



Cairnmillar  
INSTITUTE

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# Examination of Theses Policy

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<b>Policy name</b>	Examination of Theses Policy
<b>Policy number</b>	RP008
<b>Date approved</b>	1 April 2020
<b>Approving body</b>	The Academic Board
<b>Responsible officer</b>	The Head of School
<b>Implementation officer</b>	The Research Coordinator
<b>Next review date</b>	April 2023
<b>Linked policies</b>	Assessment Tasks and Marking Guides Policy
<b>Linked forms</b>	

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## Purpose of this policy

In several courses at The Cairnmillar Institute (the Institute), students are required to submit a research dissertation. This policy relates to the examination of these dissertations. The purpose of this policy is to

- Establish a process to assign each thesis a fair grade—a grade that accurately reflects the quality of this work
- Garner feedback from examiners that can be used to improve the quality of future research
- Prevent unexpected delays in the examination of theses
- Ensure the qualifications and skills of examiners.

## Scope

This policy applies to all research theses, submitted by students enrolled in:

- Master of Psychology (Clinical Psychology)
- Doctor of Psychology (Clinical Psychology)
- Master of Counselling and Psychotherapy
- Future postgraduate courses in which a minor or major thesis needs to be submitted.

## Number of examiners

For a Masters or AQF level 9 thesis there will be a minimum of two examiners. At least one examiner will be an external examiner, the second examiner will normally be an internal examiner.

For a Doctoral or AQF level 10 thesis there will normally be two examiners. Both examiners will normally be external examiners.

An additional examiner is appointed whenever:

- The difference between the grades the first examiners confer is 10% or more
- The examiners provide substantially conflicting remarks—and, although encouraged to resolve these discrepancies by the Research Coordinator, the two examiners still do not agree

## Criteria to select external examiners

Individuals can be appointed as external examiners only if they fulfill several criteria. In particular, these individuals:

- Must not have worked at the Institute as either a full time, part time, casual, or adjunct member of staff during the last year
- Must not have been a student of the Institute during the last year
- Cannot have provided more than about 4 hours of assistance to this project
- Must have expertise on related topics
- Must be able to grade the thesis within 4 to 6 weeks
- Cannot have developed a relationship with the student outside the work domain
- Must not experience a conflict of interest
- Must have completed a degree that exceeds or is equivalent to the degree that the student is completing
- For theses submitted for the Master of Psychology (Clinical Psychology) and Doctor of Psychology (Clinical Psychology), it is desirable but not compulsory, for the examiner to

be a psychologist and preferably eligible for membership of the College of Clinical Psychology.

To decide who are the most suitable external examiners, several attributes may be considered, such as the degree to which the examiners are:

- Knowledgeable about the topic
- Reputable in their field
- Experienced in grading similar theses
- Available and reliable.

## Criteria to select internal examiners

Individuals can be appointed as internal examiners only if they fulfill several criteria. In particular, these individuals:

- Must be a full time, part time, casual, or adjunct member of staff at the Institute
- Must not have been a student of the Institute during the last year
- Cannot have provided more than about 4 hours of assistance to this project
- Must have expertise on related topics or similar research methods
- Must be able to grade the thesis within 4 weeks
- Cannot have developed a relationship with the student outside the work domain
- Must not experience a conflict of interest
- Must have completed a degree that exceeds or is equivalent to the degree that the student is completing
- For theses submitted for the Master of Psychology (Clinical), it is desirable but not compulsory for the examiner to be a psychologist and preferably eligible for the College of Clinical Psychology.

## Conflicts of interest

Examiners are requested to disclose any conflicts of interest. If a conflict of interest could limit the objectivity of this assessment, another examiner must be sought. While a conflict of interest may not preclude an examiner, any actual or perceived conflicts of interest must be declared to the Associate Head of School (Research) for approval prior to that examiner being nominated. Should the AHoS (Research) be the supervisor, declarations of conflicts of interest should be made to the Head of School. Conflicts of interest, for example, may include

- A commercial or material relationship with the candidate or supervisor.
- A familial or romantic relationship with the candidate or supervisor.
- A recent (past five years) collaborative or supervisory relationship with the candidate or supervisor.

## Role of examiners

Examiners are required to:

- Read the thesis and marking criteria carefully
- If necessary, seek advice to enhance their understanding on topics in which they are unfamiliar –but without identifying the thesis
- Assign a mark out of 100, or using the alternate letter grading criteria provided, within the agreed timeframe, and submit a report that justifies this grade and provides both positive and negative feedback
- Declare any conflicts of interests before marking
- Refrain from discussing this thesis with the supervisor, student, or anyone involved in the research
- Sign a formal confidentiality agreement — only necessary if the thesis contains material that needs to be protected, such as information that could be translated into a patent.

## Process of examination

Administration for thesis examinations will be carried out in accordance with the Thesis Examination Procedure which is implemented and monitored by the Academic Registrar, and approved by the Head of School or Research Coordinator.

## Calculation of mark and grade

Examiner grades are reviewed. If two examiners agree on a grade, then this grade applies.

To calculate the final mark, in the case where marking criteria require assessors to assign a numeric mark and grade, the marks that are assigned by each examiner are averaged.

### Final grading where an additional examiner is used

However, when an additional examiner is sought, this procedure may not be applicable. The need to seek an additional examiner implies that, perhaps, one of the examinations was not suitable and this possibility needs to be accommodated appropriately.

To calculate the final mark, the Research Coordinator and Head of School, may consider the patterns of grades to determine if two examiners agree and one is discordant. Academic judgement is applied to determine if the third discordant examiner's report can be set aside. In most cases the outlying mark, that which is more than 10% discrepant, will be disregarded and only the concordant marks will be taken. In the case where two of the examiners assign a failing grade, the final grade will be a fail.

The weight attached to each mark may depend on:

- The extent to which each examiner is familiar with the marking scheme at the Institute
- The degree to which the examiner has acquired extensive knowledge of research in general
- The extent to which the examiner has acquired extensive knowledge about the relevant topic

- The degree to which the examiner usually provides grades that are similar to those of other examiners.