On Our Doctoral Thesis Examinations …

Do you know the University now conducts more than 80 PhD thesis examinations a year? This also means more than 80 faculty members helped chair these thesis examinations in 2001-02. Katherine Wong of the PG Secretariat may be a familiar name to many faculty as she is the one who sends email requests or makes telephone calls appealing to eligible faculty members to help chair these thesis examination sessions. Summer is a particularly difficult period for finding PhD thesis examination chairmen as not many faculty members are available. Unfortunately, summer is also high season for thesis examinations.

The list of eligible PhD thesis chairmen is not particularly long. At the rate PhD thesis examinations has been growing, the cycle for eligible faculty to be called on to help will become shorter. The search for chairmen in the summer months will become even more intense. We plead for the understanding of faculty when they are approached to chair thesis examinations, afterall, this is a service to students of the University.

On the actual conduct of PhD thesis examinations, a few concerns have been raised by participating faculty. One recurrent issue has to do with the punctuality of a small number of examiners at thesis examination sessions. A less common concern has to do with the dress code of personnel participating in the thesis examination. While there is no dress code for thesis examinations, the examination is an important occasion for the candidate. Casual household wear is not typical attire one would expect on such occasions. A third concern has to do with abrupt changes in examination arrangements, including a change in the examiner or the examination time or date at short notice.

While there are always reasons for any of the above to occur, their occurrence will undoubtedly cause inconvenience or concern to all participating in the examination and possibly raise the level of anxiety for the candidate being examined.

The University is still very green in view of its brief history. Its traditions and customs are still evolving. In the process of building our culture and tradition, we hope our thesis examination sessions will command respect and be conducted in style. This is the least we can do to show our respect for the thesis examination, student, as well as fellow examiners.

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Annual Progress Reports for RPgs

The Annual Progress Report Form is the only official record of the study progress of a research postgraduate student. The student, the thesis supervisor and the thesis supervision committee all participate in completing the proforma. Every summer, the reports collected by ARRO are randomly read by staff of the PG Secretariat. Where inconsistencies and the absence of action for students with low ratings occur, follow-up work is normally done by contacting the PG Coordinator concerned. This year, as of 15 August, ARRO has received over 75% of the reports. For thesis supervisors who have been away in the past few weeks, can they please forward their completed reports to ARRO as soon as possible?

Sampling of the reports will take place in October. A summary report will be submitted to the Committee on Postgraduate Studies subsequently. In addition, a brief report will be made in the next issue of PG UPDATE.

Time Limit for PhD Degree Completion Relaxed

According to University regulations, the maximum time allowed for doctoral students to complete their degree is eight years. There is a one-and-a-half-year reduction if a relevant master’s degree is earned prior to entering the PhD program.

The Committee on Postgraduate Studies (CPS) recently reviewed the requirement about the time reduction for maximum length of study for PhD students with a relevant master’s degree. A recommendation was made to Senate for the time reduction to be removed for such students. The recommendation has been endorsed by Senate at its meeting of 10 April 2002. With effect from Spring Semester, 2001/02, the maximum duration of study for all PhD students is eight years, regardless of whether a student is in possession of a relevant master’s degree. The normative length of study for PhD students remains at four years for those who do not possess a research master’s degree and three years for those who possess a research master’s degree.

Plan Ahead – CPS & Senate Meeting Dates

Better plan ahead! To help schools and departments schedule their submissions to the Committee on Postgraduate Studies (CPS) and to the Senate in good time, the meeting dates for both committees for the 2002/03 academic year are now provided below.

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<th>CPS Meeting Date</th>
<th>Senate Meeting Date</th>
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<tr>
<td>Wed, 15 Jan 2003</td>
<td>Tue, 11 Feb 2003</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wed, 14 May 2003*</td>
<td>Tue, 10 Jun 2003</td>
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<td>Wed, 9 Jul 2003*</td>
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* tentative

The meeting dates for CPS for Spring Semester, 2002/03 may change slightly, depending on the teaching and class schedules of members for that semester. As a general rule, CPS meetings are held approximately three to four weeks prior to the next Senate meeting. Schools should aim at submitting their proposals to the PG Secretariat for consideration by CPS at least two weeks before the appropriate CPS meeting date.
Mainland Students Seeking Employment in Hong Kong After Graduation

The Hong Kong SAR Government has approved that degree or above level Mainland students (excluding exchange students and those attending short courses) graduating from UGC-funded institutions in 1990 or afterwards be allowed to re-enter Hong Kong for employment under certain conditions since 1 August 2001. On this provision, the UGC has recently written to the University to further clarify the new policy. The essential points are listed below.

Entry Status

(a) Only persons who entered Hong Kong on “student” status are covered by the new policy (others such as those entering on “visitor”, “employment”, “training” or “dependent” status are not covered); AND

Eligibility of Programs of Studies for the Employment Scheme

(b) For undergraduate level programs, only graduates of full-time, publicly-funded programs of UGC-funded institutions are covered (but graduates of programs offered by their Continuing and Professional Education (CPE) arms are excluded);

(c) For taught postgraduate level programs, only graduates of full-time programs (publicly-funded, mixed mode or self-financing) of UGC-funded institutions are covered (but graduates of programs offered by their CPE arms are excluded). To be eligible, the graduates should have completed the entire program in Hong Kong; and

(d) For research postgraduate level programs, all graduates of UGC-funded institutions are eligible.

As a general rule, the new policy does not apply to graduates of non-local programs, distance learning programs or professional courses.

For Mainland residents entering Hong Kong on “student” status to pursue programs run by the University which are not covered by the new policy, the Immigration Department will write to the University with a copy to the student informing that he/she will not be eligible for employment after his/her graduation.

Change of Student Visa for Graduating Students Who Wish to Seek Employment in Hong Kong

Some of our graduates of the postgraduate programs from the Mainland may wish to seek employment in Hong Kong immediately after their graduation. For those whose student visa will soon expire after graduation, they may now approach the Admissions, Registration and Records Office to obtain an award certification letter to certify their graduation and intention to seek employment in Hong Kong. According to the Immigration Department, a one-off three-month extension will be granted for successful applicants and their visa status will be converted from “student” to “visitor”. Continuing Mainland students should not take this route to change their status before graduation.
PGSs to Exchange-out RPgs

Often, chances may be available for RPgs to travel outside Hong Kong to conduct fieldwork or research usually for no more than one semester. During the period overseas, they may receive financial support from the host institution. Departments may top-up the financial support of an exchange-out RPg up to a level where the total of the top-up amount and the stipend paid by the overseas institution taken together does not exceed the PGS rate of the University, subject to the condition that the student has registered as a full-time student during the period when the “top-up” PGS is paid. Departments should exercise judgment in such topping-up arrangements as it should take into account the cost of living of the host country.

New PG Programs Launched in 2002/03

The following PG programs will be admitting their first intake in the 2002/03 academic year:

- MSc, MPhil and PhD programs in Bioengineering
- MPhil and PhD programs in Environmental Engineering
- Graduate Diploma and MSc programs in Civil Infrastructural Engineering and Management
- MSc program in Financial Analysis
- MSc program in IC Design Engineering
- MSc program in Microelectronics
- MSc program in Telecommunications

Channels for Voicing Grievance

If a PG student has any grievance about their program, their thesis work, their study or supervision arrangements, channels are readily available to help them settle their grievance and alleviate their concerns.

When a PG student encounters any difficulty or has any concern that they feel should be conveyed to or discussed with the University, the first stop should normally be the PG coordinator. If this does not work or is not appropriate for some reason, the next level for voicing grievance is the head of the department. If the issue cannot be settled satisfactorily in the department, the student may approach the Associate Dean of the school responsible for PG studies for advice. On condition that the issue still cannot be resolved within the school, the next stop is the Associate Vice-President for Academic Affairs (PG Studies & Academic Research) who represents the Vice-President for Academic Affairs. If the issue-in-question involves existing academic policies, the matter may be referred to the Committee on Postgraduate Studies or Senate for consideration.

In general, if the grievance is of a personal nature, the student may consider talking to a student counselor from the Student Counseling Service and Careers Center of the Student Affairs Office for advice.

FROM THE PG SECRETARIAT

This newsletter has been prepared by the PG Secretariat of VP-AA Office. If you have any feedback or suggestions on this newsletter, please contact Vincent Cheung at aackc@ust.hk or Katherine Wong at aakwong@ust.hk.