

**AGST Alliance**

**Guidelines**  
*for*  
**PhD candidates**



**AGST**  
ALLIANCE

[www.agstalliance.org](http://www.agstalliance.org)

Welcome!

We are privileged to have you a candidate in one of our AGST Alliance Doctor of Philosophy programs. We look forward to an enriching partnership – all for God’s magnificent kingdom.

These guidelines are prepared to be a useful, working resource to help you in your research program. They will help clarify expectations for the program, and especially your relationship with your supervisor.

Guidelines like these are always ‘work under construction’, and so your comments and suggestions on how to ensure they are maximally helpful would be appreciated.

In Christian fellowship,



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Wherever you see this icon in these guidelines, it has a hyperlink to a relevant page of our AGST Alliance website, [www.agstalliance.org](http://www.agstalliance.org). Ensure that you are on-line, and double-click on the icon. For example, a double-click on this one should take you to the AGST Alliance homepage. Try it and see!

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## PhD programs objectives

Our AGST Alliance Doctor of Philosophy programs in Biblical Studies, Education and Theology are advanced research awards, designed to produce committed graduates who are equipped to provide significant leadership in the wider Christian community in Asia.

- Research in the **PhD(Bib. Studies)** program should qualify a graduate to function as a research specialist in biblical studies, and is likely to have an applied focus for the Asian context.
- Research in the **PhD(Ed)** program will most likely have a clear applied focus on Christian education/spiritual formation and an integration of theological and educational elements, as an avenue for ‘serving God’s people in Asia’.
- Research in the **PhD(Theol)** program should qualify a graduate to function as a research specialist in theology, and so will have a clear applied focus for the Asian context.

Most of our AGST Alliance programs are validated by the Asia theological Association (ATA). The ATA guidelines for the purpose and nature of research doctoral programs like a PhD are:

Programs granting the Research Doctorate degree are designed primarily to qualify the graduate to function as research specialists in biblical, educational and theological studies. (*Manual for Accreditation, ATA, 2013, p. 38*).

\* \* \* \* \*

## As you commence your PhD program

Whatever form your dissertation research takes, its context is the Church in Asia. While it is easy to see your research as an academic exercise to obtain a PhD, it is important that you continue to sense your stewardship of the resources and abilities which God has given you to be able to complete this major assignment.

Thus, maintain a sense of humility before God as you progress through your dissertation. Recognise that you are doing it ultimately for him. Allow prayer and reflection to permeate the process of your inquiry, from start to finish: From the Kingdom’s perspective, this is unlikely to be time wasted!

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## Program practical details

### 1. Program component

The sole work for the PhD programs is preparation of a dissertation that reflects original research. The dissertation will be up to 80,000 words (excluding references/bibliography and appendices).

There is no specific coursework to complete. However, there may be courses in another seminary or university which your supervisor(s) will encourage you to attend, to get necessary input/background for your research.

Also, we strongly urge our PhD candidates to plan for a stay of at least three months at an appropriate internationally-recognised study centre during their program.

### 2. Program duration

The PhD is likely to take at least the equivalent of about three years of full-time study to complete. There is a seven-year time limit for completion.

### 3. Time commitment

You need to ensure that you are able to give adequate time to your program.

Good time management is essential. You will need to restructure your work/ministry load and responsibilities for the duration of the program.

- Some participants have **study leave** provisions in their church/organisation.
- Others arrange to **cut down their work/ministry load**.
- Others take **unpaid leave**.

We urge you to use the *Student Support Framework Memorandum of Understanding* so that the major stakeholders in your program – your family, ministry organisation/seminary and/or local church leaders – are informed and committed to help you complete the program well.

### 4. Getting started

When you applied to enter your PhD program, you briefly outlined the area you wish to explore. This is the starting point for your research.

The next stage is to complete your “focus of interest (FOI)” document. The FOI is an initial document that helps students further narrow their area of interest to a workable topic. We would expect you to have done some initial reading on the topic and develop a possible research topic and research questions from there. Your FOI has to be approved by the appropriate AGST Alliance Committee. When this is approved, a supervisor will be appointed.

Now, you will spend the first year or so reading widely and developing your **research proposal** – the detailed, informed plan for your further research focus.

Your research proposal needs to be approved by the appropriate AGST Alliance Program Committee. They may also seek comments from an external expert in your general field of research.

Once your proposal is approved, you may continue with your research and writing, hopefully leading to a successful outcome.

## 5. Official starting dates

You may commence your PhD program at any time during the year.

For ease of administration, however, we set the official date of commencement on either January 1 (for participants commencing between September-February), or July 1 (for participants commencing between March-August).

## 6. Annual PhD colloquium

All AGST Alliance doctoral candidates are required to participate in an annual 4 day/3 night colloquium.

The purpose of the colloquium is primarily to provide a setting for encouraging you and your peers to 'keep on keeping on', and so bring your research to a successful conclusion sooner rather than later. The focus of the colloquium is thus threefold:

- a) To enable you to talk through the direction and progress of your research with 'critical friends' (PhD peers and faculty) - you will be required to make a presentation of your work to date, followed by discussion.
- b) To enhance your research ability, with skills training in areas in which you and your peers sense you need further help.
- c) [For new PhD candidates] To be oriented to your program, and to review required doctoral level research skills.

## 7. Program marker points

All candidates enter our PhD programs on **an initial one-year probation period**. At the end of the first year, candidates are expected to complete an initial literature review. There will be an intermediate assessment of this literature review. Continuation is contingent upon satisfactory progress having been made to that point.

Subsequently, satisfactory **annual reviews** are required to ensure ongoing continuation in the program. A major part of the review is completed jointly by you and your supervisor(s), and you both have opportunity to make other, more confidential, comments if you wish.

Your formal **proposal submission** is a further program marker. Your proposal must be approved by your program committee in order to continue in your PhD program.

## 8. Language medium

Most often, students will complete their research and writing in English. However, sometimes a student may be in a situation where their main language is not English.

In these cases, student may be granted permission by their program committee to research/write in a language other than English. These conditions will apply:

- A competent supervisor(s) who is conversant in the non-English language is available.
- There are sufficient resources relating to the research topic in the non-English language to warrant allowing non-English research and writing.
- The official copy of the dissertation will be in English.
- The dissertation examiners will usually receive the English copy.
- An oral examination will be routinely expected.

Note that effectively the research and writing will need to be bi-lingual (English and the non- English language), because of the availability of suitable resource material.

## 9. Dissertation examination

There are two phases to a successful examination of your dissertation:

### a. Pre-submission dissertation perusal

When you and your supervisor agree that your dissertation is getting very close to its final form, 1-2 readers internal to AGST Alliance will peruse it, in order to 'OK' it for final submission and sending out to the external examiners.

The internal readers will be looking at criteria for 'readiness to submit' which include:

- **Technical:** is the grammar/formatting/style of the dissertation accurate, appropriate and consistent?
- **Conceptual:** is there an appropriate/clear logical flow of argumentation through the dissertation?
- **Use of research evidence:** are the cited sources used appropriately, to complement the argumentation rather than to provide the argumentation; and is there any obvious evidence of plagiarism?
- **Academic:** overall, is the dissertation at PhD level?

The internal reader(s)' role isn't to agree/disagree with the specific argumentation content of your dissertation (which we assume will have been done by you with your supervisor). So, it is more a general overview of the quality of the dissertation rather than a detailed critique that will be done.

After your dissertation draft has been received by the Programs Director, it is likely to take two weeks or so to be perused.

### b. Dissertation examination

Your submitted dissertation will be read by three external examiners, drawn internationally. Although the final decision relating to the choice of examiners lies with AGST Alliance, you will have an opportunity (through your supervisor) to suggest the names of possible examiners and anyone you would prefer not to be an examiner.

An oral defence may be called for, to assess candidates' understanding of aspects of the dissertation and/or to test their general knowledge in areas relating to the dissertation.

Upon successful completion of the defence, the degree will be conferred with either:



- Awarded
- Awarded with distinction

Subject to the recommendations of the examiners, candidates may be invited to revise their dissertation prior to the degree being awarded, or a MTh may be awarded. If a dissertation is failed, no degree will be awarded and resubmission will not be allowed.

## 10. [For PhD(Ed) candidates] Transfer from PhD(Ed) to EdD program

As they progress through the PhD(Ed) program some participants may realise they would like to move into our EdD (doctor of education) program. This is possible.

Discuss the possibility with the Education Programs Director in the first instance. Moving from the PhD(Ed) to the EdD is likely to involve different program fees.

## 11. Finance matters



Details about fees and the payment schedule are found in *Information for Students* and on our website.



Note that you will need to factor other significant costs into your program, beyond the program fees – for travel, accommodation, resources, etc. (See ‘Other costs’ in the Fees page on our website.)

We regret that no scholarship money is directly available from AGST Alliance. However, we actively support student applications to trusts/foundations for financial assistance.

## 12. Immigration and visa issues

It is essential that you check carefully about immigration regulations *well in advance* of any travel you plan as part of your PhD program, e.g. to spend time at a study centre, to visit your supervisor, to do field research, etc. ***This is your responsibility.***

AGST Alliance is able to provide official letters if required for immigration purposes.

## 13. Life as a PhD candidate

Doctoral candidates come to their programs from widely different backgrounds and experience, with different life situations and different abilities/skills. Despite that, there are enough similarities to be able to suggest common elements to be aware of to ensure as smooth a journey as possible.

Thus candidates in our AGST Alliance doctoral programs are encouraged to:

- Relate to doctoral peers, within AGST Alliance and beyond.
- Peruse books such as these:
  - ↳ N. Gupta, *Prepare, succeed, advance: A guidebook for getting a PhD in biblical studies and beyond, Pickwick (Wipf and Stock), Eugene, USA, 2011.*
  - ↳ E. Phillips & D. Pugh, *How to get a PhD*, Open University Press, Buckingham, 1994 (reprinted 2004).
  - ↳ S. Potter (Ed.), *Doing postgraduate research*, Open University Press/Sage, London, 2006, (reprinted 2011).
  - ↳ G. Wisker, *The postgraduate research handbook (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.)*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2008.
- Keep a close relationship with the God who has called you to himself, and who is the ultimate source of direction and wisdom.

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## Expectations of PhD level study

What level and quality of study is expected for our AGST Alliance PhDs? This question may be answered in two ways.

### A. Generic expectations

AGST Alliance PhDs are advanced degrees which will be recognised internationally. Holders of an AGST Alliance PhD will have demonstrated that they have advanced human knowledge in some way through research or scholarship, and this is confirmed by independent experts, applying recognised standards.

Phillips and Pugh (1987, pp. 18-19) summarise well what this means in practice:

The holder of a doctorate is someone who is recognized as an authority by the appropriate faculty...

- ... you have something to say your peers want to listen to.
- ... you must have a command of what is happening in your subject so that you can evaluate the worth of what others are doing.
- ... you must have the astuteness to discover where you can make a useful contribution.
- ... you must have mastery of appropriate techniques that are currently being used, and also be aware of their limitations.
- ... you must be able to communicate your results effectively in the professional arena.
- ... all this must be carried out in an international context; your professional peer group is world-wide... You must be aware of what is being discovered, argued about, written and published by your academic community across the world.

Thus, a successful dissertation will demonstrate these skills by the candidate:

- Able to explicitly set out substantive aims and objectives for the study and has clearly defined its scope, assumptions and limitations.
- Mastery is reflected in the use and citation of primary and secondary sources.
- Has clearly marshalled the evidence and formulated the problems raised by it.
- Has dealt with the problems in an orderly and creative way.
- Has demonstrated highly developed analytical, critical and synthesizing skills.
- Arguments and supporting evidence are coherent and set out in a logical fashion.
- The methodology is sound and appropriate to the aims.
- Key terminology has been clearly outlined and consistently used.
- Is original, in either (a) enlarging or modifying previous knowledge and/or (b) giving significantly new interpretation of the work of other scholars.  
([http://www.roxborough.com/Research/research\\_aids.htm](http://www.roxborough.com/Research/research_aids.htm))

### B. Expectations in an evangelical Christian institution

The above guidelines are generic. But there is another essential dimension to bear in mind in your doctoral study in AGST Alliance.

Doctoral study within an evangelical Christian institution is founded on an understanding of knowledge that is more than academic. In the Bible, acquiring and exercising wisdom involves a combination of faith, reason and action. It requires

- right belief and committed trust in the living God (“the fear of the LORD is the first principle of wisdom”),
- creative and humble use of the rationality God has granted to humans made in his own image, and

- appropriate living in the world to reflect God's calling and participate in God's mission.

Doctoral study, therefore, pursued on such a foundation, will be *confessional, rational* and *missional*. For a Christian, doctoral study is one dimension of what it means to "love the LORD your God with all your heart and mind and soul and strength."

Within such a framework of Christian identity and commitment, it is assumed that our doctoral students will be recognised as Christians maturing in faithful discipleship and having leadership skills. The following qualities of their doctoral work will be demonstrated through appropriate examination:

1. **Comprehensive understanding**, having demonstrated a breadth of systematic understanding of a field of study relevant to the Christian community of faith, and mastery of the skills and methods of research appropriate to that field.
2. **Critical skills, faithfully exercised**, having demonstrated their capacity for critical analysis, independent evaluation of primary and secondary source materials, and synthesis of new and inter-related ideas through coherent argumentation, and their commitment to exercise such skills on the foundation of biblical faithfulness to Jesus Christ and his church.
3. **Serious inquiry with integrity**, having demonstrated the ability to conceive, design and implement a substantial project of inquiry resulting in a sustained and coherent thesis, and to do so with Christian and scholarly integrity.
4. **Creative and original contribution**, having produced, as a result of such disciplined inquiry, a creative and original contribution that extends the frontiers of knowledge, or develops fresh insights in the articulation and contextual relevance of the Christian tradition, some of which merit national or international refereed publication.
5. **Contextual relevance**, having shown their capacity, in the course of their doctoral program and in their expectation of its future potential, for biblically-informed critical engagement with the realities of their cultural contexts.
6. **Ability to communicate**, having shown an ability in communicating about their area of expertise to peer-level academic audiences, and, where appropriate, to non-specialists in local Christian communities and the wider society in culturally relevant ways, including their mother tongue, for example through teaching, preaching or writing.
7. **Missional impact**, having demonstrated that the doctoral work produced promotes the kingdom of God and advances the mission of the church (both local and global).

All these seven elements are expressed to the glory of God.

*(The section above has been adapted from The Beirut Benchmarks, developed in the ICETE Doctoral Consultation, Beirut, Lebanon, March 2010.)*

If this seems daunting, don't despair! Your previous study has demonstrated that you already have some of these skills. They now need to be honed up further, with diligence and discipline.

A good way to appreciate what a good dissertation looks like is to look through dissertations in your field which have passed. These will be found in theological college and/or university libraries. Your supervisors are also an important resource for this: they

may be able to suggest dissertations for your to peruse; and give you helpful advice about what is expected.

Give attention to these following three areas also as you move through your doctoral program:

**1. Research originality**

A common concern relates for those starting out on doctoral studies relates to originality of doctoral level research. Helpful insights on this are in Appendix 1, *What makes doctoral research original?* (p. 22).

**2. Plagiarism**

Naturally, at this level of study, plagiarism needs to be watched very closely, too. Remind yourself of what plagiarism is – see *Plagiarism: a caution* in Appendix 2 (p. 23) – and ensure that you can not be accused of it.

**3. Avoid common mistakes**

Remember that many have gone before you – and you can learn from their mistakes. So take a few moments to scan some of the common mistakes doctoral students make, on p. 24 (Appendix 3).

Don't hesitate to seek help early to cope with the scholarly expectations of your program!

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## What is a PhD dissertation?

Joe Wolfe (University of NSW, Australia) has summarised the nature of a thesis/dissertation well:

Your thesis is a research report. The report concerns a problem or series of problems in your area of research and it should describe what was known about it previously, what you did towards solving it, what you think your results mean, and where or how further progress in the field can be made.

Do not carry over your ideas from undergraduate assessment: a thesis is not an answer to an assignment question. One important difference is this: the reader of an assignment is usually the one who has set it. S/he already knows the answer (or one of the answers), not to mention the background, the literature, the assumptions and theories and the strengths and weaknesses of them. The readers of a thesis do not know what the “answer” is. If the thesis is for a PhD, the university requires that it make an original contribution to human knowledge: your research must discover something hitherto unknown.

Obviously your examiners will read the thesis. They will be experts in the general field of your thesis but, on the exact topic of your thesis, you are the world expert. Keep this in mind: you should write to make the topic clear to a reader who has not spent most of the last three years thinking about it.

(<http://www.phys.unsw.edu.au/~jw/thesis.html>. Accessed 29 December 2011)

### What the dissertation contains

Before you settle on what sort of dissertation you will do, a good idea is to browse through other doctoral dissertations, especially those in your particular discipline. These should give you an idea of the commonly-used structure, and the range of research methods employed. Suitable dissertations to peruse may be found in theological college and university libraries, and from on-line sources.

Generally, a dissertation will contain these elements:

- **Introductory pages**

(Title page, declaration, acknowledgements, table of contents, abstract, etc.)

- **Introduction**

What is the topic and why is it important? How does it fit into the broader world of your discipline?

- **Literature review**

Where did the problem come from? What is already known about this problem? What other methods have been tried to solve it?

- **Middle chapters**

The exact structure in the middle chapters will vary among dissertations, depending on the research method being used. In conceptual/historical enquiries, the middle chapters will be structured in a way determined by the logic of the enquiry. In empirical (experimental) enquiries, the middle chapters are more likely to follow the form of methods being used for the research, results of the research, and discussion of the results and their significance in your enquiry.

- **Final chapter**

What are your conclusions? What are the practical implications of your work? What further interesting avenues of research does your work point to?

- **References**

All the resources you have cited in your writing (= reference list) and perhaps a list of significant resources you used in your research but have not specifically cited or drawn from in your final written submission (= bibliography). Both 'hard form' (books, articles) and 'soft form' (internet resources) resources need to be included.

- **Appendices**

Material that is relevant to your dissertation, but which distract the reader from the major flow of the writing. Use appendices with caution: they are not designed to give you an undercover means of exceeding the word count for your dissertation!

Appendix 4 (*Research Methodologies*) on pp. 25ff gives a brief overview of various research possibilities.

There is a wealth of resource material available on research methodologies, in both hard- and soft-copy formats. The following titles are known to be helpful, especially in the education field:

Creswell, J. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among the Five Approaches* (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.), London, Sage, 2007.

Creswell, J. W. (2011). *Educational Research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research*. 4<sup>th</sup> ed. New Jersey: Pearson Educational International.

Yount, W. R. (2006). *Research design & statistical analysis in Christian ministry*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. Available to download free of charge from <http://napce.org/yount.html>.

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## You and your supervisor(s)

You will be assigned one or two supervisors to journey with you through your program.

One supervisor will be chosen to provide expertise in your specific field of research. Additionally, a co-supervisor (or adviser) may be appointed if your research is interdisciplinary. If these people live out of your immediate region, a local supervisor will also be appointed to provide you with general doctoral-level oversight.

### 1. Selecting your supervisor(s)

Selection of supervisor(s) is a shared task between you and the program director. You are invited to suggest names – and perhaps even informally sound out people if you know them.

Formal invitations will be issued by your program director.

You and your supervisor(s) will need to be able to work together, and so there will be regular and mutual reviews of the relationship.

### 2. Meeting your supervisor(s)

Frequency and form of meeting between you and your supervisor(s) will be mutually agreed.

Adequate interaction with your supervisor(s) is enough of a challenge in the 'normal' setting of on-campus research: It is an even more significant challenge working in 'distance supervision' mode.

There are a number of ways to ensure effective supervisory links with your supervisor(s) if you are operating in distance mode:

- *Email* will probably be the most commonly used method. Discuss with your supervisor(s) practical matters relating to preferred email etiquette, e.g. what size attachments both of you can receive/send.
- *Zoom* (or a similar form like *Facetime*, etc.) is a cheap and usually effective option if both you and your supervisors' internet connections are working OK.
- *Phone calls* may be quite cheap, especially with IDD phone cards.

A zoom/phone call of 30-40 minutes may enable discussion/dialogue to clarify thinking in a way email or letters can't. It will be important to decide mutually on the appropriate time for you to call your supervisor(s) – arrange this by email.

- *'Snail mail'* may still be used, especially for sending resources. Check on what service is preferred (and affordable – see 'costs' below) between you and your supervisor(s): airmail post, or a courier service.
- *Visits*: we recommend that you budget to spend face-to-face time with your supervisor personally say once a year (for fulltime PhD candidates). This will need to be at a mutually agreed date.

Your initial face-to-face visit should be within the first year of your candidature – probably after several months in which you have been interacting by distance with your supervisor(s), have done significant wider reading/research and are moving towards a firmer and focused proposal. Certainly, this visit should precede the submission of your research proposal.

A visit to your supervisor(s) *in situ* will also give you an opportunity to explore resources – your supervisors’ personal library, university/theological institution libraries, resource people to meet with a view to ongoing networking, etc.

### *A supervision rhythm*

There is no generic model for distance supervision. We suggest that you and your supervisor(s) communicate about what rhythm of contact may work, try it for a time, and allow for review and adjustment.

However, it is probably reasonable to ensure that there be some form of contact at least every two months. This may be a brief update email from you to your supervisor(s), or a more substantial contact. What is important is that both you and your supervisor(s) know that the other is still alive and well!

### **3. Your relationship with your supervisor(s)**

Getting through your doctoral program is a collaborative effort. Your relationship with your supervisor(s) is a key to this. There is no ‘one size fits all’ approach to this relationship, although the common strong images are those of *mentor* and *critical friend*. And as you progress through your research and writing, you may well find that you subtly change from a mentor/mentoree or teacher/student relationship to one which is more reciprocal and collegial. After all, you are becoming an expert in your particular field!

Note: clear written communication of your dissertation writing is your responsibility. Even if English is not your main language, you can not expect your supervisor(s) to read drafts which are in poor English, or to adopt the role of editor.

### **4. Responsibilities**

Both you and your supervisor(s) have responsibilities if you are to thrive in, and complete, your research. Some of these responsibilities are:

#### *You:*

- Maintaining regular communication with your supervisor(s), as mutually agreed.
- Complete and submit tasks you commit yourself to. It is recommended you keep a record of your contacts with your supervisor(s).
- Frank and honest discussion of your progress, difficulties and concerns.
- Regular reflection on the process of supervision.
- Completion – on time – of required progress reports.

#### *Your supervisor(s)*

- Monitor progress.
- Provide critically constructive feedback within an agreed time frame (see ‘*Turn around of work*’ below).
- Alert you to areas in which you are not handling your research competently, especially in English communication, argumentation, and use of resources.
- Point you towards appropriate resources (especially people within their network of contacts).
- Completion – on time – of required progress reports.

### **5. ‘Turn around’ of work**

We know the value of getting feedback within a reasonable timeframe; and we are encouraging supervisors to act responsibly to provide it. Realistically, we all face

time/priority pressures, and it is not always possible for a supervisor to respond immediately. We will request your supervisor to work within this schedule:

Item	Target response time
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ‘Administrative emails’ from you (e.g. requesting clarification of process, a resource reference, contact address of another person, setting up a time to phone, etc)</li> </ul>	Within one week
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An email/letter from you, raising a significant content issue (e.g. working through the details of an aspect of the research topic)</li> </ul>	Acknowledge receipt: 1 week Substantive response: 2 weeks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A major section of writing (e.g. a draft chapter of the dissertation)</li> </ul>	Acknowledge receipt: 1 week Substantive response: 3 weeks
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading a complete dissertation draft</li> </ul>	Acknowledge receipt: 1 week Substantive response: 5-6 weeks

Some issues may be most easily dealt with by a quick telephone call rather than a written response.

We also request your supervisor to alert you if (s)he anticipates that (s)he will not be able to meet a target response time.

## 6. If problems with your supervisor arise

Difficulties and/or misunderstandings may arise between you and your supervisor(s), not least because a significant amount of your contact will be non-face to face.

Seek to resolve such concerns directly and as they arise. Another means is through frank discussion at the time of the joint annual review with your supervisor(s).

However, if you feel that things have not been, or cannot be, adequately resolved directly, approach your AGST Alliance program director to air your concerns and to discuss a way forward. You also have the opportunity to do this as part of your annual review.

Your supervisor(s) similarly have an invitation to comment confidentially to your program director.

## 7. Supervision costs

Supervisors will be given an honorarium from AGST Alliance for their supervision. However, direct costs incurred in your contact with your supervisor(s) are generally your responsibility: Please don't presume upon the generosity (or affluence) of your supervisor(s).

Items you will need to arrange to reimburse your supervisor(s) for (unless they indicates otherwise) include the cost of photocopied articles, postage of resources to you and phone calls.

## Ethical clearance for your research

Internationally in recent decades, there has been an enhanced awareness of the ethical responsibilities of researchers towards research participants. Issues of integrity, respect for persons, beneficence and justice lie at the heart of this concern as theological issues too. So, as a Christian institution, AGST Alliance wants to ensure that people in its programs reflect these values also.

If you are involved in research which gathers 'live' data – the views of living people – then ethical issues will relate to such areas as:

- Aspects of anonymity and confidentiality
- Care for research subjects/participants
- Protocols for selection of samples
- Informed consent and rights of research subjects/participants

'Live' data sources may include the administration of questionnaires, interviews, observations, drawing information from current administrative records of an institution, etc.

If you envisage ethical clearance may be required, indicate this in your proposal. After your proposal is approved and prior to your data collection and/or interaction with research subjects, the *Ethical Clearance Form* will need to be submitted. Please contact the dean for further instructions.

Data collection for your research cannot proceed until ethics clearance is given.

\* \* \* \* \*

## Dissertation presentation style

The normal word limit for the PhD dissertation thesis is 80,000 words (which includes footnotes, but excludes the bibliography/reference list and appendices), depending on the nature of the research.

Note: as you progress with the flow of your dissertation writing, the nature of your content may lead you to have difficulty keeping within the normal word count limits. In this case, you may request an increased word count limit (up to 100,000 words). This will be agreed to on a case-by-case basis by your program director, on the recommendation of your main supervisor.

Precise guidelines for the physical layout of your dissertation are available separately.

AGST Alliance uses the Turabian (author-date) referencing style. The key reference book is K. Turabian. 2018. *A Manual for Writers of Term papers, Theses, and Dissertations*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

\* \* \* \* \*

## PhD timeline

Phase	Time	Candidate action	AGST Alliance response
Application Phase	Application phase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Application papers submitted</li> <li>• Registration fee paid</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Application approved</li> </ul>
Focus Phase	From FOI to supervisor appointment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus of interest form submitted.</li> <li>• [FOI to include literature map]</li> <li>• Suggest possible supervisor</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus approved</li> <li>• Supervisor(s) approached &amp; appointed</li> </ul>
	After supervisor appointment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contact with supervisor</li> <li>• First year fees paid</li> </ul>	
Proposal Phase	During 1 <sup>st</sup> year*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Broad reading in topic area</li> <li>• Start Writing Literature Review.</li> <li>• Compile annotated bibliography.</li> <li>• End of Year 1: Intermediate Assessment of Initial Literature Review</li> </ul>	
	By end of 18 months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Detailed research proposal submitted</li> <li>• Submit <i>Ethical Clearance form</i> for approval if required.</li> <li>• Annual report submitted.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proposal approved; or revisions/amendments recommended</li> <li>• Annual report approved; opportunity to address concerns.</li> </ul>
Research and Writing Phase		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Detailed work on the research</li> <li>• Writing</li> </ul>	
	By end of 1 <sup>st</sup> month of successive years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supervision fees instalment paid</li> </ul>	
	By end of successive years	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annual report submitted</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annual report approved; opportunity to address concerns.</li> </ul>
Pre-submission	~1 month before dissertation is ready to be submitted	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Submit dissertation submission form</li> <li>• Dissertation examination fee paid</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Examiners approached</li> </ul>
	Pre-submission dissertation perusal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A 'close to final' copy of your dissertation submitted for perusal</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dissertation approved for final submission</li> </ul>

Submission Phase	Dissertation submission	Copies of dissertation handed in. Include the signed <i>Declaration on thesis/dissertation submission</i> .	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dissertation sent to examiners</li> </ul>
Post-submission phase	~ 2-3 months post submission		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Examiners' reports received &amp; considered</li> <li>• Oral exam date set (if required)</li> <li>• Decision conveyed to candidate</li> </ul>
	~ 3-5 months post submission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Oral exam (if required)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decision conveyed to candidate</li> </ul>
	~4-8 months post-submission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Amendments/revisions made</li> <li>• Final dissertation copies bound and submitted</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decision conveyed to candidate</li> <li>• Graduation ceremony confirmed</li> </ul>
GRADUATION	~6+ months post-submission	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Graduation fee paid</li> <li>• Graduation ceremony</li> </ul>	

\* For ease of administration, study years are deemed to commence on either January 1 (for applications approved in September-February), or July 1 (for applications approved in March-August).

## Dissertation proposal

When you applied to enter the doctoral program, you gave a brief outline of the area you wished to explore in your focus of interest; and that is the starting point for your ongoing research. You will of course need to focus considerably, as well as determining the methodology you will adopt.

You will spend much of the first 12-18 months reading widely, and developing your *dissertation research proposal*. This will be your plan for further, detailed research and writing, even though it may be modified as you progress. An expert in your general field of research will be asked for comment before your proposal is approved.

Produced in consultation with your supervisor(s), your dissertation proposal will include these elements:

1. **Title:** A working title.
2. **Introduction and background to research:** Provide a brief background and context to your research. (1 page)
3. **Brief literature review** (1-2 pages)
4. **Research Questions and Sub-research questions:** An unambiguous research question; Insert also four or five sub-research questions. These sub research questions will relate to each chapter of your dissertation.
5. **Hypothesis statement**
6. **Description of area of research:** A clear description of the area of research that you propose to explore (*up to 1 page*).
7. **Significance:** A statement of the potential significance of this investigation: why does it need to be done? What contribution do you think it will offer? What is 'new' about your investigation? (*up to 1 page*).
8. **Research plan and methodology:** A detailed plan of your research, including the methods/procedures you propose to use to collect data (*up to 3 pages*).
9. **Limitations and Delimitations:** An indication of the limits/boundaries of the proposed research – in terms of both the area to be addressed and method(s) to be used (*up to 2 pages*).
10. **Time-Line:** A proposed time-line for your research and the writing of your dissertation (*~1-2 pages*).
11. **Chapter Layout:** A proposed chapter layout of your dissertation (*up to 1 page*).
12. **Annotated bibliography:** An annotated bibliography of representative resources. Highlight the more important works and authors discovered so far. (~50-60 resources)
13. **Resources for research:** Indicate the availability of resources necessary for you to conduct your research. Include 'offshore' sites you anticipate you will need to visit (e.g. where your supervisor lives, a significant library) (*up to 1 page*).
14. **Ethics clearance:** Indicate aspects of your research which will require ethics clearance (e.g. the administration of questionnaires, interviews, drawing information from administrative records, etc.)
15. Your supervisor(s)'s comments on the viability and benefits of the research (*up to ½ page*).

The page length indicators are a suggestion only: The optimal length of your proposal will be the minimum required to do the job well. Avoid padding!

Type your proposal single spacing on A4 paper, single sided, with 3 cm left- and right-side margins and 2 cm top and bottom margins. The preferred font is Times New Roman 12 point. Incorporate in-text referencing of sources you cite in your proposal and a reference list (as distinct from the initial bibliography of #8 above).

### **Acknowledgments/references**

These guidelines have drawn on resources from various university/seminary on-line resources, particularly Australian College of Theology, Melbourne College of Divinity and Murdoch University.

#### **References:**

Barnes, R. (1995). *Successful study for degrees*. London/New York: Routledge.

Cryer, P. (1996). *The research student's guide to success*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

Phillips, E., & Pugh, D. (1996). *How to get a Ph.D.* Buckingham: Open University Press.

## Appendix 1: What makes doctoral research original?

'Making an original contribution' may seem a daunting prospect! But several writers have suggested what this means in practice. Think about these two lists, and relate them to your likely area of research.

Possible areas of originality:

- a new product/theory
- a development of – or improvement on – an existing product/theory
- a reinterpretation of an existing theory
- a new research tool or technique
- a new model/paradigm/perspective
- an in-depth study of a previously less-studied area
- a critical analysis
- a portfolio of work based on research
- a collection of generalizable findings or conclusions

(Pat Cryer, 1996, p. 149. Read further Ch. 15 *Coming to terms with originality in research*)

'These examples of originality were collected from supervisors, examiners and research students by Estelle Phillips:

- Carrying out empirical work that hasn't been done before.
- Making a synthesis that hasn't been made before.
- Using already known material but with a new interpretation.
- Trying out something in [one] country that has previously only been done in other countries.
- Taking a particular technique and applying it to a new area.
- Bringing new evidence to bear on an old issue.
- Being cross-disciplinary and using different methodologies.
- Looking at areas that people in the discipline haven't looked at before.
- Adding to knowledge in a way that hasn't been done before.'

(Zuber-Skerritt & Ryan, cited in Cryer, 1996, p. 154)

## Appendix 2: Plagiarism: a caution\*

**Plagiarism** is the practice of borrowing from the work of another persons without acknowledging the source. Within the academic world, intentional plagiarism is treated very seriously – and especially at the doctoral level of research and writing.

Why is it such an important matter? Because of the nature of academic institutions, with their function of seeking and advancing knowledge. It is assumed that students are mastering the skills of intellectual enquiry, and if this is called into question, it brings disrepute to both the students and institutions involved.

There are various forms of plagiarism:

- **Idea plagiarism:** changing the order of words but keeping the same idea, and not giving the source;
- **Key term plagiarism:** using key terms or terms coined by someone, but not giving the source;
- **Word for word plagiarism:** copying the exact words of a source, but not using quotation marks and failing to identify the source.

To avoid being accused of plagiarism, try to accurately acknowledge all sources you use. In this way, it will be clear to the reader which ideas are yours, and which ideas have come from a source you have found. **If in doubt, acknowledge your source!**

### Examples of plagiarism

Three students are writing papers on the subject of Christian education. Each discovers B. V. Hill's book, *The greening of Christian education* (1985), and this sentence: "My contention will be that we have allowed certain cultural trends to draw us away from the Bible's representation of what our teaching ministries should be like" (p.17).

This is what the students wrote:

*Student A: Our changed culture has drawn the church away from the Bible's ideas of what our teaching ministries should be like.*

This, with some changes, has been copied directly from the original sentence. It is poor writing, because it does not accurately portray the original sense. But it is also dishonest, because it is clearly plagiarism.

*Student B: Cultural trends have "drawn us away from the Bible's representation of our teaching ministries".*

The quotation marks ("...") indicate correctly that the definition has been borrowed. But note that the quotation is not exact - and the source of the quotation has not been given. The student is not demonstrating clarity of thought - and is open to being accused of plagiarism.

*Student C: Hill (1985, 17) has suggested that "... we have allowed certain cultural trends to draw us away from the Bible's representation of what our teaching ministries should be like". While his views are credible, there are other reasons which can also be suggested for the changed style of teaching ministries today.*

This student has quoted accurately, and acknowledged the source appropriately. She has also demonstrated her ability to think critically by raising other perspectives on the problem. She has not assumed that just because it is published in a book, it is beyond question.

(\* Adapted from School of Education, *Plagiarism and collusion: A caution*. Perth: Murdoch University. 1995.)

### Appendix 3: Common mistakes of doctoral students\*

#### Common mistakes of doctoral students

A thesis at this level is not so much about the use of other people's ideas as understanding and testing them.

Doctoral research is not a licence to plagiarise. Any suggestion that your thesis is not your own work must be avoided and the implications of this for referencing sources and not using other people to do work only you can do explored and followed through. It is of the nature of a doctorate that a student is able to make their own judgments about their work and take responsibility for all the dimensions that must be capable of withstanding critical scrutiny.

If near the end of your writing you still need someone else's judgment to tell you that you have got it right, then you are not yet meeting a necessary criteria for the award. It is different at an earlier stage when developing ideas and discussing them. Ways in which legitimate feedback can be obtained at any stage include presentation of a section of your work as a conference or seminar paper, and verbal discussion of ideas. These enable you to go back to refine a document which remains unambiguously your own.

It is a hard and lonely business taking the time necessary to get to a place of confidence that your thesis has a defensible coherent argument which says what you want it to say. Don't forget to take family and friends with you on the journey.

#### Ten common mistakes in thesis writing

1. Being confused between a research topic and a research thesis.
2. Amassing descriptions and lists of points without developing an argument which makes sense of it all and ties it together in an integrated narrative.
3. Drawing conclusions which do not follow from the evidence presented.
4. Quoting available primary sources from secondary sources without checking the original, and failing to assess the viewpoint and authority of sources quoted. Quoting people on issues which are marginal to a person's real area of expertise.
5. Quoting authorities on issues about which the research student must be able to form their own judgment. Students often accept at face value things it is actually the purpose of their research to test.
6. Including stuff which may have been of interest or an exciting personal discovery, yet at the end of the day is not actually part of the thesis argument. Most of us find it hard to accept that a thesis is not a compilation of everything we have done and discovered but a disciplined extract from our research arguing a thesis which can be tested. If it is not falsifiable, it is not a thesis.
7. Failure to develop a critical framework by consulting parallel studies and placing the type of argument used in the context of how others have done similar types of research project. Lack of evidence of a literature survey which shows mastery of these issues.
8. Failure to keep to word length. This is inexcusable.
9. Inadequate bibliographical searches and failure to discern the most appropriate monographs, journal articles and worldwide web resources.
10. Expecting their supervisor and others to do work on their research and writing that they have not been prepared to do themselves.

\* From <http://www.roxborough.com/commonmistakes.htm>. Accessed 3 January 2012.

## Appendix 4: Research methodologies\*

This is a brief introduction to various research models, processes, and terminology... Once you have a basic understanding of different types of research and research terminology, you will be in a better position to seek your supervisor's advice as well as being better prepared for your initial supervision meetings.

The type of study you undertake will depend on numerous factors such as the type of data you wish to collect, your research question and aims. Ongoing discussions with your supervisor and more experienced researchers will also help you to pinpoint the type of study, or the research methodology which will be most suitable for your research question(s).

### Empirical

This type of research requires that data be collected. Thus, empirical research is grounded in reality rather than in some abstract realm. Data may be collected by observation or by experiment. The purpose of empirical research is to explain the data collected through the development of a model or theory that hypothesises about the relationship between the data and relevant variables of the environment. The results of empirical research should be able to be replicated as adherence to this method implies the use of objective, reliable and valid research methodology and criteria.

### Theoretical

Provides explanatory principles for phenomena. It may remain on an abstract rather than a reality referred (data driven) level. In this type of research, theoretical principles are developed, proposed and described. Theoretical research is carried out in all disciplines.

### Qualitative and quantitative

Generally *qualitative research* focuses on the subjective experience and perception of the research subjects. In qualitative research, the researcher is the key instrument of data collection. Tools used include open ended interviews, field notes, 'conversations' with participants or journal diaries. The focus of qualitative research is not only to describe but also to analyse: it seeks to look at the *why* of events not just the *what* (Tuckman, 1988).

In contrast, the focus of *quantitative research* is objective measures rather than subjective experience. Data is collected in some objective and replicable manner; this methodology provides greater distance between the data and researcher than in qualitative studies. In addition, data is usually analysed statistically in this type of research. The tools of quantitative research include test performance scores, physiological readings, survey responses and spectrometer readings.

### Action research

Used in applied settings such as the classroom or a health care environment, this approach involves the practitioner as researcher collaborating with students or work colleagues in order to bring about change, to develop new skills or to problem solve in a particular situation that directly arises from the setting. A distinguishing feature of this approach is its spiraling and cyclical nature typically involving stages such as planning, action, observation and reflection. An example of action research is the introduction by the researcher of self assessment criteria for student learners. The research would investigate the effect of this innovation. Collaborative and/or reflective aspects of such a project may include a discussion with students about their input, perceptions and evaluation of the innovation.

### Case study

This type of research looks in depth at particular issues with a single or small number of subjects. Advantages of case study research are that the researcher can investigate a characteristic and/or its development in depth and at close range.

### **Ethnographic**

Ethnographic research is a means of gaining insight into a culture or social process. It involves participant observation, which means the researcher becomes immersed in the daily lives of the people or community he or she is observing. Data for ethnographic studies may include field notes, interviews, taped conversations.

### **Experimental**

This type of research uses quantitative methods and involves a formal control of variables. It may occur in a laboratory situation. *True experimental studies* investigate possible cause and effect relationships by exposing one or more experimental groups to one or more treatment conditions and comparing them to control groups who are equal in other respects but do not receive the treatment(s). This type of design allows a comparison to be made and a conclusion drawn about the effect of the treatment. For example, to investigate student learning from computers one group of students learn about a topic using the conventional teaching materials (the control group) while another learns about the same topic using the same information except the information is presented on a computer. Students would be randomly assigned to the groups or matched using some valid criteria. Variables such as intelligence, prior knowledge of the topic, familiarity with a computer and gender would need to be accounted for or controlled in this process. Other variables such as time of day and number of students in a learning group would be equalised or randomised across the groups in order that these variables are also controlled. After the learning period, the students' knowledge of the topic would be assessed using an identical test for both groups. Objective criteria would be used to establish the test results of the groups. A conclusion about the effect of using a computer for learning can then be drawn, as the other variables that would impact upon the ability of the students to learn have been controlled. Experimental designs demand scientific principles such as objectivity, replicability and validity be upheld.

Out of a laboratory it is often difficult to control all of the variables that impact upon an experiment. *Quasi-experimental designs* use experimental methodology without total control of relevant variables. Although the researcher in this situation compromises the internal validity of the experiment (since not all variables are controlled), they may gain some external validity as the results they have obtained would be generalisable to other similar situations in the real world.

### **Interventionist**

As the term implies, interventionist studies involve some deliberate change in a particular process or situation so that the effects can be monitored and evaluated. Interventionist studies tend to have less control over variables than experimental studies. An interventionist study on student learning could involve the introduction of different teaching approaches to enhance learning. It may not be possible to achieve a control group (controlling all variables such as socioeconomic status, performance and prior knowledge) who are taught only using the old teaching approach and materials given factors such as ethics and real classes and courses. Action research is a type of interventionist research as all participants intervene to create change.

### **Phenomenological**

This approach investigates ordinary human life experiences within their context to discover meaning. Thus, an individual's 'life world' or 'living experience' is studied as he or she experiences it rather than looking to categorise the experience or theorise about it. Examples are frequently used in this approach to illustrate the significance of the 'life experience' being described. An example of a research question using this approach is

“what is the nature of the experience of becoming a nurse?” and the aim of this research would be to understand this experience (Munhall, 1994).

### **Longitudinal**

In this type of study data is collected repeatedly over a period of time in order to document or measure changes which have occurred in the population over the period of the study. For example, to investigate student’s learning, students taught about the same topic using either a paper based or computer based technique for information presentation may be tested immediately after learning, one month after learning and six months after learning. This approach would investigate whether the learning benefits associated with a particular presentation technique continued over time. Longitudinal studies may also occur over many years and have a *developmental* focus or a *correlational* focus. Data for longitudinal studies can include surveys, interviews, diaries, test results, documents such as student writing.

### **Developmental**

Investigates patterns and sequences of growth and/or change as a function of time.

### **Correlational**

Investigates two or more existing situations in order to determine and explain their differences and similarities.

### **Multi-Method Research**

Data is gathered about a range of related issues using a mix of methods.

### **Triangulated data/triangulation of data**

This involves the comparison of data relating to the same issue or phenomenon of investigation but from different perspectives or from different methods of collection: for example, comparison of data from different stages of research; comparison of data from different sets of participants; or comparison of data from different tests that purport to measure the same variable. Data is therefore crosschecked in order to confirm the hypothesis. Triangulation of data can show up disjunctions in the research results, as well as provide additional insights.

### **Grounded Theory Research**

Data is gathered and analysed to generate hypotheses that are grounded in practice.

### **Interpretive**

Data is gathered that generates ‘thick’ description & interpretation and that allows theory building.

### **Historical**

Reconstructs the past objectively and accurately, often in relation to the tenability of an hypothesis.

### **Descriptive**

Systematically describes a situation or area of interest, factually and accurately.

### **Evaluative**

Determines whether a particular program or procedure is providing the expected outcome.

## Appendix 5: Getting started with your thinking/proposal\*

### A: PREPARATION

#### 1. **Insight and Passion.**

What has fired my imagination and interest? From my reading, writing and experience is there an emerging focus? Is there an issue that I really want to think through more rigorously? One needs both insight and passion for a dissertation topic to emerge and to be completed within a reasonable time-frame . (Your study program is intended as a gateway to the next phase of life, not a career!)

#### 2. **Disciplinary Knowledge.**

What disciplines will I need to draw on for my research? How can I build up the basic knowledge and skills to embark on my research?

- Use any postgraduate courses/modules that you are completing to help you get into the best possible shape for the writing process.
- If you need particular languages for your research make sure that you are well grounded in your knowledge of the language(s).
- If you are doing qualitative or quantitative research, make sure you have an adequate knowledge of the requisite methodologies.

#### 3. **Technical Knowledge.**

Ensure you are familiar with the extended functions of your word processor, footnote/referencing software, and the technical requirements for the writing of theses (styles for endnotes, footnotes, bibliography, and grammar). It is essential that you use current anti-virus software and file backup mechanisms on your computer.

#### 4. **Procedures.**

Familiarise yourself with the AGST Alliance procedures. If something is unclear, contact the education programs director or Dean of AGST Alliance.

#### 5. **Research.**

A dissertation is meant to be an original piece of work, so it is extremely important to do a serious library search to ensure that no one else has written on the precise dissertation you are to pursue. Theses (dissertation) abstracts are available in printed form, online or as CD. Familiarise yourself with the ATLA Database, AULOTS, and other library research tools – ask the assistance of the librarian in a theological institution.

### B: GETTING A PROPOSAL TOGETHER

Most people begin with a global theme which has to be refined over time into a *do-able* project that can be completed in a reasonable time: the *Filtration process* for writing a dissertation proposal. The following are some ways to aid this filtration process.

#### 1. **Conversation (talking yourself into clarity).**

Talk through your ideas with friends and advisers. Conversation may help you clarify ideas and others, from their own background and knowledge, may well contribute to your project.

#### 2. **Writing (writing yourself into clarity).**

Type a page or two on your area of interest. Read it aloud to see if it makes sense and there is enough material for a dissertation/dissertation. Think about the chapters that will be required and how they will cohere. Put this material aside for a week, and do something different, then take another look at the project. Eventually you should aim at

being able to express the central issue of your dissertation in one complete (even if complex) sentence.

**3. Reading (reading yourself into clarity).**

There is no substitute for time spent in the library, or with material borrowed from the library, steeping yourself in works that address your area of interest. (If you take notes as you read, make absolutely sure that you have your notes fully referenced: there are few things more frustrating than trying to remember where you acquired that wonderful quote that you really wanted to use to support your proposal, or include in your dissertation).

**4. Mulling (thinking yourself into clarity).**

Leisure time is essential, not only during the writing time, but in getting it together for a proposal. Often issues that are on the backburner come to a greater degree of clarity when we give ourselves an appropriate amount of space and exercise.

**5. Discipline (working yourself into clarity).**

Use the keyboard to start to sort the potential chapters of your dissertation while constantly asking yourself the about the ways in which these discrete sections relate to the dissertation topic.

**6. Bibliographies.**

Begin the process of gathering bibliographies around areas of particular interest. If you find that very few people have written anything about your area of interest then proceed very cautiously.

**7. View successful dissertations.**

It can be very instructive to take a serious look at several of these so as to get a good idea of what is required both in terms of presentation and content.

\* \* \* \* \*

\* This material is adapted from Michael A. Kelly, *One Approach to Writing a Dissertation Proposal and Completing the Dissertation*, <http://www.mcd.unimelb.edu.au/forms/DissertationWriting2005.pdf>

## Appendix 6: Developing a research proposal\*

### MODES OF ENQUIRY

There are two main ways of pursuing enquiries, conceptual and empirical. Each has in common:

#### 1. Identify a problem

What is an area of interest you have, perhaps one which has arisen from your previous studies and related to your own church/ethnic context? It is likely to involve reading in one part of the field to become clearer about the problems it raises. Such reading will probably appear later in your writing as part of a *literature survey*, so it is important to take good notes and file bibliographical details as you go so that this work can be retrieved at the later stage of writing up. Ethical concerns of autonomy, privacy and integrity should be considered too.

Clarifying the specific problem you would like to explore will lead you to formulate a *research question*, which will become the main focus of your enquiry. Make sure that your research question is something you are genuinely interested in finding an answer to, to give you added motivation to complete your dissertation.



#### 2. Develop a hunch

From your research question, a number of more specific 'sub-questions' (or, hypotheses) will be derived, as hunches to be investigated. These will involve thinking of ways of getting answers to these sub-questions, and at this point you will need to confirm the primary methods of enquiry you will be pursuing. You will probably find that you are drawn to one or more of the modes of research described below:



<p><b>Conceptual Enquiries</b> These may include philosophical studies of language, logic and the use of models, ethical enquiries into the justification of certain aims or values in education, and curriculum design in its conceptual phases. In short, they involve the consideration of problems requiring the marshalling of convincing arguments to support a normative point of view.</p>	<p><b>Empirical Enquiries: (a) Psychometric</b> Studies in this mode involve the accumulation of empirical data relevant to one's hypotheses, with a view to processing them by statistical means. Such research may be undertaken in laboratories, classrooms, other learning environments, and on samples drawn from -the general population.</p>
<p><b>Historical Enquiries</b> Studies which utilise historical methods of research fall between the conceptual and the empirical. They begin with an organising idea much like conceptual enquiry, but they then proceed with the collection of testimony and documentary data like an empirical enquiry. Then comes a kind of interpretive analysis more like the marshalling of arguments to defend a view. The goal is to generate a</p>	<p><b>Empirical Enquiries: (b) Ethnographic</b> Psychometric studies seek objectivity by trying to keep the scientific observer out of the equation. Ethnographic studies factor the observer in by emphasising the collection of data through participant observation. Ultimately, however, this kind of enquiry, like psychometrically controlled enquiry, collects and processes data in the real world with a view to solving problems of observation and method. Its biggest problem is reliability.</p>

plausible and illuminating interpretation of events.



<p style="text-align: center;"><b>3a. Formulate theses</b></p> <p>It is now necessary to formulate the ideas which you will be clarifying and defending in the study. They need to be stated as specific and original insights or <i>theses</i> which will steer and integrate the course of your enquiry. Even in historical research, mere description of a sequence of events is not enough; interpretive ideas give point to the enquiry, and their credibility will be measured by the extent to which they illuminate and account for the events and trends you are describing.</p> <p>(Note: a <i>thesis</i> is a proposition to be proved/ disproved. A number of such theses will drive the shape of your dissertation.)</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>3b. Formulate hypotheses</b></p> <p>It is now necessary to formulate the ideas which represent the hunches you have about how that part of the world you are investigating works. This calls for useful <i>operational definitions</i> of terms to be used in your <i>hypotheses</i>, which in their turn are best framed in the form "If X, then Y", on condition that they are in a genuinely testable (or falsifiable) form. Wrestle with this phase of your proposal, because muddy work at this point will dog you for the rest of your study. Don't aim to fix them later.</p>
<p><i>Note: The classical distinction between 'theses' and 'hypotheses' in educational/social science research is breaking down. Current educational and psychological research talks more often in terms of hypotheses (used when a researcher is fairly sure about the nature and direction of relationships between key variables) and research questions (used when a researcher is not so sure about the nature and direction of relationships but reasonably suspects that some sort of relationship exists).</i></p> <p><i>The preferred terminology to use is research question (= the main focus of the enquiry) and hypotheses or sub-questions (= hunches to be investigated, derived from the main research question).</i></p>	



**4. Foreshadow your plan of attack and a provisional time-scale**

You should now be in a position to foreshadow your plan of attack and estimate how its various stages will fit in to the time frame allowed for the degree you are working for. What are natural divisions in your enquiry which may become discrete chapters? Examples of plans in each of the three broad categories distinguished above are given below.



**5. Confirm your proposal**

Now draft entries for the proposal, requiring details of your topic, a sample bibliography, methods of enquiry, plan of attack, and the anticipated time frame for each stage. Discuss these entries with your supervisor and then fill them in on the form.

\* This article has been adapted from Brian Hill, *Developing a Proposal*, Murdoch University School of Education, W. Australia, undated.

**Appendix 7: Dissertation ‘Focus of Interest’ form, PhD(Biblical Studies)**

1. **My general area of biblical studies interest:**
2. **A major problem/challenge I see in this area of interest that I would like to explore for my dissertation research**
3. **To explore this problem/challenge, a possible research question and 2-3 related sub-questions could be:**

**Main research question:** .....  
 .....

- Subresearch question 1:
- Subresearch question 2:
- Subresearch question 3:
- Subresearch question 4:

4. **A possible way(s) I could seek to get answers to the research question/sub-questions is:** [Methodology, object of research]
5. **Data sources I envisage I will need access to and initial bibliography**  
 (Data sources: sources of appropriate literature' specialist libraries/ resource centres; living human participants)  
 Please include an initial bibliography or a list of about 25 books/ articles you are referring to.
6. **Possible supervisor:**  
 (Note: most likely this person will hold a relevant doctorate and have experience in your field of interest. But if no, still suggest a name if you think the person may be suitable.

*I suggest a suitable supervisor may be:*

Name: Preferred title: Mr/Ms/Rev/Dr  
 Position/role: Church/organization  
 Postal address: Postcode  
 Tel: [home/office] [cellphone]:  
 Email  
 Your relationship to this person (if any):

*An alternative supervisor may be:*

Name: Preferred title: Mr/Ms/Rev/Dr  
 Position/role: Church/organization  
 Postal address: Postcode  
 Tel: [home/office] [cellphone]:  
 Email  
 Your relationship to this person (if any):

*(Note: you may wish to sound out possible supervisors about their likely availability, but do not make a commitment for/with them.)*

**4. Other aspects**

*Further comments relevant to my area of interest/possible research focus are:*

Name:

Date:

**Appendix 8: Dissertation ‘Focus of Interest’ form, PhD(Theo).**

1. **My general area of theological interest:**
2. **A major problem/challenge I see in this area of interest that I would like to explore for my dissertation research**
3. **To explore this problem/challenge, a possible research question and 2-3 related sub-questions could be:**

**Main research question:** .....  
 .....

Subresearch question 1:  
 Subresearch question 2:  
 Subresearch question 3:  
 Subresearch question 4:

4. **A possible way(s) I could seek to get answers to the research question/sub-questions is:** [Methodology, object of research]
5. **Data sources I envisage I will need access to and initial bibliography**  
 (Data sources: sources of appropriate literature<sup>1</sup> specialist libraries/resource centres; living human participants)  
 Please include an initial bibliography or a list of about 25 books/articles you are referring to.
6. **Possible supervisor:**  
 (Note: most likely this person will hold a relevant doctorate and have experience in your field of interest. But if no, still suggest a name if you think the person may be suitable.

*I suggest a suitable supervisor may be:*

Name: Preferred title: Mr/Ms/Rev/Dr  
 Position/role: Church/organization  
 Postal address: Postcode  
 Tel: [home/office] [cellphone]:  
 Email  
 Your relationship to this person (if any):

*An alternative supervisor may be:*

Name: Preferred title: Mr/Ms/Rev/Dr  
 Position/role: Church/organization  
 Postal address: Postcode  
 Tel: [home/office] [cellphone]:  
 Email  
 Your relationship to this person (if any):

*(Note: you may wish to sound out possible supervisors about their likely availability, but do not make a commitment for/with them.)*

**7. Other aspects**

*Further comments relevant to my area of interest/possible research focus are:*

Name:

Date

**Appendix 9: Dissertation ‘Focus of Interest’ form, PhD[Education].**

1. **My general area of educational interest:**
2. **A major problem/challenge I see in this area of interest that I would like to explore for my dissertation research**
3. **To explore this problem/challenge, a possible research question and 2-3 related sub-questions could be:**

**Main research question:** .....  
 .....

Subresearch question 1:  
 Subresearch question 2:  
 Subresearch question 3:  
 Subresearch question 4:

4. **A possible way(s) I could seek to get answers to the research question/sub-questions is:** [Methodology, object of research]
5. **Data sources I envisage I will need access to and initial bibliography**  
 (Data sources: sources of appropriate literature' specialist libraries/resource centres; living human participants in field research)  
 Please include an initial bibliography or a list of about 25 books/articles you are referring to.
6. **Possible supervisor:**  
 (Note: most likely this person will hold a relevant doctorate and have experience in your field of interest. But if no, still suggest a name if you think the person may be suitable.

*I suggest a suitable supervisor may be:*

Name: Preferred title: Mr/Ms/Rev/Dr  
 Position/role: Church/organization  
 Postal address: Postcode  
 Tel: [home/office] [cellphone]:  
 Email  
 Your relationship to this person (if any):

*An alternative supervisor may be:*

Name: Preferred title: Mr/Ms/Rev/Dr  
 Position/role: Church/organization  
 Postal address: Postcode  
 Tel: [home/office] [cellphone]:  
 Email  
 Your relationship to this person (if any):

*(Note: you may wish to sound out possible supervisors about their likely availability, but do not make a commitment for/with them.)*

**7. Other aspects**

*Further comments relevant to my area of interest/possible research focus are:*

Name:

Date:

## Appendix 10

### AGST Alliance



## Human Participants Research Ethics Application

You require ethics clearance if you propose to use living human participants in research, and/or research data which are not accessible in the public domain.

**Ethics clearance must be obtained before you commence data collection for your research.**

Ensure your answers are concise but clear. The members of the Human Research Ethics Panel may not have the same background as you have for your area of study, so write in plain English.

- Avoid jargon.
- Define technical terms.
- Write acronyms out in full the first time they appear in this application and in other documents.

As you prepare this form, refer to the AGST Alliance *Ethics Clearance and Informed Consent* guidelines.

In order to get started, please email:

The Administrator  
AGST Alliance Human Participants Ethics Panel  
[ethics@agstalliance.org](mailto:ethics@agstalliance.org)

You will be registered on the EdBrite site where you can obtain the most updated forms.

When your application is completed, upload the form into the Ethics section in EdBrite, and email that you have done so to:

The Administrator  
AGST Alliance Human Participants Ethics Panel  
[ethics@agstalliance.org](mailto:ethics@agstalliance.org)