DCU Taught Dissertation/Project Guidelines for Supervisor and Student

The following guidelines provide direction to both students and supervisors with regards to managing the dissertation[1] process on DCU's taught undergraduate and postgraduate awards. Dissertations/projects typically carry a significant credit allocation of up to 30 credits and have a workload associated with them which can span more than one semester and/or the complete academic session. Dissertation and projects are usually a significant demonstration of (some) programme learning outcomes. Students should be provided with written guidelines to outline and assist in completion of their dissertation/project. Guidelines can be programme specific but should cover the following topics:

- Supervision
- Role of the student and supervisor
- Managing the relationship between student and supervisor
- Meetings and timeframe
- Academic citing and referencing
- Plagiarism and Ethics

These areas are elaborated on in the following sections and can be used in conjunction with, incorporated into and/or expanded upon in programme specific guidelines. In the event of programme specific guidelines being unavailable these DCU guidelines will provide direction to both students and staff.

Dissertation/Project Supervision

All students must have an academic supervisor. The academic supervisor is a staff member (lecturer) of the School(s) responsible for the programme. If the project is industry-related, the student might have a second supervisor at the company. However, an academic supervisor is always required.

The Role of the Student

The success or failure of the dissertation project is the responsibility of each student. The supervisor is there to guide and assist the student in reaching their goal. While decisions regarding the activities to be undertaken for the dissertation/project will be made in conjunction with the supervisor, it is not the supervisor's role to ensure that these tasks are

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[1] In some programmes students will complete major projects or practicums as part of their studies. These guidelines can also be applied in these cases.

completed. A careful record, of all meetings, including dates, action agreed and deadlines set, is to be agreed between supervisor and student.

Students are expected to attend dissertation workshops/seminars as agreed with their supervisor. Students must ensure that their dissertation/project is their own work and must identify any material which is not their own work by referencing and acknowledgement. The dissertation must not incorporate dissertation material which has been used for another degree or plagiarise the work of others.

The Role of the Supervisor

The supervisor facilitates the development, by the student, of attainable goals and guides the student towards completion of the dissertation/project within a disciplinary or interdisciplinary area. If a student is not progressing according to the agreed dissertation/project schedule, the supervisor should discuss it with the student. The project supervisor will:

- Discuss the work schedule of the dissertation/project, plan progress and identify potential problem areas if possible
- Advise the student on general aspects of the dissertation/project
- Discuss with students any ethical issues associated with their dissertation/project and advise accordingly
- Attend interim presentations and/or oral examinations as necessary
- Assess and give feedback on the student's performance throughout the term of the dissertation/project
- Read drafts of elements of the dissertation/project, for example chapters, as agreed in the schedule and give feedback in a timely manner

The supervisor is not responsible for the following:

- Proof reading drafts for grammatical and spelling mistakes or proving feedback on full drafts of any dissertation/project work
- Arranging supervision sessions. This should be agreed and arranged as per the schedule.

A careful record to be kept, agreed between supervisor and student, of all meetings, including dates, action agreed and deadlines set.

Meetings

Once a supervisor has been assigned there will be an introductory/first meeting called by the supervisor. This should occur by ….. *(insert appropriate week or specific date)* of the academic session. At this meeting the topic of the proposed dissertation/project is discussed and a schedule of meetings is agreed between the student and supervisor. There are many different types of dissertations/projects. A Gantt chart (Appendix A) showing planned tasks and milestone timing, is a useful tool to use to facilitate the planning process.

Note: significant deviation by the student from the agreed schedule may lead to the termination of project.

A preliminary work schedule will be discussed including:

• when and how often student/supervisor meeting should occur
• what are the milestones (deliveries and timing) for the dissertation/project, including submission of draft elements as appropriate
• what resources, if any, are needed
• are there any ethical issues

It can be useful to have a 'checklist' or agenda for all meetings student/supervisor meetings to ensure that all relevant topics are covered. This can also be used to record notes about the discussion and any decisions reached. Table 1 provides an example of a 'checklist' that might be useful for such meetings.

	Are you happy these issues have been covered? (Y/N)	Student	Supervisor
Supervisory Meetings: Time and frequency			
Weekly time commitments expected			
Dissertation/project report outline/work plan/timelines			
Training requirements, e.g. equipment, Health & Safety, software. Resources available: e.g. lab/desk space, materials, equipment if appropriate			
Ethical Issues: e.g. code of conduct for research, human/animal ethics clearances obtained if appropriate			
Environmental Health & Safety if appropriate			
Out of Hours working policy			
Are there any issues you feel are outstanding? Please comment			

Table 1 Checklist student/supervisor meetings

Records of discussion and agreed actions of the supervision should then be kept. These records can be housed with the supervisor and may be recorded electronically or on paper. Records should be retained until completion of the project and the graduation of the student. A possible template for recording the meeting this can be seen in Appendix B.

Managing the relationship of student and supervisor

It is important for the student to develop a sense of ownership and responsibility for their dissertation/project. In supervisor-student relationships, responsibility is two-way. A student will have expectations in terms of support and advice from the supervisor and a supervisor will have expectations regarding independent research by the student, time-keeping, regularity of work and reporting etc. Ultimately it is the student's dissertation/project. If the student or supervisor feels the relationship is becoming difficult it should be discussed at a meeting to determine a solution. However, if a solution is not found the matter should be brought to the attention of the Module Coordinator/Project Leader/Programme Chair, this may be done by the supervisor or student as soon as possible. The relationship should not be allowed to deteriorate to the point where it impacts on the possibility of the dissertation/project not being completed.

Plagiarism

All students must comply with DCU Academic Integrity and Plagiarism policy which can be found at: (insert web link)

Ethics

All students must comply with Ethical norms and DCU Ethics policies. In the event that ethical issues arise within the study, these must be brought to the attention of the supervisor immediately. Guidance must be sought with the appropriate stakeholders in Schools, Faculty and at university level under the auspices of the Research Ethics Committee.

Citing and Referencing

Citing and referencing norms can be programme and/or discipline specific. Students should ensure that they implement the appropriate academic citing and referencing norms associated with their area of study. A general guide for citing and referencing can be found in DCU Citing and Referencing Guide can be found at: (insert web link)

Research

DCU Code of Good Research available at:
http://www.dcu.ie/sites/default/files/research/DCU%20Code%20of%20Good%20Research%20Practice.pdf

References:

Aberystwyth University, (2014) Taught Master's Schemes: Good Practice Guidelines for the Supervision of Dissertations available at: http://www.aber.ac.uk/en/regulations/contents/taught-masters/

Bristol University, (2014) Dissertation guidelines for taught postgraduate programmes available at: http://www.bris.ac.uk/esu/assessment/annex/dissertationguidelines.html

Geraghty, J. (2012) Forth year engineering project, Guidelines for managing your project. 8th ed. DCU

Appendix A

Sample Gantt Chart

Task	Semester 1			Semester 2			
	Week	Week	Week	Week	Week	Week	Week
Meeting Schedule agreed	→						
Drafts to be submitted		X		X		X	
Research/Lit review	⟶		→				
Ethics Approval		⟶	→				
Data Collection			⟶	→			
Analysis					⟶	→	
Final draft						⟶	→

This schedule above is a sample; variations may be introduced depending on dissertation/project. However, they should be agreed early in the schedule, ideally at the first meeting.

Appendix B

Student Name	**Student No:**
School:	**Faculty:**
Dissertation/Project Title	
Supervisor/s	
Meeting Date: **Duration of meeting:**	**Expected date of Final Submission:**
Work to be reviewed at meeting:	
Feedback and Issues identified and discussed	
Agreed actions	
Supervisor's signature and date	Student's signature and date
Date next meeting:	Date for submission of work prior to next meeting: