

How to apply for Transfer to D.Phil. Status

Professor Marta Kwiatkowska



Oxford University Computing Laboratory

The Nature of Research

- What is a research degree?
 - *“Finding out something to find out, then finding it out”*
 - Freedom from tightly prescribed courses, textbooks, exams...
 - ... but more responsibility for organising own time and taking charge of investigation
- D.Phil.
 - qualifies you to become **an equal** to faculty
 - a **requirement** for a career as a university professor or researcher in many fields
 - useful in many other professional careers: management, consultancy, government/service, etc
- Awarded for
 - a **significant and substantial piece of research**
 - **the thesis**, examined by experts and defended in a viva-voce

Thesis vs Dissertation

- Thesis
 - **The case** you are trying to argue
 - Must be describable in one paragraph, e.g.
 - “Algorithm A is efficient on systems of type C”
 - “Mathematical construct F extends to functions of type X”
- Dissertation
 - **The document** in which you make the case
 - Must include the **scientific and rigorous justification** for the thesis, e.g.
 - Complexity proof for A
 - Experimental evaluation of A which demonstrates efficiency on a set of test cases, relative to known methods
 - Definition of F on X and proof of correctness
- For a D.Phil. to be awarded, the thesis must be a **significant original contribution** to the state of knowledge

Milestones in the life as a D.Phil.

- Life begins...
 - PRS: **Probationary** Research Student, 1st year
 - Start research, take courses, participate in research activities, ...
 - **Transfer** to D.Phil. (or M.Sc. by Research) Status, **within 4 terms**
 - Submit qualifying dissertation (research report and thesis proposal)
 - Be examined by 2 assessors (not supervisor)
 - Maximum **two** attempts, within 6 terms
 - **Confirmation** of D.Phil. Status, **within 9 terms**
 - Submit progress report, incl. thesis contents and timetable
 - Be examined by 2 assessors (not supervisor, at least one with experience of successful supervision to completion)
 - **Submission** of thesis and Examination, **within 12 terms**
 - External and internal examiners
 - Viva voce, in subfusc
- What's next?
 - Career as a researcher, lecturer, in IT, management, etc

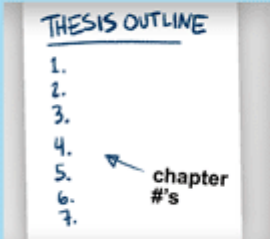
Requirements for D.Phil. Transfer

- Application for transfer (forms MAT.1 and GSO.2)
 - By week 5 of 4th term, possibly earlier (Category A)
 - Category B (in 1st term) rare
 - Supervisor must apply for deferral to DGS, exceptional circumstances only
 - Second attempt possible
 - Can hold PRS status for maximum of 6 terms, incl. retake (exceptional extension for 1 term possible)
 - Otherwise Education Committee approval needed
- Qualifying dissertation
 - Must contain progress report and thesis proposal
- Training requirement (note on GSO.2 form)
 - Exam results on 4 courses
 - Skills training and other activities, e.g. seminar and conference presentations

A Take on Thesis Outline

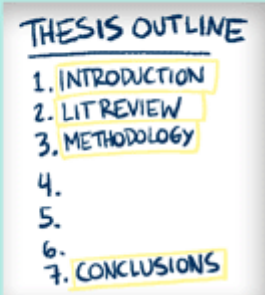
WRITING YOUR THESIS OUTLINE NOTHING SAYS "I'M ALMOST DONE" TO YOUR ADVISOR/ SPOUSE/PARENTS LIKE PRETENDING YOU HAVE A PLAN

STEP 1 Aim for a respectable number of chapters:



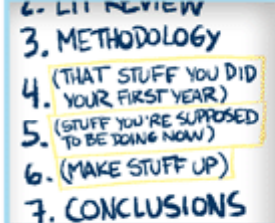
5 = "That's IT??"
6-7 = "Not bad"
8+ = "Are you crazy??"

STEP 2 Fill in the "freebies":



You're half way done!

STEP 3 Make up titles for the "meat" chapters:



(It'll be years before you actually have to work on that later chapter, and by then your thesis topic will have changed anyway)

STEP 4 Voilà! You just bought yourself another two years



JORGE CHAM © 2006

www.phdcomics.com

Qualifying Dissertation

- Two components, can be interlinked (25–30 pages typical)
- Progress report
 - the research work you have done in your first year
 - for example, a **case study** or a less ambitious problem that you have tackled
 - should describe
 - the **motivation** for the research and
 - its **significance**
 - includes a **literature review**
 - explain
 - the theoretical background
 - the results obtained, and
 - the conclusions drawn
- Demonstrates your **competence and presentation skills**

Qualifying Dissertation

- The thesis proposal is expected to contain
 - a clear statement of the **specific topic** you have chosen for your D.Phil. research,
 - a description of how it relates to **previous work** in the field,
 - your **strategy** for achieving the research objective,
 - the **significance** and **importance** of your work, and
 - the **scientific basis** for how you intend to evaluate the results.
- Your proposed research topic should be
 - well-defined and specific
 - should admit **novel** treatment, and
 - it must be significant enough to be worthy of a D.Phil. if competently investigated.

Qualifying Dissertation

- Your proposal for strategy should be
 - **concrete**,
 - clearly explained, and
 - of **justifiable promise**.
- What is a strategy?
 - A sensible plan for getting to the desired outcome
 - Risks considered and fall-backs included
 - E.g. “First, I intend to apply A to the class X. I believe this will work because XZ has recently applied it to class Y that is similar to X. If this does not work, I will analyse the cause and try A on a suitably restricted class X.”
- Remember, in research the goalposts keep moving...
 - A strategy is **not** a guarantee of getting a D.Phil.
 - You may have to adapt it or even change tack completely

Qualifying Examination

- Submit D.Phil. Transfer forms along with Qualifying Dissertation (or date for submission)
- Viva by two assessors (not supervisor(s))
- Must convince them
 - that you are competent,
 - have identified a problem worthy of D.Phil and
 - have a strategy
- If pass, proceed to confirmation
- If fail,
 - revise and resubmit, usually within one term
 - ... but you are unlikely to fail if handbook advice followed
- If fail 2nd attempt,
 - either outright failure or transfer to MSc by Research

Some Advice

- **Your** motivation and commitment essential
- Remember, D.Phil. Transfer is
 - A milestone that takes you to the next stage
 - **Insufficient** progress and **too much perfection** equally bad
- Seek advice of your supervisor and DGS if necessary
 - ... and listen to it
- Regs, regs, regs
 - Regulations clearly specify the process, deadlines, forms
 - For example, your status as research student lapses if you don't **complete** transfer within 6 terms
- **If you feel things are going wrong...**
 - Talk to supervisor
 - Next, talk to advisors
 - else DGS (via Julie Sheppard) or Director

Sources of Information

- The Graduate Research Student handbook
 - Comlab and Computer Science specific
 - Available on the Comlab webpage
 - <http://web.comlab.ox.ac.uk/teaching/dphil/>
- MPLS handbook
 - Essential information about the process, forms to fill, deadlines, etc
 - <http://www.mpls.ox.ac.uk/intranet/teachingandlearning/graduateprog.html>
- The 'grey book'
 - Authoritative, but MPLS handbook more detailed on regulations and code of practice