

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA AND REPORTING GUIDELINES FOR RESEARCH QUALIFYING ESSAYS

Introduction

The research qualifying essay is a tool for enabling students to extend their knowledge and skills in their chosen specialisation, while serving to demonstrate an ability to pursue higher research awards. Students should be able to show an in-depth knowledge of the topic chosen, demonstrate skills in researching that topic, expound the topic systematically employing the appropriate methodology, and appreciate the complexity and ramifications of the topic. The Qualifying Essay is a non-award subject.

The Qualifying Essay reflects the following statement from the SCD Handbook: *Masters [coursework] students are expected to give evidence of a breadth of research and a depth of understanding beyond that of an undergraduate student. In particular, their work should manifest the higher order skills of:*

- *Analysis - the ability to break down what is presented into its component parts and indicate the relationship among those parts;*
- *Synthesis - the ability to re-assemble those component parts into a new whole;*
- *Evaluation - the ability to think critically and originally, making judgments based on relevant principles.*

[SCD Handbook Postgraduate Award Descriptions: Master of Theology No. 3.2]

It is important for examiners to be aware that the research qualifying essay is not a research thesis. The student is required to respond within the parameters of the research question, including length of chapters.

Assessment criteria

The standard system of grading employed by the SCD is to be used: H = 85+, D = 75-84, C = 65-74, P = 50-64; a specific numerical mark must also be given. A grading of H or D is an indication that the student has shown a clear capacity to enter a research degree program. A grading of H indicates the work is of publishable quality.

Reporting – areas to be assessed in light of the research question:

Please comment upon

Writing and researching skills

a] the ability of the student to survey the relevant literature and to document statements adequately

Methodology

a] the degree to which the student has shown competence in the methodology/methodologies outlined in the statement of the topic question

Analysis

a] the evidence that the student has the knowledge and skills pertinent to the area of investigation

Synthesis

a] the evidence that the student has been able to identify connections and disconnections, and integrate them into a plausible framework in line with the chosen methodology/methodologies

Evaluation

a] the extent to which the student's attitude to his/her own work and to the work of others is critical and perceptive;

b] shows that the student understands the relationship of his/her own investigation to the wider context of knowledge in which it belongs;

c] offers a critique of the methodology/methodologies utilised in the essay;

d] makes a contribution to the knowledge of the subject with which it deals.