PhD Completion Seminars are a new requirement at RMIT. They are a “hurdle requirement” in the sense that every PhD candidate must do the seminar before their thesis will be accepted for examination by School of Graduate Research (SGR). However, in the most important sense they are not *simply* a hurdle……

The Completion Seminar is an opportunity for the candidate to obtain feedback from qualified people on the examinable status of their work i.e. does it appear to the panel of experts that the candidate is thinking about their research in a way that will lead to them produce a thesis which will satisfy the examiners. The panel of experts are largely from within the School, but desirably includes some external people.

A form has to be completed by the panel after the Completion Seminar – and it is at the end of this memo. The questions asked of the panel members on this form make it very clear that the primary focus of the seminar is *NOT* on the detailed technical content of the work. The questions are focused on the research process and how the results of the research are recorded and discussed. The form will become a report to the candidate – and the candidate is obliged to address the concerns raised when they write their thesis. This will be checked by the Discipline Head and the Head of School when the thesis is subsequently submitted. It is clear, then, that a completion seminar cannot be held after the thesis has already been written – or probably even a week or two before submission.

**Considering the intention of the Completion Seminar, we will be adopting the following process for completion seminars:**

1) School Research Coordinator (SRC) will create a schedule of seminars, informed by her database which lists the expected completion date for each candidate. SRC will schedule the seminar to be about 1-2 months prior to expected submission.

2) Discipline Heads and Senior Supervisors will check the schedule before it is published, and notify the SRC of any changes expected due to a possible request for an extension by the candidate.

3) SRC will then publish the seminar list to the School.

4) Changes to the schedule will only be made after the change is approved by the relevant Discipline Head. SRC will *not* make any changes without this prior approval.

5) A change to the schedule requires that a “free slot” be available. There is a limited number of seminar dates (obviously one per week!) and an even more limited number of free slots. It may be that a candidate wants to submit their thesis before the census date, but then requests a changed completion seminar date and the only free slot is after the census date. This is a consequence which the Senior Supervisor and candidate must take into account when they request a changed date.

6) Senior Supervisors are responsible for ensuring that the required panel members, or their nominees, are present at the Completion Seminar. A Completion Seminar cannot proceed unless all four panel members (or their nominees) are present.

7) Senior Supervisors should advise their candidates to prepare their seminar with the questions on the attached form in mind. Answers are needed to those questions, so it is in the
candidate’s interest to provide answers to those questions. A purely technical seminar will not achieve this, and will lead to many awkward questions after the seminar.

8) Senior Supervisors will complete the form with his/her comments, then pass the form by email to each panel member in turn so they can add their comments. Signatures will also need to be obtained. This process will obviously take a week or two to complete.

9) The candidate will then be given the form, and asked to sign the form as evidence that they have received it. They are not asked to sign that they like, or agree, with the comments…….just that they have received them.

10) The form, with the required signatures, is then forwarded to SGR.

11) It needs to be repeated that SGR will not forward a thesis for examination unless it has on file the completed and signed form.

Advice to Candidates
Please read the questions on the form!! Your seminar will need to be structured in such a way that the panel members can judge your work based on those questions. Some of the issues you need to address, and can be expected to be questioned on, include the bigger questions;

a) how has your work contributed to and expanded knowledge in the field?

b) how significant is the work – will it change thinking? Does it add support to existing theories? Does it help industry improve their operations?

c) what are the benefits of your work to the field of study, to the community, to the environment?

d) what parts of your work are worthy of publication? What journals are you planning to publish in? When?

There are also some more specific issues that you may be questioned on;

e) how did you approach your literature evaluation? What difficulties did you encounter? How did you overcome them?

f) why did you choose your particular research questions? How did they follow from the literature?

g) how did you plan the methodology for your experimental work?

h) have your analysed your results in a logical and consistent way?

And then finally;

i) are you able to communicate your work in a professional, clear and confident manner?

j) can you handle questions in a professional manner?

Remember – the aim of the seminar is to help you prepare a thesis that will be passed by the examiners.
PHD COMPLETION SEMINAR

POLICY, PROCEDURE, PROCESS AND FORM

Policy

All PhD candidates will make a public presentation of work in the form of a completion seminar.

Candidates will present at such a seminar in the course of the final calendar year prior to submission for examination.

The Completion Seminar forms an integral part of a PhD candidate’s research program. It is a hurdle requirement for the final submission of the thesis/project for examination.

It is the responsibility of the HDR Co-ordinator (or equivalent) of the School in which the candidate is enrolled to ensure that all doctoral candidates enrolled in the School present within the time frame specified above.1

Procedure

A panel will be convened for each seminar presentation.

Candidates must present a summary and chapter outline, or project description in the case of a PhD degree by project, to members of the panel.

The seminar panel will consist of:

1) The principal supervisor of the candidate and the second supervisor active in the research training of the candidate, or nominee;

2) A member of academic staff in the same or cognate discipline area of the candidate (whilst this panel member would normally be an internal member of academic staff, appropriate external academics may also be used).2

3) The School’s Deputy Head R & I in the candidate’s School (who will also act as the panel chair). An appointee of the Deputy Head should take this role, where the Deputy Head is unavailable or are themselves involved in the supervision of the candidate.

The role of the panel is to:

1) Provide general and specific feedback to the candidate.

2) Advise the candidate on how close the candidate’s work is to completion.

3) Present a report to the candidate, through the School Deputy Head R & I (or nominee), relating to the above which the candidate must take account of in finalising their work for submission (see Report Form template below).

The members of the panel must complete and sign the Report Form, this to be then given to the candidate for sign-off. The School HDR Co-ordinator or equivalent/nominee must forward the completed form to the School of Graduate Research.

Process

1 It is expected that all HoSs will take account in workload planning of the extra workload this gives to School HDR Co-ordinators
2 It is the responsibility of the School to fund the participation of an external researcher
Seminar presentations will normally last no more than 60 minutes. Candidates will normally make a presentation of 30-40 minutes duration, after which they should be prepared to receive comments and answer questions on their presentation.

The School Deputy Head R & I, in conjunction with Senior Supervisors, will organise a program of completion seminars on a regular basis.

Candidate should send to all members of their designated panel, at least two weeks in advance of the date of their completion seminar, a list of chapters and a summary of their presentation if they are submitting by thesis.
Report Form for providing feedback on the candidate’s presentation

Name of Candidate  
ID

School

Program Name

Program Code

Study Load

Research Mode

The presentation demonstrates that:

A. Knowledge in the field of study
   1. The thesis/project will contain in-depth and significant new knowledge
      Yes □ No □ Partially □
      Comment

B. Effective communication
   1. Ideas and knowledge are being effectively communicated to audiences inside the field of study or discipline
      Yes □ No □ Partially □
      Comment

C. Critical judgement and research skills
   1. There is demonstrated an ability to engage effectively in the discipline’s philosophy of enquiry and discourses
      Yes □ No □ Partially □ Not applicable □
      Comment

2. Independent and original research and scholarship is clearly demonstrated.
   Yes □ No □ Partially □ Not applicable □
   Comment
3. There is evidence of an understanding and development of relevant concepts
Yes □ No □ Partially □ Not applicable □
Comment

4. Viable research question(s) have been formulated
Yes □ No □ Partially □ Not applicable □
Comment

5. Research goals and planning, have been set of and carried out
Yes □ No □ Partially □ Not applicable □
Comment

6. Information has been accessed and managed at an advanced level
Yes □ No □ Partially □ Not applicable □
Comment

7. Methodologies appropriate to the discipline or field of study have been designed and implemented
Yes □ No □ Partially □ Not applicable □
Comment

8. There is evidence of an appropriate analysis and synthesis of information or data from a variety of sources
Yes □ No □ Partially □ Not applicable □
Comment

9. There is a critical analysis of research outcomes
Yes □ No □ Partially □ Not applicable □
Comment
D. Any further comments:

E. The presentation demonstrates that the thesis/project is on the right track for submission

   Yes ☐  No ☐  Partially ☐

F. Sign-off by Panel

Panel Member
Name…………………………………….  Signature……………………………………… Date…………………………

Second Supervisor (or nominee)
Name…………………………………….  Signature……………………………………… Date…………………………

Senior Supervisor (or nominee)
Name…………………………………….  Signature……………………………………… Date…………………………

School HDR Co-ordinator (or equivalent/nominee)
Name…………………………………….  Signature……………………………………… Date…………………………

G. Sign-off by candidate

Name…………………………………….  Signature……………………………………… Date…………………………

School HDR Co-ordinator (or equivalent/nominee), please send a photo-copy to the Graduate Research Office

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For guidance only

1. Comparative Attributes of Masters by research and PhD Graduates

The difference in the levels of Masters by research and PhD graduates is more of a qualitative rather than a quantitative nature. Doctoral graduates must demonstrate a higher level of attainment but with the same knowledge, skills, qualities and abilities.

Compared with Masters by research graduates, PhD graduates will demonstrate a greater;

- depth and breadth of knowledge, including ‘cutting-edge’ knowledge, and skills
- emphasis on an original contribution to knowledge
- ability to conduct independent research
- capacity to perform larger, and more complex research tasks
- a higher level of responsibility for design, conduct and reporting of research.