WHAT EXAMINERS LOOK FOR IN A THESIS...

A personal view

Dr Juliana Mansvelt, School of People, Environment and Planning
email: J.R.Mansvelt@massey.ac.nz

4/10/12
Some starting points....

- The Examiner is not out to get you...
- The Examiner is interested in your research
- The Examiner is generally familiar with the literature in the field but....
Be encouraged....

....YOU are the expert!

http://www.metaphonica.com/tag/expert/
Thesis Criteria...

- the candidate shows familiarity with, and understanding of, relevant literature
- the thesis provides a sufficiently comprehensive study of the topic
- the methods adopted are appropriate to the subject matter and are properly applied
- the research findings are suitably set out and accompanied by adequate exposition
- the quality of English and general presentation is satisfactory
- the thesis as a whole makes an original contribution to the knowledge of the subject with which it deals, and the candidate understands the relationship of the thesis to the wider context of knowledge in which it belongs
First impressions - What may discourage your examiner...

- A thesis that is overlong
- Too smaller fonts
- A lack of proof-reading
- A lack of clarity and coherence in the first chapter
“Although generally insufficient to fail a thesis, shortcomings in literary presentation such as editing and clarity can be a strong deterrent to an examiner and result in a largely negative appraisal. Examiners quickly become annoyed and distracted by spelling, typographical, grammatical and referencing errors... One of the problems with work that is poorly presented is that the examiner tends to lose confidence in the candidate and can become suspicious that there are deeper problems of inadequate and rushed conceptualisation”

But what makes for a great thesis?

- Clarity
- Justification
- Supporting evidence
- Critical interpretation and reflection
- Coherence
- Originality
Clarity

- Around the thesis narrative
- Around the expression your ideas
- Around the contribution of the research
Justification

- Of your choices and research decisions
- The research journey
- What has and hasn’t worked (Why/Why not?)
Supporting Evidence

- Support your assertions
- Link the general to the particular
- Ground your conclusions and analysis in the data and the literature

To quote further from people's exhibit A, your Twitter feed, "@holdupguy I'm in the getaway vehicle with the money and hostages. Where R U?"

Critical Interpretation and Reflection

- Reflect critically on the place of your research
- And on the research itself
  - The wisdom of your decisions
  - The validity of your inferences and conclusions
Coherence

- Link the component parts of the thesis
- Have a clear flow to your thesis
- Connect the introduction and the conclusion

Winter et al., 2000 research on examiners’ perspectives on what constitutes ‘original’ and ‘publishable’, concluded that a PhD ought to:

- be a report of work which others would want to read;
- tell a compelling story articulately whilst pre-empting inevitable critiques;
- carry the reader into complex realms, and inform and educate him/her;
- be sufficiently speculative or original to command respectful peer attention

Originality

- Multiple dimensions
  - Topic
  - Problem/question
  - Method
  - Theorisation
  - Interpretation and Analysis
  - Practice
  - Contribution

“Thinking outside of the box is difficult for some people. Keep trying.”
Stake your claim!!

- Say how and why you have made a contribution!
- Consider the potential implications of your research
- Breaking new ground – where to from here?

http://www.coolstuffinc.com/images/Products/Misc%20Art/Wattsalpoag%20Games/wap_claimit.jpg

THE TREASURE IN YOUR THESIS...
Conclusions: Don’ts......

- Give your examiner the wrong impression by not dealing with the mechanics of putting the thesis together (length guidelines, spelling, presentation, referencing, grammar)

- Produce a collection of chapters with contain description but little analysis

- Think the findings speak for themselves (be explicit about meaning and contribution)
Conclusions – Do’s……

- Be confident in your expertise and make the benefits of the knowledge you have gained explicit to your readers

- Provide the examiner not just with an exposition of what you have done but also reflect on your research choices

- Demonstrate why and how your research is original/novel and has added something new to what is already known
Success.

http://dannybrown.me/2011/01/14/social-media-small-business/
References