School of Surveying and Spatial Information Systems

Procedures for Postgraduate Research Progress Reviews

(Version 1.5, 6/9/2011)

1. BACKGROUND

Based on the University’s conditions of award of Doctor of Philosophy and Masters by Research Degree, the progress of a candidate for such research degrees should be reviewed annually. Annual progress reviews provide an opportunity for the candidate, supervisor(s) and the School to:

a) Document the progress of the candidate’s project over the past year (or 6 months if the candidate is commencing) using the official progress review form provided by the Graduate Research School; and

b) Review all aspects of the candidature and develop a plan of action for the following year.

At the beginning of the candidature, a Review Panel of two academic staff will be set up to review the progress of the candidate. This Review Panel will conduct the scheduled progress reviews of the candidate throughout the candidature (6, 12, 24 and ≥36 months – see the requirements for the progress reviews in Section 3). The original copy of the completed review forms and supporting documents are kept on the candidate’s student file in the Graduate Research School. The candidate, the supervisor/co-supervisor, the Director of Postgraduate Studies (DoPS) and the School Office will keep the (electronic) copies of the review documents for reference.

This document describes the SSIS procedure for conducting the research student progress reviews.

2. KEY ISSUES TO BE COVERED IN THE PROGRESS REVIEWS

According to the UNSW Research Student Handbook: (http://www.grs.unsw.edu.au/currentstudents/studenthandbook.html), the review process is to examine all aspects of the candidate, including:

a) Infrastructure and resources available to the candidate – are they adequate and appropriate for the research?

b) The role of the supervisor and co-supervisor – The Panel should be satisfied that expectations are clear, that supervisors are fulfilling their obligations at the appropriate level. Any problems with the communications between the parties?

c) Key research milestones for the next 6 or 12 months by which progress can be assessed;

d) Overall progress of the thesis project towards timely completion of the degree – anticipated thesis submission date which should take into account the census dates (31 March and 31 August);

e) Any problems (personal, technical or academic) identified by either the candidate or the supervisor(s) – for example, additional skills and training required to complete the
research tasks. The Head of School (HoS)/DoPS may need to be consulted and serious issues may need to go to the Higher Degree Committee (HDC) for action.

3. **REQUIREMENTS FOR THE PROGRESS REVIEWS**

3.1 First Progress Review (within 6 months)

In this first review, in addition to the review form, the candidate should prepare a separate document (of at least two pages) to describe the initial progress made over the first 6 months (**Full-Time-Equivalent**-FTE), reflect on the initial literature search and describe the overall direction of the proposed research.

In consultation with the supervisor, the candidate should have developed a plan to complete the courses of 18 Units of Credits (UoC) within the first 18 months FTE of his/her PhD candidature or the first 12 months FTE for his/her Masters candidature.

3.2 PhD Candidature Confirmation/Progress Review Focusing on Research Proposal (within the first 12 months)

The progress review for the first 12 months (FTE) will be a major review for the candidature, focusing on the viability of the research proposal and confirming the candidature for the research degree. The candidate, the supervision team and the review panel should follow the requirements documented in the UNSW procedure listed at: 


As required in the UNSW procedure, “the candidate should provide, in writing:
(a) An outline of achievements for the past 12 months against agreed objectives/criteria and milestones, and
(b) An outline of key objectives/criteria and milestones for the next 12 months, and
(c) A timeline and milestones for completion of the thesis, and
(d) A table of contents for the thesis together with the completion status of each section”.

In addition to the progress review form, the candidate should prepare a well structured thesis research proposal of **at least 5 pages**. Guidelines on how to prepare a thesis proposal can be found at the following website:


According to the UNSW guidelines, “a written research proposal should include:
- the key objectives/criteria and milestones of the research, and
- a literature review, and
- a justification of the research, and
- an assessment of the resources required to support the research, and
- a statement of how the research will be conducted in accordance with the UNSW policies for intellectual property, OHS and ethics”.


As part of this major progress review the candidate will present the research proposal at a Staff-Student Development Seminar (SSDS). Through the SDS coordinator, the candidate should reserve a presentation time slot that is convenient for the review panel members.

3.3 Master by Research Progress Review (within the first 12 months)

For a candidate in the Masters by Research program, the research proposal should include a well-considered plan for the thesis writing – including the details of the thesis structure and the timelines to complete the writing of each part of the Masters Thesis.

The candidate, the supervision team and the review panel should follow the requirements documented in the UNSW procedure listed at: http://www.grs.unsw.edu.au/downloads/ConfirmationandProgressReviewProceduresPhDMResMPhil030909.pdf

As the UNSW procedure required, “conversion of enrolment in either an MPhil or MRes to enrolment in a PhD degree requires that the candidature is confirmed as part of the annual review. Alternatively, if the request or recommendation for conversion to a PhD degree occurs at a time which does not coincide with the annual review schedule, an additional review may be arranged for the sole purpose of consideration of confirmation of candidature”.

3.4 Progress Review Focusing on Thesis Writing (within 24 months)

At this stage of the candidature the candidate is expected to have made significant research progress towards the goals for the thesis, and have published several conference papers and/or refereed journal papers over the past 24 months (FTE).

In addition to the review form, the candidate should prepare a separate document (of at least 3 pages) with details of the thesis structure and the timelines to complete the writing of each part of the PhD thesis.

3.5 Progress Reviews for Extension of Candidature (≥36 months for PhD or ≥24 months for Masters by Research)

For such progress reviews, a document should be attached to the progress review form. This document should include detailed plans for completion of the degree, including an outline of both any further research work required and the timetable for completion of the thesis. As an appendix to this document there must be a table of contents for the thesis in its current state of completion, giving page numbers for the start of each chapter and each section/subsection of a chapter.

For a candidate who has completed either 2 years (FTE) of a Masters or 4 years (FTE) of a PhD candidature, the review panel may do such progress reviews every 6 months.

For some special purposes, the candidate, or the supervisor, or the School may make a request for an unscheduled progress review.
4. **Major Steps in the Progress Reviews**

4.1 Set up the Review Panel

Within the **first 3 months** of the candidate’s initial enrolment, HoS/DoPS will set up a Review Panel of two academic/research staff for the candidate’s progress reviews (the candidate’s supervisor will not be a member of the Review Panel). The first named panel member is the Chair of the Review Panel. For most candidates; the Chair of the Review Panel will be the DoPS. Normally this Review Panel will not change during the whole candidature.

4.2 Obtain official Progress Review Forms

In January, and July of each year, the School Office (Peter Leech, email: p.leech@unsw.edu.au) may distribute the electronic review forms from the Graduate Research School to alert those research students who may need a progress review.

However, the candidates should keep the timelines for their own progress reviews scheduled for the whole candidature as the progress process is of great benefit for the candidate ([http://www.grs.unsw.edu.au/currentstudents/progress.html](http://www.grs.unsw.edu.au/currentstudents/progress.html)). If the review forms have not been sent to the candidate in time, the candidate should directly contact the Graduate Research School to obtain a fresh review form (email: engineering.grs@unsw.edu.au).

4.3 Conduct a Progress Review

Most of the progress reviews should be by a formal meeting between the candidate and the Review Panel. The supervisor will not be present at the review meeting, unless the candidate requests his/her attendance. The Review Panel may request that the supervisor attend part of the meeting to discuss specific issues, particularly for the difficult cases, see the details in Step d).

The candidate should have extensive discussion(s) with the supervisor/co-supervisor on relevant matters of the progress review before/during the preparation of the progress review form and the supporting document(s).

The steps the candidate should follow are:

a) The candidate to contact the review panel members for a mutually agreed meeting time for any progress reviews during the candidature.

b) The candidate to prepare the progress form and supporting documentation well before the scheduled review meetings.

c) The candidate is to make sure the relevant section has been completed by the supervisor/co-supervisor.

d) The candidate to forward the completed (hardcopy) review form and supporting documentation to the Chair of the Review Panel at least 24 hours before the review meeting. According to the UNSW procedure, “in the case of a recommendation by the Panel of either marginal or unsatisfactory, the supervisor or joint supervisor must be present for part of the review”. Before any reviews, the panel should check the review documents first. If the panel find any tendency towards the marginal or unsatisfactory review decisions, the supervisor/joint supervisor should be invited to
attend part of the review to discuss any academic issues/concerns. Then the supervisor leaves, the panel makes its decision independently.

e) The candidate is to scan the completed review form (with all the necessary signatures) AND supporting documentation into a single PDF to be sent to the DoPS; the Chair of the review panel; the supervisor; Peter Leech (p.leech@unsw.edu.au), and the GRS (email: engineering.grs@unsw.edu.au). This PDF is named with *SurnameReviewMonth-Year.pdf*, for example, for the student John Smith’s review in February 2010, the PDF named as SmithReview2-2010.pdf).

f) The candidate is to hand the original fully completed review form (with all the necessary signatures) AND supporting documentation to the Graduate Research School (located at: Ground Floor, South Wing, Rupert Myers Building).

The Review Panel may decide to conduct the progress review “on paper”, without a face-to-face meeting.

For any candidates who can not come to the campus for face-to-face review meetings – for example, some part-time research students living away from Sydney, or some full-time students conducting their thesis research away from the campus – the progress reviews can be conducted “on paper”. Under such circumstances the candidate should ask the supervisor to forward the completed (hardcopy) review form and supporting documentation to the Chair of the Review Panel, as well as to complete steps e) and f).

If the supervisor/co-supervisor is not available at the time to help the candidate, the candidate can contact the School Office (Peter Leech, p.leech@unsw.edu.au) or the DoPS for any assistance to complete steps e) and f).

5 Contact Details

Any comments and recommendations on these procedures should be directed to the SSIS Director of Postgraduate Studies (DoPS):

Jinling Wang  
Office: EE405  
Tel: 02 9385 4203  
Mobile: 0400 463 668  
Fax: 02 9313 7493  
Email: Jinling.Wang@unsw.edu.au