Glossary of Terms Related to Higher Degrees by Research (HDR)
School of Graduate Research

UNIVERSITY ᴏꜰ DIVINITY

The following brief glossary is for the purposes of clarifying terms that might appear in documents associated with policies and regulations governing HDR awards, students, and supervisors. It intends neither to be exhaustive, nor to replace more specific guidelines governing the development of and expectations surrounding a research proposal. Though the precise expectations governing each of these terms will differ across fields of study, the general shape of a research project coinheres across areas of study.

Research Proposal

A proposal is a first stage in the research process. Though a provisional statement of the project, it is also a foundational document: a well-developed proposal will provide a solid foundation for the first year of research leading to the confirmation panel. A research proposal may well take six to twelve weeks to develop, should go through multiple revisions, and be developed in conversation with a potential supervisor. A typical research proposal should contain:

- an introduction to the "research problem" and associated "research question";
- a "methodology" by which this problem might be investigated;
- a provisional answer to this problem, or a "thesis";
- a sense of the "structure" needed to answer this question;
- a statement of the "originality" and significance of this problem and the research project;
- a recognition of the skills needed to complete the thesis, and your current level of qualification in these skills (languages, research methodologies, etc).

Topic

A topic is a broad area of study which might be limited by a range of *qualifiers*: geographical region (Australia), time frame (1800s), discipline (theology, philosophy), culture (Chagga), population group (over 50s). A research topic is a beginning point, but a topic alone is too broad for the purposes of developing a robust research proposal.

Research Problem

A research problem identifies a specific issue, gap, blind-spot, or contradiction in a field of research that leads to a research question and associated answer, or "thesis." The problem will avoid binary solutions and is something that can be examined via multiple perspectives using a variety of methods. A "literature review" is a potential way of identifying a research problem. The description of a research problem should also indicate the significance of the problem, supply some rationale as to why the problem should be researched.

Research Question

A question arises out of the identified problem. A good research question:

- will focus on a single, well described problem;
- is researchable: available to being investigated through the use of primary and secondary material in a way that will lead to an evidenced thesis;
- is capable of being answered within the constraints of the research project: word limits, timeframe, requisite skills, funding;
- is relevant to the scholarly literature: it passes the "so what?" test.

Thesis

A thesis is a proposed answer to the research question. The term thesis can be used in two ways: the first refers to the whole body of work; the second refers to the precise claim or argument being developed through the work. The thesis, in this second sense, should be:

- *concise* enough to be formulated as a thesis statement: a sentence or a paragraph at the beginning of the work which introduces the claim that will be argued for through the work;

- *complex* enough to be developed as a "sustained argument" through the whole master's or doctoral thesis.

The thesis, or argument, will develop in relation to the chosen "methodology," and will suggest an overall "structure" for the project. It is possible, even probable, that the thesis will change over the course of the research, from the initial proposal until the final submission.

Methodology
A methodology names and discusses the broad philosophical underpinning or lens a researcher uses to identify, gather, read, and interpret the data basic to the project. This finds expression in a set of tools or approaches that have already been established in the relevant disciplines. A methodology will suggest a "method": a specific means by which data is identified and gathered.

Discipline
An academic discipline is a field of study or branch of knowledge normally organised around a shared object of inquiry.

Interdisciplinary
An interdisciplinary research project draws from, and builds upon, the findings of researchers across multiple disciplines. It produces a thesis which is a substantial contribution to knowledge in more than one discipline.

HREC
"Human Research Ethics Committees (HRECs) review all research proposals involving human participants to ensure that they are ethically acceptable." In Australia, every piece of research conducted with reference to human participants is governed by "The National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007)" and "Ethical Guidelines for Research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples."

Originality
The expectation and demand for the demonstration of "originality" in a thesis applies only at the doctoral level. A doctoral thesis is to produce a distinctive contribution to the accumulated knowledge of the discipline. Originality may comprise of a number of different factors, such as but not limited to:
- the application of new methods to a data analysis;
- a new analysis of a phenomenon or text;
- the discovery of new data;
- a modification of an existing theoretical framework.

Abstract
An abstract is a self-contained statement of 300 words that describes the larger thesis. It should include a concise summary of the research problem, the argument or thesis and the conclusion.

HDR Regulations and Policies
The University of Divinity regulations and policies to be read in conjunction with this glossary are:
- Regulation 7 Master of Theology (Research)
- Regulation 9 Doctor of Theology
- Regulation 22 Doctor of Philosophy
- Regulation 38 Master of Philosophy
- Minor Thesis Policy