



# HIGHER DEGREE BY RESEARCH (HDR)

The School of Philosophy and Theology

# Studying for Higher Degree by Research (HDR) at the School of Philosophy and Theology



The School of Philosophy and Theology, in cooperation with the Research Office, offers three kinds of HDR programs in Philosophy and Theology:

- **Master of Philosophy (MPhil)**
- **Master by Research (MRes)**
- **Doctor of Philosophy (PhD)**

## Preliminary remarks

- Eligibility – can I enrol into a HDR program?

If you wish to enrol into a HDR program available at our School you must have a substantial degree of knowledge and experience in the area of Philosophy and/or Theology. If your academic background is in another area you should consider enrolling into one of our postgraduate coursework programs in Philosophy and Theology. You can find the list and explanation of these coursework programs here: [www.notredame.edu.au/about/schools/sydney/philosophy-and-theology/our-programs](http://www.notredame.edu.au/about/schools/sydney/philosophy-and-theology/our-programs).

The best contact persons for these coursework degrees are

- Dr Dejan Šimković in Philosophy (dejan.simkovic@nd.edu.au), and
- Dr Kevin Wagner in Theology (kevin.wagner@nd.edu.au).

## Choosing the right program

If you already have some academic, coursework background in the area in which you want to pursue your research, you need to think about which HDR program would be most suitable for you. There are two things which need to be taken into account here: your research background and the difference between the Masters programs and the Doctoral program.

## Research background

MRes and PhD programs require not only some coursework background in Philosophy and/or Theology, but also some research background. This background can be an Honours thesis, a substantial research component of a coursework degree (e.g. a capstone research-based project) or some publications in the area of interest. Please note that marks which you received from your Honours or your research-based capstone project will be taken into account in the process of making the decision about admission.

In the MPhil program the research background would certainly also be very useful, however it is not a necessary prerequisite for admission since the MPhil program includes four units of coursework which are designed to help you to gain the most important research skills in your area of interest.

## Masters or Doctorate?

The two Masters programs (MPhil and MRes) require writing a thesis which is shorter than a PhD thesis. A standard MPhil thesis in Philosophy and/or Theology is c. 45,000-55,000 words long and a standard MRes thesis is c. 50,000-60,000 words long. A PhD thesis should normally be between 80,000 and 100,000 words long. All these figures refer only to the body of the text and exclude footnotes and bibliography.

However, the length of the thesis is not the only difference between a Masters thesis and a doctorate. The main difference concerns the level of the in-depth analysis of the given issue and the originality of the scholarly contribution of your project. While the aim of MPhil and MRes theses is to synthesise the existing knowledge in an original way, PhD should do this too, but it should also go

a step further and provide an intelligent, informed, original and academically robust contribution to the development of the discipline in which your research is carried out. Thus, a PhD project is not simply an extended, longer Masters project. It is a different kind of project altogether and due to the different expectations with regard to the level of its originality, a PhD thesis is going to be structured and carried out somewhat differently to a Masters thesis. As the regulations of the University stipulate:

“The PhD research and the resulting thesis are an independent supervised systematic advanced level investigation into a significant question or related questions, problems or phenomena. The thesis must make an original and substantial contribution to knowledge.”

## The timeframes for the HDR programs are:

**MPhil 1.5 years of full-time study**

**MRes 2 years of full-time study**

**PhD 3 years of full-time study**

*Please note that it is possible to enrol either in full-time or part-time mode. For more information about this please contact the Research Office.*

For some more general information about the HDR degrees here: [www.notredame.edu.au/research/research-at-notredame/postgraduate-research/postgraduate-information](http://www.notredame.edu.au/research/research-at-notredame/postgraduate-research/postgraduate-information).

If you have doubts about which program would be most suitable for you, please contact the Associate Dean of Research and Academic Development, Dr Mariusz Biliniewicz ([mariusz.biliniewicz@nd.edu.au](mailto:mariusz.biliniewicz@nd.edu.au)).

## First steps in the process of enrolment

If you have the necessary background in your research area, developed a specific research question and decided into which program you would like to enrol, you should get in touch with the School through the Associate Dean of Research and Academic Development. At this initial contact it will be explained to you that in order to enrol into a HDR degree in our School you will be strongly encouraged to organise a few important things before you apply officially. These include:

- Your academic CV. You will need to state your academic experience, credentials and also provide contact details of two academic referees who can confirm your suitability for enrolling into a HDR program.
- Initial research proposal. You will need to explain what it is that you are planning to do in your project and how you are planning to do it. This initial proposal should not be longer than 1500 words and should be accompanied by a partially annotated bibliography.
- Supervisors. You are expected to make an initial contact with those academics who you think would be good supervisors for your project. Every project should have two supervisors, in some cases having three supervisors is also possible. At least one of your supervisors needs to be working at our School or be our adjunct. The list of our academics and their areas of specialisation can be found here: <https://www.notredame.edu.au/about/schools/sydney/philosophy-and-theology/supervision-expertise>.

## What happens next?

Once the Associate Dean of Research receives your CV, your initial proposal and the details of your proposed supervisors, he will present the documents to the School Research Committee (SRC) and contact the proposed supervisors to confirm their readiness to supervise you in this project. If the SRC considers the project viable and suitable for our School, you will be encouraged to put in your official application through the Admissions Office <https://www.notredame.edu.au/current-students/your-enrolment/admin-and-fees/sydney/admissions>.

If you wish to discuss fees and scholarships, you should contact the

Research Office for further details ([www.notredame.edu.au/research](http://www.notredame.edu.au/research); [sydney.research@nd.edu.au](mailto:sydney.research@nd.edu.au)).

## Admission to the program and plan of study

Once your official application comes through and is accepted, you will be officially admitted to the program and will begin your study under the guidance of your supervisors.

If you are enrolled in the MPhil program, you will need to complete four units of coursework before commencing the Supervised Dissertation part of your study. Your supervisors and the Associate Dean of Research will help you to choose the most suitable courses for your project (for more information about the MPhil program and its structure, see [www.notredame.edu.au/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0024/32784/MPhil-Sydney.pdf](http://www.notredame.edu.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0024/32784/MPhil-Sydney.pdf)).

If you are enrolled in the MRes or PhD program, you will not be required to complete any coursework and will enrol straight into the Supervised Dissertation part of your study.

## Confirmation of candidature – oral and written proposal

In the first stage of your study you will need to develop an official research proposal which will be sent out for review and upon which the confirmation of your candidature will depend. In the MRes and PhD programs this will need to happen in the first six months of study if you study full-time, or in the first twelve months if you study part-time. In the MPhil program one of your four units of coursework will be devoted to helping you with writing the proposal.

### Official written proposal

Your official, written proposal, which will be developed in cooperation with your supervisors, will need to be normally 5,000-6,000 words long and will need to include:

- research question (what is it that you are doing in this project?)
- methodology, including proposed outline of chapters (how are you going to do it?)
- scope and limitations (what are you going to investigate closely and what are you going to leave out, and why?)
- literature review (what has already been done in this area and where does your own work fit in this context? how will those sources be useful to you? which of them will be examined in detail and which will not, and why?)

- bibliography (what works have you already consulted and are going to consult?)
- timeline (when are you going to do your project? what will be the most important milestones?)

More information about how to prepare the official research proposal can be found here: [www.notredame.edu.au/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0007/2005/GUIDELINE-Format-and-Presentation-of-a-Research-Proposal-for-Higher-Degrees-by-Research.pdf](http://www.notredame.edu.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0007/2005/GUIDELINE-Format-and-Presentation-of-a-Research-Proposal-for-Higher-Degrees-by-Research.pdf).

Your research proposal will need to be approved by your supervisor and then by the SRC. When this happens, it will be sent out for review to two readers, one internal and one external to the University. Once the reviews arrive, the SRC will examine them and determine whether the School can confirm your candidacy. If it happens that the proposal requires revisions, this will be communicated to you and the SRC will explain to you what changes are required and how much time you have to implement them.

### Oral proposal

As a part of the process of confirmation of candidature you will need to present your research proposal orally to our community of academics and your fellow HDR students. This is usually organised by Associate Dean of Research when the proposal is ready. Normally both of your supervisors should be present at this presentation. If this is not possible then at least the principal supervisor should be present.

Although the oral presentation can take place either before or after the written presentation is submitted, the School suggests that you present your proposal orally first. The reason for this is that usually the feedback received at the oral presentation helps to strengthen the official written proposal.

## What happens when my candidature is confirmed?

Once your candidacy is confirmed, all that is left to do is write your project! In the process of writing remember to work closely with your supervisors and to keep regular contact with them, to keep to your deadlines and to liaise with the Research Office and the School should any difficulty arise.

Should you have any questions about the process of admission to HDR degree at our School, please contact the Associate Dean of Research and Academic Development, **Dr Mariusz Biliniewicz** at [mariusz.biliniewicz@nd.edu.au](mailto:mariusz.biliniewicz@nd.edu.au), ph. 02 8204 4179

*Useful contacts regarding HDR programs include:*

**Dr Mariusz Biliniewicz,**

Associate Dean of Research and  
Academic Development

**mariusz.biliniewicz@nd.edu.au; ph. 02 8204 4179**

**Research Office**

(sydney.research@nd.edu.au; ph. 02 8204 4426)

**Admissions Office**

(sydney.admissions@nd.edu.au; ph. 02 8204 4430)

**Your prospective supervisors**

**Dean of the School, if needed**

(renee.kohler-ryan@nd.edu.au; 02 8204 4171)

## Contact us

School of Philosophy and Theology, Sydney  
University of Notre Dame Australia  
Sydney.philosophytheology@nd.edu.au  
02 8204 4139 / 02 8204 4175

