Honours Thesis Examination Guidelines
(BACSC, February 2013)

1. University Policy on Examination of Honours Theses
1.1 The University Coursework Thesis Supervision and Examination Policy (MPF1027) sets minimum procedural standards and expectations for the examination of Honours and postgraduate coursework theses at section 5.3-5.4 and section 6.
1.2 The University Coursework Thesis Enrolment, Supervision and Examination Policy (MPF1027) sections 5.3-5.4 state:

“5.3 Departments will document the thesis examination procedures and make them available to students on enrolment in the thesis subject. For substantial theses of 100 points or more, examination procedures will follow the procedures for the examination of research master theses.
5.4 Departments will establish assessment processes which will set out clear and transparent methods for resolving discrepancies among examiners including:

- the appointment of a chair of examiners with responsibility for allocation of examiners and resolution of discrepancies
- a process for seeking an agreed assessment outcome through consultation among examiners
- a process for appointing an additional examiner and for incorporating the additional examiner’s input into the final thesis assessment (in particular, it should be clear: whether all assessments will be taken into account and, if so, how; whether a discrepant assessment will be discarded; and whether the determination of the additional examiner will be final)
- a mechanism by which the supervisor can signal concern over the fairness of the mark awarded to a thesis, and a clear and transparent mechanism for resolving such concerns.”

1.3 The University Coursework Thesis Enrolment, Supervision and Examination Policy (MPF1027) section 6 states:

“6. Examination of the Thesis
6.1 Departments will ensure that the assessment of the thesis is undertaken in a timely way recognising the contribution of coursework thesis marks to students’ options for employment and further study.
6.2 The chair of examiners will appoint the examiner(s), in consultation with the program coordinator and the supervisor.
6.3 Each examiner will provide the chair of examiners with a mark for the thesis and written comments. Written comments will be general in nature and be clearly distinguished from suggestions about possible improvements to the text or possible additional work, which an examiner may or may not provide as a courtesy to the student.
6.4 Where more than one examiner is engaged, the chair of examiners will coordinate the process for arriving at a single mark and grade.
6.5 Where there is a dispute over the final mark and grade the department will follow the process of resolution as set out in the MPhil and Masters by Research handbooks.
6.6 Departments will release an overall mark for the thesis. The chair of examiners will provide feedback on the thesis to the student based on information of a general nature included in the written examiners’ comments ensuring that the anonymity of examiners is preserved.
6.7 Departments will advise students of the University policy and procedures for appeal.”

1.4 The following guidelines apply to the application of this policy to thesis examination in the BA (Honours) only and in some cases extend the requirements of the University policy.

2. Examiners
2.1 The BA (Honours) thesis should be marked by at least two examiners who are not the supervisor of the thesis.
2.2 The supervisor of the thesis may act as a third examiner of that thesis or undertake a formal role in the examination process as determined by the teaching School or Department. The role of the supervisor in the examination process must be clear and transparent, as required by sections 4 of the University policy (MPF1027), and this role must be communicated to students at the commencement of their study.
2.3 It is the responsibility of the Chair of Examiners (defined at 3.1, below) to appoint examiners for each thesis ‘in consultation with the program coordinator and supervisor’ as required by sections 6.2 of the University policy (MPF1027).
2.4 Each examiner will mark the thesis independently according to the assessment criteria and submit a recommended mark and a brief report on the thesis to the Chair of Examiners. Reports should clearly distinguish any comments not to be communicated to the student in order to facilitate the provision of a final examination report, or reports, to the student at the conclusion of the examination process (see 2.6, below).

2.5 The Chair of Examiners will coordinate the process for arriving at a single mark and grade (see 6.4 of the University policy (MPF1027)). This process is to be determined by the teaching School or Department and made clear to all staff involved in the examination process and to students at the commencement of their thesis study.

2.6 The Chair of Examiners will ensure that each student is provided with a written report, or reports, on the thesis no later than two weeks following the release of results. The report(s) may be the original examiners’ reports, or a version of those reports, with attention paid to section 2.4, above.

2.6.1 Section 6.6 of the University Policy (MPF1027) requires that “The chair of examiners will provide feedback on the thesis to the student based on information of a general nature included in the written examiners’ comments ensuring that the anonymity of examiners is preserved.” However, in cases where the examiners wish to make their identity known to the student, and the Chair of Examiners does not believe that this will compromise the integrity of the examination process or any subsequent appeal procedures, they (the examiners) may do so.

3. Chair of Examiners

3.1 The Chair of Examiners will be the Honours Coordinator for the program/discipline in which the thesis has been completed, or the Head of Program (or nominee) in cases where the Honours Coordinator is also the supervisor of the thesis.

3.2 The identity of the Honours Coordinator should be communicated to students at the commencement of their study and noted, with contact details, under the Honours listing for that program in the University Handbook.

4. Honours Examination Board

4.1 Each program/discipline that offers an Honours program should convene an Honours Examination Board at the conclusion of each semester.

4.2 The Board is chaired by the Chair of Examiners and should consist of the Program Coordinator/Head of Program for the discipline (if the Program Coordinator/Head of Program is not the Chair of Examiners) and all staff involved in the Honours examination process (supervisors and examiners).

4.3 Information about the examination of each thesis should be made available to the Board, including any examiners’ reports and marks. The Chair of Examiners should report, as appropriate, on the process by which single marks and grades were arrived at.

4.4 This Board provides final approval for Honours examination marks prior to verification and release. The Chair of Examiners should not verify any final marks until these have been approved by the Honours Examination Board.

5. Appeal Procedure

5.1 In cases in which academic judgment alone is at issue, appeals should follow the process outlines in the Requests for Remarking of assessment Components: Guidelines (BACSC, September 2011). In these cases, the Honours Coordinator fulfils the role of ‘Chair of the Board of Examiners’ as detailed in those guidelines.

5.1.1 In cases of appeals on the basis of academic judgment, it should be noted that, prior to the approval and publication of final results, the Honours thesis has already been marked by at least two examiners. Therefore, further review on the basis of academic judgment alone is unlikely.

5.2 Students always retain the right of appeal on procedural and other grounds encompassed by the Student Complaints and Grievances Policy (MPF1066) in accordance with the Student Complaints and Grievances Procedure (MPF1067).

5.3 Students should be advised of the policy and procedure for appeals at the commencement of study (see section 6.7 of the University Policy (MPF1027)).

6. Communication of Examination Procedures and Assessment Criteria to Students
6.1 It is the responsibility of the Schools or Departments that administer the Honours program to communicate details of examination and appeals procedure and assessment criteria to students in a clear and transparent manner at the commencement of their study.