POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH GUIDE

ESSENTIAL INFORMATION FOR MFA CANDIDATES AND SUPERVISORS
MASTER OF FINE ARTS (MFA) PROGRAM

The degree of Master of Fine Arts is designed to provide visual artists with the opportunity to extend their professional practice through advanced research in one or more discipline area. The MFA is primarily undertaken as a supervised independent study program of written work and studio research. Candidates develop a level of proficiency, self-direction and focus through investigating a proposed area of research to produce work of an original and speculative nature.

The course is normally undertaken full-time over four semesters with examination in the final semester. Full-time candidates are expected to devote the equivalent of a 35-hour week to their research.

Research candidates at SCA are required to complete their first year as full-time students, unless there are exceptional circumstances such as major personal hardship or health problems. Part-time study is available from second year for candidates who have established a visual arts practice or are engaged in related employment that limits their study time. Candidates enrolled on a part-time basis may not receive their own studio space as this is subject to availability and priority is given to those enrolled on a full-time basis.

MFA candidates may seek permission to transfer to the Doctor of Philosophy at the end of their first year of study, provided that they have the support of their supervisor and demonstrate successful completion of work to a standard commensurate with the requirements of the PhD. Applications to transfer candidature will be considered in relation to the total pool of PhD applications.

COURSE STRUCTURE AND REQUIREMENTS

Candidates are required to nominate one of the following modes of research:

- by creative work and research paper, culminating in a substantial exhibition, performance or installation of works in a joint show of candidates at the end of candidature, together with a research paper of 10,000–12,000 words and oral presentation, or
- by thesis of 35,000–50,000 words in the field of art theory, art history, cultural studies or professional studies in visual art.

The mode of research must be confirmed at the first Annual Progress Review, which usually takes place at the end of the first year of candidature.

FIRST YEAR

The emphasis of the first year is on the development of studio work. The first year non-studio work is usually spent investigating and expanding the bibliography submitted with your application and research proposal although other work may be undertaken in consultation with your supervisor. The Seminar program supports work related to the development of your bibliography. Reading and note taking commences from the beginning of the course and actual writing of the paper should have begun by the second year of the course. Early commitment to a coherent and structured working method for studio work, the compilation of material and regular, meaningful supervision is vital.

Postgraduate Seminar Program

All first year MFA candidates attend the Seminar Program, which aims to support the proposed research project through extending research and critical skills. Candidates make presentations on their projects and engage in peer group discussion on written and visual aspects of their work, and learn how to shape their research proposals and select appropriate research methods to achieve their project goals. Seminars are held weekly and candidates must attend no less than 90% of each seminar program. Students with non-satisfactory attendance will have to repeat the required seminars unless there is an evidence of extenuating circumstances or approval from the Director of SCA Graduate School.

Changes in Research Proposal
Towards the middle of the second semester, during the Postgraduate Annual Progress Review, first year candidates have the opportunity to revise their initial research proposal in consultation with their supervisor. Any such revision must be signed by the Supervisor, and lodged with Student Administration. The candidate should also submit a copy of the revised proposal to the supervisor.

SECOND YEAR

Second Year Seminar Program

In the third semester of enrolment MFA candidates attend a weekly seminar program dedicated to contemporary exhibition practices and critical writing. The program is integrated with the Graduate School Gallery curatorial program. Candidates must attend 90% of the program unless there is an evidence of extenuating circumstances or approval from the Director of SCA Graduate School.

Graduate School Forum

MFA candidates who have completed the three seminar programs are then required to attend the Graduate School Forum, which is held every Wednesday during semester time (except public holidays and non-teaching weeks). Students who are unable to attend a presentation must have the support of their supervisor and approval in writing from the Director of SCA Graduate School.

Submission for Examination

Towards the end of the final year, candidates must submit for examination:

- a substantial exhibition, performance or installation of artwork with supporting visual material of work completed during candidature; a presentation addressing the structure and mode of exhibition and developmental process; and a research paper of 10,000 -12,000 words relevant to the work and its development, its cultural and historical or theoretical references; or
- a thesis of 35,000 – 50,000 words which is the result of original investigation in the fields of art theory, art history, cultural studies or professional studies in visual arts.

The research paper or thesis must be presented in English, and must identify those components of assessable work which are respectively the candidate’s own and that of others.

The research paper should achieve, via its own internal consistency and nominated methodology, the following objectives:

- Be a coherent document which illustrates through words and images the candidate's concerns as a creative work practitioner
- Present a clearly sequenced and expressed discussion, including introduction, analysis and conclusion at a level appropriate to a Masters degree
- Indicate the location of the creative work within the context of contemporary art practice
- Show evidence of familiarity with recent literature relevant to general developments in the discipline and to candidate's own creative work concerns
- State the candidate's intentions in the development of the exhibited works; and more broadly, the intentions in work developed over the course of study. (Both should relate clearly to the candidate's original course study proposal)
- Included appropriately presented and labelled illustrations to which the text makes specific reference and which represent the candidate's creative work
- Include all relevant bibliographic and pictorial reference data
- Observe the required work length
- Observe all formal presentation requirements (number of copies, binding, etc)

As the research paper is seen as a complement to a candidate's creative work, some candidates wish to extend the creative possibilities of their work into the written component. Candidates who elect to take this
approach should to indicate this in the Introduction (or Foreword, if there is one) to the research paper, in order to clearly establish expectations of form and scholarship for examiners.

**SUPERVISION**

Each research candidate has a supervisor, a member of the SCA academic staff, appointed to take primary responsibility for the conduct and progress of the candidature, and an associate supervisor, a member of academic staff at the Faculty or within the University of Sydney, appointed to provide additional support to the candidate and to cover times when the primary supervisor is not available.

The primary supervisor:
- Meets regularly with the candidate to provide academic and professional support and guidance
- Is responsible for administration and progress of the candidature

The associate supervisor:
- Meets with the candidate and supervisor at least once per semester to discuss the project;
- Meets individually with the candidate at the request of the candidate, if time permits; and
- Acts as interim supervisor when the supervisor is on leave.

Candidates will typically have the same supervisory team for the duration of their candidature. In some cases, however, as a project develops, it may no longer match the original supervisor's area of expertise, and either the candidate or the existing supervisor may seek an alternative supervisor without discredit to either party. Likewise, associate supervisors sometimes find they carry responsibility for the bulk of primary research supervision and wish this to be formally recognised by a change of supervisory arrangements. Such concerns are usually able to be dealt with amicably at the local level, and require the completion of a ‘Request to Change Supervisory Team’ form.

Requests for changes in supervision should be submitted to SCA Student Administration and the form is available on-line at [http://sydney.edu.au/sca/current_students/student_administration/postgraduate](http://sydney.edu.au/sca/current_students/student_administration/postgraduate)

It is the responsibility of candidates to maintain regular contact with their supervisor. Regular fortnightly meetings of 30 – 40 minutes are recommended, relative to a candidate’s progress in the degree.

If there is any concern regarding supervision, a candidate should consult the Director, SCA Graduate School or the Dean.

**ANNUAL PROGRESS REVIEW**

A review of candidates’ progress is conducted in each academic year. Each candidate is required to complete an Annual Progress Report and attend an interview. The report will assist in the interview conducted by a review panel. All candidates are provided with the opportunity within the review session to comment in confidence on their supervision, and first year candidates may submit a revised research proposal. Both the review panel and candidate will sign the progress report at the end of the review session to confirm any agreed outcomes.

The composition of the review panel will usually be two members of academic staff who are not the candidate’s supervisors. Provided progress in the degree is satisfactory, the candidate will be permitted to proceed. If the candidate’s work is considered unsatisfactory by the panel, the review panel may recommend that the candidate be set a specific program of work to be submitted for assessment by a nominated deadline. If this work is not satisfactory, the candidate will be asked to show cause and enrolment may be terminated.

It is the candidate’s responsibility to ensure that all parties complete the Annual Progress Report before submission to the Student Administration Office. A candidate who fails to complete and return the report may be asked to show cause as to why the candidature should not be terminated by reason of unsatisfactory progress. Failure to submit the completed report by the due date may result in the discontinuation of the candidate’s scholarship for which the University of Sydney will not be held responsible.
A candidate may be subject to the review process as described above if progress is unsatisfactory at any time during the year.

**EXAMINATION PROCESS**

**EXAMINATION TIMELINE**

Approximately sixteen (16) weeks before the intended date of lodgement of the research paper/thesis examination copies, the candidate submits the ‘Notification of Proposed Higher Degree Examination’ form to his/her supervisor together with a copy of the research paper/thesis at almost final draft stage.

Fourteen weeks (14) before the lodgement date, the candidate meets with his/her supervisor to discuss the date and place of examination. Candidates may advise the names of persons they do not wish to see appointed as examiners, giving their reasons in writing. Candidates may also initiate a discussion as to the range of possible examiners with their supervisor and/or Director of SCA Graduate School. As care must be taken not to jeopardise the integrity and independence of the examination process, candidates will not be given the names of the chosen examiners.

Twelve (12) weeks before the lodgement date, the candidate submits the completed and signed ‘Notification of Proposed Higher Degree Examination’ form to the Student Administration Office. This allows for adequate time to appoint examiners and arrange oral examination and exhibition facilities.

Oral examination must take place during a Degree Show exhibition unless the Director of SCA Graduate School has approved a late examination.

**RESEARCH PAPER SUBMISSION FOR EXAMINATION**

Five (5) weeks before the scheduled oral examination the candidate submits three examination copies of the research paper/thesis to the Student Administration Office, and an electronic copy of the thesis abstract online at <address for online form included here>. ‘Statement by Supervisor on Submission of Research Paper/Thesis’ and ‘Lodgement of Higher Degree Thesis/Treatise’ forms must accompany the research paper/thesis lodgement.

Instructions on the style, formatting and binding of examination copies in the MFA Research Paper Preparation Guidelines available at http://sydney.edu.au/sca/graduate_school/current_students/your_study/mfa

The candidate and the candidate’s supervisor must complete the ‘Statement by Supervisor on Submission of Research Paper/Thesis’, confirming that the research paper/thesis is ready for examination. The ‘Lodgement of Higher Degree Thesis/Treatise’ is signed by the candidate to approve the public availability of the thesis following examination, and receives a copy to acknowledge submission. If appropriate this receipt can then be used to claim thesis preparation expenses.

After submission, faculty staff affix a label inside each examination copy covering copyright in relation to the research paper/thesis. The research paper/thesis is then forwarded to examiners.

Candidates who have elected thesis only mode and who do not require an oral examination must submit their thesis for examination by their latest completion date.

**APPOINTMENT OF EXAMINERS**

Supervisors are responsible for recommending the appointment of the examiners and Chair of the oral examination. They must submit the relevant forms approximately ten (10) weeks before the lodgement date.

In order to reduce delays supervisors are required to contact examiners in advance of their appointment to see if they are willing and able to act within the time frame expected. The examination date and time must be confirmed at this stage.

The following specific points should be noted:
The examiners should be known to be familiar with the supervision and/or examination of research papers. Justification should be provided for examiners who have not had previous experience.

Recommendations for examiners who are not persons of obvious academic standing must be supported with justifying statements and documentation.

Examiners should normally be still active in research/scholarship thus ensuring that their knowledge of the field is current. Recommendations for the appointment as examiner of someone who has retired should be supported with a justifying statement including how long it has been since the person retired.

At least one examiner must be external to the University.

Examiners should be free from bias, for or against the candidate or supervisor.

A person should not be nominated as examiner if he/she:

- has had involvement in the student’s research;
- is a co-author on any part of the work;
- has a close personal relationship with the candidate or supervisor; or
- has had substantial contact with the candidate or supervisor in any other circumstance, which might jeopardise the independence of the examination.

**LATE EXAMINATION AND CANDIDATURE EXTENSION**

Late examinations are approved under exceptional circumstances, where the candidate’s work is affected by extreme illness, injury or misadventure. The candidate must submit an ‘Application for Late Examination’ with supporting documentation (e.g. special consideration application and/or statutory declaration).

Approval for late examination will not be given in the following instances:

- Brief or minor illness of one or two weeks duration that occurs one week or more before thesis submission or oral examination;
- Failure to allocate sufficient time to write the thesis and create the studio work, or failure to ascertain what is required in terms of content, style and presentation;
- Information and communications technology-related problems, except where they could not have been prevented, avoided or minimised by reasonable diligence on the part of candidate.

Should it appear during the last year of candidature that the candidate will not be able to complete the requirements by the latest date, the candidate should apply for an extension of candidature. Extensions are granted one semester at a time.

**EXAMINATION EXHIBITION**

Candidates undertaking the ‘Creative work and research paper’ mode are expected to develop a body of creative work for examination, which is to be exhibited in the Postgraduate Degree Show closest to the candidate’s latest completion date.

The SCA Degree Show Committee manages the Postgraduate Degree show. The Committee allocates exhibition spaces based on the information provided in the ‘Notification of Proposed Higher Degree Examination’ form. Candidates then meet with the responsible Studio & Technical Supervisor, and the Research Supervisor, to complete the ‘Degree Show Technical & Equipment Requirements’ form and a risk assessment. Exhibition specifications are subject to approval by the SCA Work Health & Safety Committee, and the Graduate School will attempt to meet individual requests for space and equipment, but cannot guarantee that all requirements can be accommodated due to the large and complex nature of the exhibition. Candidates participating in a Degree Show must observe the Degree Show Terms & Conditions and the installation requirements and schedule as circulated by the SCA Degree Show Committee.

**ORAL EXAMINATION**

The oral examination takes place during the Degree Show exhibition period. The objectives of the oral examination are:
To test the candidate’s comprehension of the field of study described by the research paper and presented in the exhibition;

To clarify points either of principle or of detail in the research paper and exhibition; and

To assess the contribution made by the candidate to the content and presentation of the creative work and research paper.

**ORAL EXAMINATION PROCEDURE**

SCA will appoint a chair to supervise the oral examination. The Chair of the examination meets with the candidate about 20 minutes before hand to help him/her to set-up. The Chair also meets the examiners and introduces them to the candidate.

The oral examination process is two hours and is divided roughly into four half-hour sections:

1. **Contextualisation of Candidate’s Work**
   In this section the candidate talks about the lead-up to the examination work, and the work produced during candidature – themes, issues, any problems etc. This provides an opportunity for examiners to ask background questions.

2. **Examination of Creative Work**
   The candidate and examiners discuss the candidate’s exhibited work.

3. **Discussion of Research Paper and Related Matters.**
   Examiners ask any questions about the paper and any points of clarification. Towards the end, the candidate can raise points that he/she thinks the examiners might have missed either about the creative or written work.

4. **Examiners Confer.**
   The candidate is asked to leave so that the examiners can confer. After 15 minutes the candidate is recalled and, if the examiners have come to a mutual conclusion, is informally advised of the outcome of the examination. The candidate signs the Chair’s Report.

**EXAMINER REPORTS**

Approximately four (4) weeks after the oral examination (eight weeks after submission of the thesis for candidates submitting by thesis only) examiners return their reports to Student Administration Office. Candidates will be sent copies of the examiners’ reports and a copy of the Chair’s Report, which details any changes requested by the examiners, and a letter with the due date for completion of corrections or submission of final permanently bound copies.

**POSSIBLE EXAMINATION RESULTS**

**Award Without Further Conditions (Outright Pass)**

The research paper and creative work or thesis have fulfilled all of the requirements and are of such quality that no corrections of any sort are required.

Candidate has four (4) weeks upon receipt of the results notification letter to submit two permanently bound copies before deemed eligible to graduate. A letter of completion will subsequently be sent to confirm eligibility to graduate and date of closest graduation ceremony.

**Award Subject To Typographical Corrections (Pass with Minor Revisions)**

The award of the degree is clearly appropriate but there are several minor errors or omissions in the research paper and/or creative work or thesis, which should be corrected.

Candidate has four (4) weeks upon receipt of results notification letter to submit corrections. Upon receipt of another letter with approval of corrections, the student has the usual four (4) weeks to submit two (2)
permanently bound copies before deemed eligible to graduate. A letter of completion will subsequently be
sent to confirm eligibility to graduate and date of closest graduation ceremony.

**Award Subject To Conditions/Emendations**

The examiners acknowledge that in the main the research paper and creative work or thesis are worthy of the
award, but there are several changes or additions that need to be made. The changes should not require an
additional period of research and should not substantially alter the conclusions of the research paper/thesis.

The candidate has twelve (12) weeks upon receipt of results notification letter to submit emendations. Upon
receipt of another letter with approval of corrections, the student has the usual four (4) weeks to submit two
(2) permanently bound copies before deemed eligible to graduate. A letter of completion will subsequently be
sent to confirm eligibility to graduate and date of closest graduation ceremony.

**Fail/Revision and Resubmission**

The research paper and creative work or thesis in its current form is not worthy of being awarded the degree,
but has many redeeming features. Major re-writing or reconsideration of creative work, e.g. re-writing a whole
chapter, provide extra data, reinstall the exhibition or produce further work. This means result is withheld and
revisions will be re-examined by both examiners. Candidate must re-enrol in at least one semester or more,
as prescribed by the examiners. A candidates who fails his/her second examination is not allowed to revise
and resubmit their work and the following result is applied

**Fail/Non-Award**

In making the recommendation of non-award, the examiners are of the opinion that the research paper and
creative work or thesis is not salvageable, even with a period of further experimental or research work and a
complete rewrite of the research paper or thesis. The examiners make this recommendation on the basis that
the research was irredeemably flawed in its conception, design and execution, and that the conclusions
reached are not valid.
## APPENDIX A. GENERIC PRODUCTION SCHEDULE FOR RESEARCH PAPER

March semester commencement

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>First year</th>
<th>Second year</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
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<tr>
<td>Beginning of the academic year</td>
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<tr>
<td>September/October</td>
<td>End May</td>
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<tr>
<td>Annual Postgraduate Progress Reviews</td>
<td>August</td>
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<td>November (first week)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>December</td>
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<tr>
<td>Proposed Project</td>
<td>Submitted research paper</td>
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<tr>
<td>Research &amp; discuss project so that any revision can be presented at the review</td>
<td>Developed outline</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present revised project</td>
<td>First Draft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September – December the research paper should have a point form structure</td>
<td>Second Draft</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Third Draft</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Submit Research Paper</td>
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<td>Oral exam</td>
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## July semester commencement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Second year</th>
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<tr>
<td>July</td>
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- **Proposed Project**: Research & discuss project so that any revision can be presented at the review.
- **Present revised project**: March – June the research paper should have a point form structure.
**APPENDIX C. SUBMISSION AND EXAMINATION PROCESS TIMELINE**

*This is a guide only, exact submission and examination times will depend on candidate’s oral examination date.*

Mid Year Exam

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Submission Timeline</th>
<th>Examination Timeline</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>March 31</strong></td>
<td><strong>April</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Candidates submit Notification of Proposed Higher Degree Examination form</td>
<td>1. Preliminary spaces allocated by Degree Show Committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Supervisors submit the relevant Appointment of examiners form</td>
<td>2. Candidates submit exam copies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Submission of late exam application or request to extend candidature, if required</td>
<td>3. WH&amp;S Committee review plans</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>May</strong></td>
<td><strong>June</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Studio Technical Supervisors submit Tech Requirement &amp; Risk Assessment forms</td>
<td>1. Space inspections held with candidates &amp; supervisors</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>June</strong></td>
<td><strong>August</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. WH&amp;S Committee review plans</td>
<td>1. Examiners reports returned</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>October</strong></td>
<td><strong>November</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Final space allocations confirmed</td>
<td>Submission of corrections/emendations</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>November</strong></td>
<td><strong>December</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Oral exams &amp; exhibitions held</td>
<td>1. Submission of final bound copies</td>
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<td>2. Completion letters sent</td>
<td>Graduation</td>
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Graduation
## End of Year Exam

### Submission Timeline

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<td>2. Completion letters sent</td>
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APPENDIX D. FURTHER SUGGESTED READING

- Anderson, J., Durston, B., and Poole, M., Dissertation and Assignment
- Clanchy, J., Essay Writing for Students: A Guide for Arts and Social Science Students
- Spate V., Guide to writing an essay for the Fine Arts Department
- University of Sydney, Sydney College of the Arts Handbook
- University of Sydney, Postgraduate Studies Handbook

The information given in this booklet may be subject to amendment after the date of preparation, June 2012.