Department of Computer Science

National University of Ireland,
Maynooth,
Co. Kildare,
Ireland

Departmental Graduate Handbook

The goal of our department is to provide an environment where people can learn about Computer Science at undergraduate level, graduate level and beyond. The department's research postgraduate community has a fundamental role in this learning process primarily through their research, but also through involvement in the full spectrum of the department's activities. The strategic plans of both the department and the university prioritise the continuing development of the research postgraduate environment to provide an engine of learning at the core of our work.

The purpose of this handbook is to specify and environment where learning is maximised: both individually, through your own research, and as a group through participation in seminars and related activities. Research postgraduates are unique in the student community in that their work has to regularly attain the highest international standards to merit publication, and it is vital that the department fosters an environment that facilitates this.

This handbook describes department-specific arrangements, and should be read in conjunction with the relevant NUIM policies and regulations, available from the Graduate Studies webpage.

Revised: September 2009

At the start

Before you initially register for a PhD, you should agree the main points of your research with your supervisor; specifically:

- The title and topic of your research
- The amount of funding available, and how this will be divided between fees, salary and travel expenses
- The duration of your research. The default is two years for an MSc and three years for a PhD; any extension to this must be explicitly agreed with your supervisor

Availability: As a full-time student you are expected to be available during office hours on a Monday to Friday basis; any significant exceptions to this must be explicitly agreed with your supervisor. In return, your supervisor will provide the required interaction and level of contact for the duration of your studies, and will inform you in advance of any intended sabbaticals or changes to this arrangement.
If you are a part-time postgraduate student you should ensure that clear arrangements are made for regular contact with your supervisor, and that the agreed duration of your research reflects your part-time status.

Changes: Please note that you cannot unilaterally extend the agreed duration of their research, or switch from full-time to part-time mode without your supervisor's agreement. The department cannot guarantee continuing availability of facilities or supervision in the event of a unilateral change. However, the department is willing to accommodate unexpected changes in a student's circumstances and, in such cases, the student should alert their supervisor as soon as possible.

1 A statement on the facilities and resources available to research students within the department and within the University, including the library, computing, technical and laboratory facilities

By default, all full-time research students will initially be allocated a desk in one of the two research labs with a default assignment of a standard-setup PC. With the agreement of the supervisor, you may alternatively be located in one of the special-purpose labs, where relevant. You should note that occupying a desk in one of our labs constitutes acceptance of full-time status, and this implies a responsibility to attend department seminars and participate in departmental activities.
Part-time postgraduate students and “continuing" full-time students (i.e. PhD after year 3 and MSc students after year 2) will not normally have the use of a dedicated desk in the research lab. Subject to availability, facilities in the research labs may be made available for such students at the discretion of the

Head of Department. If this is not possible, arrangements will be made for access to shared computing facilities.
You are reminded to consult the NUIM and department code of conduct regarding the use of university equipment; details can be found in the Student Handbook, available on the department's web-site.
The department reserves the right to unilaterally reallocate desks and dispose of equipment or other materials in the event of the student failing to respond to requests to do so.
The primary means of contact is through your department email address (the one ending in *@cs.nuim.ie*). You may have other email addresses associated with other aspects of your work here, but you should make sure to always check your department email address regularly.

2 A brief biography of academics and their research interests including most recent publications and successful grant areas of research

A list of the current staff members in the department, along with details of their most recent publications, is available from the department's web pages.
When you initially register a similar web page will be created for you giving details of your project, funding source and any publications or presentations. You are strongly encouraged to develop your own web-page that gives more specific details of your research.

3 Departmental policy on the timing and mode of presentation of reports, reviews, seminars and examinations by which the student is assessed

The department's seminar series are a vital part of the department's research infrastructure. They provide you with an opportunity to present your own research and receive feedback, to learn from the research of others, and potentially to identify overlaps and synergies between researchers.
Typically you will be expected to give two seminars a year, of about 30 minutes duration each. For part-time students, it may be more convenient to give a single one-hour seminar per year, and the department will endeavour to be flexible in timing this seminar. Each seminar should be on a topic relevant to your research and might include a review of related work by others, an overview of your progress to date, or a snapshot of your latest work. In all cases, the content of your seminar should be discussed in advance with your supervisor, who will be able to advise the most suitable approach.
Attendance at departmental seminars, including postgraduate and staff seminars, is expected from all full-time postgraduates. Your level of attendance for the year will be reviewed by the postgraduate committee when considering your annual report.

4 Departmental policy on Progress Evaluation, including course requirements if applicable

Each postgraduate student is assigned a supervisor on initial registration, and this supervisor is the main point of contact for your studies. Co-supervision is possible in situations where the area of research overlaps the field of interest of the academics, and is the norm in cases where one supervisor is not on permanent contract. In all cases, students should be clear who the principal point of contact for their research is.

Department Postgraduate committee The research postgraduate supervisory process in the department is coordinated by a department committee composed of the head of department and four other full-time academics, including a designated postgraduate coordinator. This committee is responsible for discharging the department's role in relation to postgraduate research, including preparing and revising the postgraduate handbook, setting postgraduate research policy, and assessing student progress on a yearly basis.

Postgraduate Committee Members: For 2009-10 the members of the committee are:

- Adam Winstanley (Head of Department)
- Joe Timoney (Research Postgraduate Coordinator)
- John McDonald
- Ronan Reilly
- James Power

4.1 Annual Report

Each postgraduate should complete an annual report by the 31st of July each year. The exact format of the report will be specified in advance, but should include at least:

- A summary of your progress to date, including publications, presentations etc.
- An outline of the work to be completed by you between this date and your expected submission date. This should include a timetable with clear, designated milestones and deliverables.
- In addition, it also covers such topics as the amount of time spent on research and non-research activities, the level of contact with the supervisor and the quality of the postgraduate environment.

If you wish to maintain a desk in one of our research labs for the coming academic year, your annual report is your opportunity to make a case for this.

Outcome: The annual reports will be reviewed by the department postgraduate committee, along with other relevant details such as seminar attendance, demonstrating duties, and feedback from the supervisor. Department approval for your continuing registration is contingent on a satisfactory outcome to the annual reporting process.
Typically, the outcome of this review will be one of:

- Approving the report
- Asking for more information or clarification on some details
- Arranging for you to give a presentation to the committee and answer questions on progress to date and plans for completion

4.2 MSc-to-PhD Conversion

All research postgraduate students must register initially as MSc students unless they already hold a research MSc or where the funding body explicitly requires registration as a PhD student.
Progression to the PhD register is contingent on completing a progression thesis, which should demonstrate that you:

- have established a viable research topic
- are familiar with related work in the field
- have conducted some preliminary work in the area
- have a clear plan for completing your PhD

A conversion thesis may be submitted at any time of the year, but you should allow sufficient time (c. 3-4 weeks) if you wish to move to the PhD register for a given year.

Conversion committee: The thesis will be judged by an ad hoc conversion committee consisting of the supervisor, the supervisor's nominee, and a member of the department postgraduate committee acting as chair. The postgraduate student will be asked to give a brief (c. 30 minutes) presentation of the report to the committee and the department, and to answer questions afterwards.

Outcome: The chair of the conversion committee is responsible for relaying the recommendation to the department postgraduate committee. The report is reviewed by the department postgraduate committee which can then recommend progression to the PhD register.

5 Departmental requirements regarding demonstration, teaching and tutorials by graduate students

Lab work is an important component of the department's undergraduate teaching, and many of our modules allocate equal hours to lecture and lab work. We encourage you to become involved in supervising labs since this involves you

further with the department's activities, improves your presentation and communication skills, and may even offer the opportunity of learning more about our subject.
Typically the department recommends that you do not undertake more than six hours demonstrating per week, though your source of funding may impose additional constraints. Many of our modules also provide for paid marking of assessments in addition to demonstrating. In all cases you should ensure that your workload is not such as to interfere with your research agenda.
Various courses are made available at university level that may help improve your demonstrating experience, and you are encouraged to participate in these.

6 Departmental guidelines on good research practice and research conduct within their disciplines taking into account the definition as outlined in Ethical Review and Research Integrity: Misconduct in Research

You should be aware (at least) of the

- NUIM Ethical Review and Research Integrity Policy
- ACM Code of Ethics

Also, you should note that the NUIM plagiarism policy (described in the NUIM Calendar) make specific reference to postgraduate students.
Your supervisor will advise you on any other guidelines relevant to your field of research.

7 Departmental policy regarding inter library loans

The Inter Library Loan (ILL) allocation for postgraduate students is fixed at about 10 ILLs per year. In practice, the availability of electronic journals through the NUIM library and IReL (the Irish Research eLibrary) means that many postgraduates will not have to use ILLs. However, if you reach your ILL limit during the year you should discuss getting it extended with your supervisor.

8 Department policy on student costs for attendance at conferences

The department recognises that attendance at conferences, workshops and graduate schools is a fundamental part of your education in Computer Science. Since departmental funds are limited, prospective postgraduate students are strongly encouraged to discuss funding for such travel in advance with a potential supervisor; often they will be included as part of your funding.
The university (through the Graduate Studies Office) also provides some funding for conference travel, and you are encouraged to try this route before approaching the department for funding.
In the event of no other funding for travel being available, the department may be able to support some conference travel. The amount sought should be commensurate with the level of publication involved and the importance of the

publication to your research. postgraduate students who require funding should ask their supervisor to discuss it with the head of department; supporting documentation, such as the reviewer's comments and the conference acceptance rate should also be supplied.

9 Departmental calendar (seminar dates etc)

The seminar series normally takes place during the two teaching semesters; further details of departmental events are available from the CS Department web-site.

10 Departmental guidelines regarding thesis content and standards expected

Students should be aware of the formatting guidelines for theses and the submission procedure; details are available from the Graduate Studies web-site. You should note that the PhD examination board needs to be approved by Faculty in advance of thesis submission, and should consult with their supervisor as regards the appropriate notification schedule.

11 Departmental specifications for the publishing of papers in international journals or international conference presentations

Publications in suitable conferences and journals provide evidence that your work has met international standards, and are often taken into account by external examiners of PhD thesis. You should note that not all conferences and journals have the same standards, and that you should seek your supervisor's advice in selecting a suitable form of publication for your work.
Students registered with the department should state their affiliation as being “Department of Computer Science, NUI Maynooth”. Your supervisor can recommend any additional authoring and funding credits. Section 6 and 7 of the NUIM Ethical Review and Research Integrity Policy deals with authorship of papers.

12 A statement of the University's policy and guidelines on intellectual property

You should be aware that the university asserts certain intellectual property (IP) rights in relation to your work here, and your funding sources may also have additional requirements.
In all cases, you should inform yourself of the relevant constraints and policies in advance of undertaking research.
The NUIM Commercialisation Office is responsible for protecting and exploiting NUIM-generated intellectual property. The NUIM commercialisation policies are available from the Research & Enterprise web-site.

13 Procedures by which the student or the supervisor may make representations as appropriate if significant difficulties arise (grievance procedures)

You are strongly encouraged to discuss any problems relating to your research with your supervisor as soon as possible - this should always be the first recourse in event of difficulty. If you cannot achieve a resolution this way then you can discuss the issue with the postgraduate coordinator or with the head of department, indicating clearly if you do not wish the discussion to be relayed to your supervisor.
For advice on general issues that may arise from you relationship with the University, you can contact the Academic Advisory Office. This office also runs regular study skills seminars, covering topics such as time management and stress management that may be of interest.
You are encouraged to note any difficulties, particularly with department policy or conditions, in your annual report.

Postgraduate reps: Each year the research postgraduates elect two representatives, one for each research lab. These reps act as a focal point for discussions among postgraduates, and as a point of contact with the postgraduate coordinator. They also attend department staff-student meetings and can raise general issues on behalf of the postgraduates there.

Change of supervisor: On rare occasions it may prove in the best interests of all involved for a student to change to a different supervisor. However, you should note that an alternative supervisor will most likely not have the same skills as the original supervisor and, in most cases to date, a change in supervisor has resulted in the PhD project being re-started from scratch. Thus you are advised to only consider this course of action if all other possible strategies for resolution have failed.
In situations where the supervisor leaves the department, a replacement supervisor will be appointed by the head of department. This will be done in consultation with the original supervisor, who may continue to be involved in the project as circumstances permit.

14 Requirements for student training in health and safety issues

Students are advised to consult the safety statement for the department, available from the department's internal web-site.