DISSERTATION

2020–2021

University of Liverpool

Online
Hello,

Congratulations! You are now either thinking about your Dissertation or are about to embark on this wonderful adventure.

The idea of this project came about where by we saw that sometimes students have information from our website, but at times may not have honest yet helpful insight from past students & their experiences. Although it was not mandatory for this to be said & distributed to you, it was an aim that was sought to be pursued with the goal to enhance your Student Experience. In other words, you matter and we care.

What to expect

We asked for contributions from our most recent top twenty students, who received some of the highest marks and/or were presented with an award due to their Dissertation. We wanted to gain wisdom from them in order to hear what they would say about their experience and to give you advice that could potentially alter your process in a positive way. All in all, you can expect some insight from them, to you. I hope it’s relatable, informative and fun to read.

There is also some valuable insight from Dissertation Advisers, and if you read carefully, this information can truly enhance your experience and outcome! Who would not want to receive a higher mark and higher quality in their Dissertation? I know I would! I hope you enjoy this booklet.

Sincerely,
Tawana Zavazava

&

Student Support
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Page</th>
<th>Section</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-29</td>
<td>STUDENTS’ PERSPECTIVE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-42</td>
<td>DISSERTATION ADVISERS’ PERSPECTIVE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>OUTRO</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


**Which Helped the Most?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assistance Provided</th>
<th>Times Chosen</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Watching the Dissertation Webinar Recording</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reading in the Masters Research Portal</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resources in the Library</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other or Please elaborate</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Other Responses**

- Constant communications and consultations with my Dissertation supervisor
- My dissertation advisor
- Working closely with my supervisor
- The biggest external help I received in the process was from my Liverpool supervisor.
- Review comments of Dissertation Supervisor
- In addition to UoL library, I also had access to another university library. These two sources provided access to every current research pertaining to my topic of study.
- Talking to my dissertation supervisor

I must say that the Legal Research Methodology module was helpful in the preparation for my dissertation writing. However, I relied heavily on advance reading of published dissertations and/or theses for the same topic I chose for my dissertation project. I sifted through each of them for style and texture in writing. Likewise, I gathered as much valuable secondary literature of the highest quality as I could in support of my hypotheses.
WHAT ASSISTED YOU IN REMAINING MOTIVATED?

**Other Responses**

- Self-motivation
- Chosing a topic that I was really interested in
- Personal interest in the subject on which my dissertation research was based
- Using a project at work that directly related to my career goals
- Reaching out to global experts in the topic I chose for my dissertation project.

WHO OR WHAT WILL KEEP YOU MOTIVATED?
HOW DID YOUR WORK WEEK CHANGE TO ENHANCE YOUR JOURNEY?

- I added more work hours to my work week: 4 times chosen
- Created fixed office hours: 3 times chosen
- It differed by the day: 10 times chosen
- Lessened hours in other aspects: 5 times chosen
- Other: 4 times chosen

OTHER RESPONSES

- I was supported by my work to get some paid free time, in return for signing a stay-on contract with them.
- My work hours stayed the same but I did ask for two days off during the process. I’m a teacher so half terms and school holidays were an opportunity to spend a lot more time on my research.
- Similar amount of time as spent on each module.

WHAT WILL YOUR WORK WEEK LOOK LIKE?
WERE YOU WORKING FULL TIME OR PART-TIME?

- Full Time: 10 times chosen
- Part Time: 4 times chosen
- I did not work: 2 times chosen
- I was volunteering/Interning: 1 time chosen
- Full Time but requested less hours at work: 1 time chosen
- Other: 5 times chosen

OTHER RESPONSES

I was full time, but decreased my hours to 2-4 days per week during my dissertation period.

I worked full time for 2 years and during my dissertation I got some free time.

I was retired, but had my own consultancy. It was effectively part time, but because it was my business, I had total control of when I did any work.

I was able to spend a few hours at work each week on my dissertation.

I was a part-time academic at the time of my studies.
WITHIN THIS PROCESS, HOW INVOLVED WERE YOU WITH YOUR FAMILY, KIDS AND/OR FRIENDS?

OTHER RESPONSES

No difference

I was the main caretaker of the children, children and husband were fully involved in the journey and were aware where they helped me

I worked around my responsibilities for example in weekends I got up early and was able to finish in time to spend evenings with my family

I worked early in the morning until lunchtime on weekends and then had family time. I worked mostly after the kids were in bed but sometimes had to work and miss putting them to bed (my husband was very supportive).

My involvement with my family more or less remained the same except when I was close to a deadline

I tried to work at night after kids were asleep as much as possible.

Frankly speaking, the aggressive writing/submission deadline had a dent on my relationship with my family. I believe those who succeeded in the online program could attest to this. However, when I detected that the time I spent studying was impacting my family life, I had to slow down a bit and restored active communication line with my loved ones.
DID YOU GO TO ANY CONFERENCES OR NETWORKING EVENTS DURING THIS PROCESS THAT ENHANCED YOUR DISSERTATION?

**Other Responses**

If yes, how did you find these events?

Scientific conferences particularly informed my knowledge of appropriate research processes as well as communication/reporting of findings.

Will you attend a conference or go to one after your dissertation?
My major obstacles were logistical as my research consumables took longer than anticipated to be delivered after procurement, consequently delaying the entire dissertation process. However, constant communications with my dissertation advisor, supervisors and student support regarding the entire process including the progress and shortcoming helped in resolving the issue as they were able to intervene and I earned extra time to complete the research project and have an excellent outcome.

Feeling like I wouldn't get enough participants - overcome by talking with my DA; Drowning in transcriptions - reminding myself that this was all part of the process and structuring the time I dedicated to transcribing in my day so it didn’t feel as overwhelming

It was difficult to get started on the leap from collecting data (I did qualitative) to actually analyzing and then reporting it. I read my transcripts a million times, and did my best to implement guidance given to me by my dissertation advisor. Also, just looking at the way that the example dissertations were organized (by section) helped me to focus my thoughts and communicate them clearly. When my dissertation was completed, prior to turning it in, I had many people read it who are not in my field of work. I did this to ensure that it was readable/understandable to anyway, and that it gave them a sense of why my topic was in issue. They mostly really enjoyed it, but gave me a few minor notes about phrasing that I was able to implement to further improve clarity. My DA was instrumental throughout the process as well.

I was unsure if my topic was a good one, but my dissertation advisor convinced me it had merit.

More research
There were plenty of obstacles - mainly ethical concerns which were a result of cultural differences. I had to organise online interviews in Asia rather than face to face interviews which meant all sorts of internet issues. Some interviews were very broken up whilst others were interrupted by friends and family of the interviewee. I overcame this through a lot of patience and sometimes by rearranging other times to chat.

The number of hours required to complete the work for the course was about double that had been suggested by Liverpool advisors before I started

Obstacles during dissertation - continuous discussion with my supervisor

I faced self-doubt a few times during the dissertation process but worked through it by remembering all that I managed to get through in my modules!

I had doubt about quality of my research topic and methodology. My dissertation adviser and reading dissertation of other students helped a lot.

I had fears of not being able to write at all and turn in a draft of each chapter to my paper on time. I faced my fears with positive determination that it's normal to go through challenges along the way.
Meeting and engaging with classmates from all over the globe and learning about their diverse experiences on matters public health as well as cultural backgrounds. I also enjoyed the participatory group discussions that widened my scope of knowledge with the right information without having to read huge texts that would otherwise be challenging to comprehend. I also became critical in analysis and learnt brevity in my writing.

**Researching an underdeveloped topic**

I enjoyed starting this from nothing, and then watching what it turned into. It was a lot of work, and I am very proud of how well it was received. I also really enjoyed doing the interviews, and then trying my best to do justice to the subjects, who gave freely of their time, to get their points across.

The entire learning experience from lit review to puzzling SPSS, writing down of discussion and APA

Finally having done an article and being able to say I have done research. I feel like a grown up.

The journey itself, what I have learned and achieved.

**Engaging in real life research.** I enjoyed learning more about my host country and it's university students and I've been inspired to change my job and to consider further research in the future.

The most enjoyable thing was that it was the most 'adult' experience in my academic life. I didn't find my first degree as different from school as I'd expected, and the first eight modules in the Liverpool MSc was like being back in a schoolroom. For the first time my dissertation allowed me to be in control of the process, which I thoroughly enjoyed. I'm currently doing a PhD, and think that the dissertation was a useful step towards this.

Some of the courses and some of the course facilitators were excellent, access to the library, talking to other students

Very well planned

I loved how I would start out reading for a specific area or topic and this would lead me to find other areas of interest along the way.

Delving into more detail on the topics that I liked through the research papers.

The subject

I enjoyed the entire journey but perhaps analyzing the data the most.

Looking back, I did enjoy process of acquiring knowledge and the required discipline to remain focused.

The practical nature of the program and how most every topic along the way could be related to my career in some way.

All the challenges that come along with it such as sleepless nights (maximum 2 days up and awake reading, writing, editing and editing). The joy of constantly receiving high marks (somehow) fuelled my drive to keep succeeding.
WHERE DID YOU GO TO WRITE YOUR DISSERTATION? (LIBRARY, OFFICE, HOME, ROTATED PLACES)

Library: 2
Office: 4
Home: 20
Rotated Places: 2
Other: 5

"Other" text answers:

A variety of coffee shops.
Starbucks and other coffee places
Sometimes I went to Starbucks to get a change of scenery
Coffee Shops
As for me, home is the perfect place to write dissertation project.
Communicate with supervisor, advisor and support of the intended travel and ensure proper planning before travel and ensure to adhere to the plan.

Careful planning, understanding what options for working would be available in different places and clear communications

I made sure that where I was going had reliable internet, or I scheduled it during a time where I was at a point in the process that I could take a break.

I planned three weeks off

Book hotel rooms with a working desk. It was a lot better with a proper working station than a low coffee table or sitting in the bed. Also, download apps for natural reading voices and listen to books or papers being read to you while on the train or airplane. You get tired from reading this kind of literature all the time so being read to helps.

Plan and reserve time, otherwise prepare to work harder on the other weeks to compensate.

Plan your schedule carefully and work when you can. Make multiple copies of your work and have online and offline versions so that you can continue to work in different situations.

Ensure good internet access

Stay focused but a break is always healthy!

Plan ahead: schedule small discrete tasks to do that are linked to the dissertation, even just 30 minutes a day.

Plan ahead so that you can enjoy your travels and take a break from the dissertation.
IF YOU TRAVELLED, ANY TIPS FOR THOSE TRAVELLING WHILST DOING THEIR DISSERTATION?

CONTINUED

Buy kindle books and plan time for working on the dissertation!

The loneliness that comes with business travel could be harnessed towards working on dissertation. However, this requires discipline and ability to sometimes turn down invitations from colleagues or business partners to go out after work.

I travelled for work, but it didn't generate any inspiration/motivation to write or write better. Home is where my soul was yearning to sit down and write.
WHAT DID ‘BALANCE’ MEAN TO YOU IN THAT SEASON?  
(HOW DID YOU SUPPORT YOURSELF MENTALLY, PHYSICALLY, SPIRITUALLY, AND MENTALLY?)

Spared time for family and friends, went to the gym, yoga and had adequate sleep.

I prefer the term harmony - balance is almost impossible to maintain (like a teeter-totter), but it meant keeping perspective on the fact that the dissertation was time-bound, and grounding in the importance of maintaining mental and physical well-being (including relationships) even if they were reduced to accommodate. Communicating regularly, clearly and checking for understanding with family & friends was essential to maintaining a degree of harmony.

Regular breaks, exercise, good time management

I exercised almost everyday. That was my biggest stress reliever, and it helped balance out how much I was sitting at my computer (compared to my usual job as a nurse-midwife). The coffee shop I primarily worked at was directly next door to my kickboxing gym, so I had a nice little routine. Overall, I probably could have been more balanced? But I did sometimes consciously try to make myself not work on it for a bit- even if just for a day or a few hours.

Balance to me was hiring extra help at home, doing yoga three times a week, the afternoons/evenings and weekends with the children.

I tried to have set amounts of time or set deadlines I would work to, f.ex “today I will finish chapter X, and then I will not have a bad conscience for not doing more today”. Otherwise I would constantly feel behind. I made sure to be with loved ones Saturday evening after studying for 5-6 hours.

Like I usually do, continuing to take care of my family and social life and practicing sports. The rate and intensity reduced though.

I wasn’t great the physical side of things but for me balance was between work, dissertation and spending time with my family. The key was to put aside blocks of time to work on my research and other times to be with my family. Sleep also became important as it wasn’t always easy to get enough!
WHAT DID ‘BALANCE’ MEAN TO YOU IN THAT SEASON? (H OW DID YOU SUPPORT YOURSELF MENTALLY, PHYSICALLY, SPIRITUALLY, AND MENTALLY?)

My life at the time was a mix of gym, consultancy, dissertation and fun with friends and family. Balance meant that I had to work hard enough to ensure that I was always on track timewise throughout the dissertation process, but not to let it take over my life. It helped that I was genuinely interested in the project so it wasn’t difficult to devote the time I needed.

family and friends helped, taking breaks, doing other things

No balance unfortunately. To successfully complete this course I gave up a great deal

Balance between work, family & study! Planning helped the most

It meant that I always scheduled “down time” as well as work time and I would have one weekend day each week in which I did no dissertation related work at all.

To be able to have a life vs study balance it was important to be self disciplined and make sure that the time that was allocated for studying was actually kept.

I had amazing support from my family

I walked in the evenings with a friend. I also did some reflection

Balance meant identifying the most important things for you in life and prioritize accordingly. As for me, my family came first and I did my best to plan my other aspects of my life (mainly work and my dissertation) around them. That way, I avoided conflicts that could have taken me out of balance.

took breaks, spent time doing other activities or projects for short or extended periods of time.... did not devote entirety of any single day or span of time to the research paper

Once I had an overall plan in place for completing the dissertation, I allowed myself to take breaks after each deliverable was complete. For example, after completing section of the dissertation I might take a couple of days off.

I equated balance to praying, praying, praying, praying before reading, writing, editing and submission.
How did you best connect with your dissertation adviser?

- University E-mail: 16 times
- Skype: 1 time
- Forum in Blackboard: 11 times
- Other: 1 time

What helped in acquiring a positive connection with your dissertation advisor?

- Consistent communication.
- We had already formed a good relationship through two previous modules for which they had been the instructor.
- Regular contact.
- I believe we both are clear communicators, and I appreciated her direct feedback and guidance. She never told me exactly what to do, but helped me in figuring it out.
- Respectful communication, seeking her advice, sending reminders when a reply took longer.
- Video chats every now and then.
**WHAT HELPED IN ACQUIRING A POSITIVE CONNECTION YOUR DISSERTATION ADVISOR?**

**CONTINUED**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>He was very supportive</th>
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<tr>
<td>Knowing (or believing) that my dissertation advisor had chosen to work with me helped. I was always grateful for his input and always made sure that I followed his advice. I was very careful to double check everything before sending it to him to make sure I wasn’t missing anything or asking the same question again.</td>
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| It was simple he was excellent. He was very supportive and was able to give very constructive criticism that really helped the process. Since then we have published a paper together based on the dissertation and remain good friends. Had Liverpool offered the option of doing a PhD in the area that I wanted, I would definitely have chosen to do it with Ricardo. |

| his knowledge, flexibility when necessary, positive attitude |

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<th>Discussion</th>
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<tr>
<th>Her openness</th>
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<table>
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<th>Asking questions when in doubt.</th>
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<tr>
<th>I was lucky in that my advisor was great and extremely helpful!</th>
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<th>My Dissertation Advisor was a friendly supportive none-judgemental. This made it easy to connect to her.</th>
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<tr>
<th>Being very honest with my weaknesses and timely asking for help. I understood I was just one of the things in the life of my dissertation advisor. Thus, I tried as much as possible not to disrupt his balance by planning and sharing my plans with with him.</th>
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<tr>
<th>I selected/requested mu dissertation advisor based on his experience being closely related to my topic, and also on the feedback he gave during the module he taught. His feedback was detailed and relevant, so I felt that would be an important trait in an advisor.</th>
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<tr>
<th>He was my former professor in one of my elective modules. He inspired me ad infinitum. Same inspiration was the driver for my choice to write in the same field of law he taught.</th>
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DID YOU EVER FACE AN OBSTACLE WITH YOUR DISSERTATION ADVISER?

IF SO, HOW DID YOU OVERCOME THIS OBSTACLE?

The university changed e-mail system and didn't alert us that we would be able to send emails but not receive. So I tried to connect to my advisor over several weeks but heard nothing, until she one day called me on my mobile and we found that I was not receiving her replies but she got my emails that I sent.

I don't know if to call it an obstacle, but I was kind of lost at the initial stages of my dissertation. Therefore, my dissertation advisor had to chase me around for a while to get me on the right path. My experience is that dissertation can be intimidating at the initial stages.
HOW DID YOU COMMUNICATE YOUR COMMITMENT TO THE DISSERTATION PROCESS WITH THOSE IN YOUR LIFE, SUCH AS YOUR WORK PLACE, CHILDREN, SPOUSE ETC?

I didn't just talk to them about it, I discussed at length what I was doing and what the implications of my findings were. As a result they were fascinated by the project and really keen to see the results at each stage.

My family all knew what it would take and were very supportive.

DID YOU TALK OR CONNECT WITH OTHER STUDENTS FROM YOUR STUDY DURING THIS TIME?
HOW DID YOU CONNECT (E.G. WHATSAPP, LINKED IN)

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<tr>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Times Chosen</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>WhatsApp</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>University Email</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Email</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linked In</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
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Note: Written communication on Blackboard is best, but if you ever use Skype to talk about your dissertation, make sure there is a written follow up/confirmation, for your records.

I only connected with the subject experts in my field of research and my dissertation advisor.

HOW HELPFUL WAS IT TO TALK WITH OTHER STUDENTS DURING DISSERTATION?

[Bar chart showing the helpfulness ratings of the discussions]

Very Unhelpful Very Helpful
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
WHAT DO YOU WISH YOU HAD KNOWN ABOUT THE DISSERTATION?

The process comes with pressure for example, the need to research and gain wide knowledge on the field of interest. Having a clear mind from the onset is therefore key to successful completion.

The allocated dissertation time is not a lot as it may seem therefore, proper planning and time management are critical.

While tough I needn’t have worried so much.

Nothing really. The written expectations prior to starting the dissertation were clear enough, although none if it fully sinks in until you’re actually muddling your way through it. But, I felt like that was all part of the learning process, so I wouldn’t have changed anything.

Absence of weekly deadlines was strange in the beginning, felt like I was losing time, not being effective.

I find the library pages very messy particularly the difference between “physical” students and online ones. I never could figure out the pages. Also, online student’s dissertations are not available online, I even contacted the librarian who confirmed this. I think this is very bad, both for the finished student, the current students and the university.

Nothing, the University provided me all the necessary info.

I felt that I was very well informed about the process. The most stressful time was trying to get the proposal right and the waiting time as this progressed and then when I was waiting for ethical approval. Connection with other dissertation students sometimes helped and sometimes hindered with this as others either received approval or had to review their work again. I think that it is important to make sure that your dissertation is manageable and that there are unlikely to be questions from the ethics committee.

I think my biggest criticism is that there was relatively little time to decide on the project. For example, I’m expecting my PhD to take about 3 1/2 years, but I spent the entirety of the 1st year reading, discussing my findings with my supervisor and changing my thoughts about the final project. With hindsight I would have done a slightly different project (although it would have had a lot of common elements). I think, having embarked on the dissertation, it is very difficult to stop, and change the topic (or even the focus of the topic). If more time can’t be found - and I appreciate that the more time thinking about the topic reduces the time to do the actual work - then I think that more should be made of this, and people should be encouraged to work harder in the first 8 weeks of choosing the topic than they have done at any other stage of the MSc.

How important initial planning was!
That it’s actually quite hard to write the piece of research you want to write whilst staying within the word limit. Review your own work regularly!

The information provided on the website and that given by the dissertation advisor was sufficient enough. In my case the guidance given was very clear.

Nothing - it was a journey and I expected to have ups and downs, as with any journey.

The course held at the start of the dissertation was very informative as well as the guidelines in writing the dissertation. I think perhaps more guidance could be given in helping students select research areas which are practical to pursue given the dissertation time frame and availability of data.

That dissertation is a journey that is meant to be enjoyed. That the doubts, fears and frustrations during the process are the necessary components that makes this journey a unique experience. They are necessary to the establishment of sense of accomplishment at the end of the journey.

I wish I had known that Board of Examiners process for a fall submission would not be reviewed and the results published until late spring (for my department).

In terms of the topic I wrote about, I wish there’s a sufficient amount of relevant literature to buttress my arguments, hypotheses and conclusion.
Was there anything that limited you that you feel should have been changed?

Mmmmm... I would have said time but this was very instrumental in shaping my time management skill. So, no limitation perse.

The online student's dissertations should also be available from UoL like the "physical" student's are, as they keep saying there is no difference between us but it feels that way when our dissertations are not worth holding on to or being shared. Also, the information about alumni and access to papers and libraries after graduation has been very bad. I don't know much about the alumni yet, 10 months later. I registered at some website but I feel like a welcome pack email would have been good.

No, I felt that I was very well supported by my supervisor and the university. Cultural differences and expectations between a Western university and Eastern university students did make it challenging to justify the way that I had to undertake my interviews but it was a learning experience for all involved.

Not really. As with all questionnaire led projects, there are always questions that you wish you’d asked. I think it might have been better rather than having one major study, to have done an initial study, analysed the data and then followed it up with another one to deal with the questions that it threw up. This is the plan for my PhD where I will probably do about four stages of fieldwork. I'm not sure whether there is time in the dissertation process for this, but it should maybe discussed as an option and a theoretical time plan examined to see whether it would be possible.

No. Personally, I felt there was a lot of support available and that I did not take advantage of it at all even though I could have. I think the module leading up to the writing phase was very helpful and represented an opportunity for the advisor to take an active role which in the future might be a good way to set students on a good path. I had a good experience because I thrive when left to my own devices, but that may be daunting to others.

The scarcity of materials available online about my research topic.
What do you think you did differently from other students in order to get such high marks and/or an award?

- Time management increased
- I knew my topic before
- I collaborated with an organization
- I chose a topic near to my heart
- Please elaborate here

Read widely, constantly communicated with my supervisors and asked questions for clarity.

I spent ALOT of time working on it

Being very thorough and detailed. Spending a whole lot of time. Looking at the topic from various angles.

Passion and willingness to learn

I didn’t take the easy option - I knew that interviewing would be more challenging than a questionnaire but I also knew that the data would be richer from interviews.

My working life was spend conducting market research. This meant that I was very quickly able to produce a good quality questionnaire and do a complete analysis on the data. As a result I had plenty of time to spend interpreting the data rather than get bogged down in the data collection process.

I worked extremely long hours and gave up my social life for the entire course

I lived and breathed the subject from the start of my course to the end of my dissertation and was very passionate about it.

I chose a research topic on which similar research had been done and for which I knew I would be able to collect the data within the required standards.

I chose a topic I had interest in, and one which was narrow enough that there were appropriate sources to draw from.
WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE UPCOMING STUDENTS?

Have a good relationship with your supervisor and peers as they are a good resource. Take criticisms positively and, Appreciate having made the decision to learn and the far you have come.

Be interested in your topic. If you are only vaguely interested in it maintaining the level of inspiration, motivation, and commitment will be difficult.

Be open with people about what you are doing. It helps them understand the additional strain on your life, but be clear that it is only for a season. Always check that they understand (especially with those close to you). Telling them vs them ‘getting it’ can be two different things and can lead to additional stressors.

Find a topic you are passionate about. Really work on time management. Keep yourself well. Read read read.

Choose a topic that you love enough to fill up your life for a year :) Make a timeline for yourself and try to stick to it (finish this section by this date, etc). Listen to your dissertation advisor. Know that both of your times are valuable, so communicate clearly, implement their suggestions, and stay true to timelines for response. Then you can expect the same from them.

Focus is important, and set your own goal. The DA is there for help and feedback, but ultimately you have to do it yourself. Plan physical activity and meditation. When not feeling motivated, visualize yourself during the graduation ceremony. Imagine how you feel in that near future and what advice you would give yourself today.

Set aside a whole lot of time, have a visual of your time management such as a calendar. Talk to friends or family or colleagues which might have an interest in the topic. Ask people who might not have an interest in it too, and see things from their point of view.

The best advice I can give to other students about the dissertation is to carefully chose the topic, no matter how long it can take. I recommend to start to think about the topic about one year before starting it. Chose a professor you admire to get advice from and to discuss ideas about your dissertation. Also test your idea for the dissertation topic with people that know the subject.

Choose a topic that interests you and make it relevant to your hobbies, work or your future prospects. This will help you to always be driven and to remember why you are doing this. Listen to your supervisor and take their advice throughout the process - they are experienced and know what they are doing. Don’t start writing until you have done enough research and/or until you have completed your analysis of your data. When this is all done, you will know what you want to write and the challenge will be reducing your word count rather than reaching it! When it’s tough, take a quick break and do something to refresh you but don’t stop for too long - keep the impetus going. Best of luck, it’s most definitely worth it!

Choice of topic is key. Do a study about something that really interests you. Pretend it is a mini PhD, that means that the objective is to discover something that is new to the world and enhances learning. That will help to keep you focussed because there is a bigger goal than just getting your MSc, but also to discover new knowledge. Apart from that, write a timing plan and then always try and keep ahead of it. There will inevitably be little hiccups along the way, so allow yourself a bit of ‘wiggle room’ so that they don’t throw you off track.

To keep up even when difficulties appear, to fight for changes when necessary
Think very carefully about the time commitment needed to be successful. Are you willing to make the sacrifices needed?

Stay focused. Plan ahead. Have frequent breaks. Any problems raise straightaway with the supervisor.

Believe in yourself and don’t be afraid to ask for advice and support - know your own strengths and areas of difficulty and choose your research method wisely.

Find a topic that you really like as you will be dedicating a lot of time looking into research papers on the topic. Focus, a positive mind set and an I can do attitude should always be on your mind to be able to succeed, especially when stressful days kick in. Time management is also very important to ensure that deadlines can always be met. A word of advise is to always allow some contingency as emergencies do happen, so allocating time for such happening will help you to stay focused and never panic.

Choose a topic that you are passionate about as it will maintain your interest.

You should not only pick an area you like but also seek to ensure that you would be able to obtain sufficient data for your analysis. You should also develop a schedule for completion of the different areas of the dissertation which is in keeping with the draft schedule provided. This is particularly important if you are working. Telling others about the research you are conducting helps it come alive and strengthens your enthusiasm. It may also help you in clarifying what you are doing. Talking to a passed student may also help if you are feeling overwhelmed.

Chose the topic near to your heart and take advantage of the guidance of your dissertation advisor.

Seek help if you want it or need it...don’t be passive. Also, start early then keep working, get feedback, keep working- approach the project as a long-term project, but work on it incrementally.

Follow the guidelines provided and get clarification early. Treat the dissertation as a project and create yourself a road map (with time frames) of the activities that you need to accomplish. That way you’ll know where you are and will be able to take breaks with confidence that you are on track.

Read and write ahead of time
Amass as much relevant literature when you see fit
Don’t be shy to reach out to identified subject matter experts in your research topic (most of these experts were thrilled about my topic and had requested a copy of my dissertation)
Don’t settle for mediocre writing style. Be inspired by the top calibre/well-written dissertation papers.
HOW VALUABLE HAS THE DISSERTATION PROCESS BEEN TO YOU?

How valuable will this process be to you?
DISSERTATION ADVISERS’ PERSPECTIVE
**How long in advance should students be firm in their topic?**

- **A year before**: 0 times
- **At least a month before**: 1 time
- **It depends, but they should have some idea**: 7 times
- **They can have an idea or ideas, but it can change when they start the first 8 weeks**: 6 times
- **Other or Please elaborate**: 2 times

**Other responses**

- Optimally, in all courses consider what the contents can provide for a dissertation.
- The timing of the idea is important but not critical. What is critical is that they must be interested or even passionate about the topic. But indeed, logic dictates that the longer they have the topic in mind the longer they can read and work around it.

**What do you look for when you accept a student to work with?**

- **The number of students I have**: 8 times
- **Their topic**: 11 times
- **First come, first served**: 2 times
- **Other**: 2 times

**Other responses**

- The topic comes first; it is no good supervising a student a topic that one knows very little about.
- Proposed study design/methodology
During the dissertation, do you suggest students go to conferences or events that relate to their dissertation topic?

If yes, why? If no, why?

They should be able to work this out for themselves!

I've assumed that they are not near conferences. I'll change on that going forward.

Unless I am somehow aware of a conference, I don't have the time to look for conferences for students with various topics.

help them to know how to do research

Never of thought of telling them to go or not to go

In case of serious research projects

Many students struggle with resources to attend conferences, and although they are very helpful, usually students don't have the time or money to attend. I usually suggest that they see what virtual conferences are available and to read currently published papers from conferences.

Yes, this is critical as the latest on any topic comes out at conferences. It does take longer to come out in journals.

To learn more about the existing, current research on the topic

I'm typically not familiar with such events as the topics tend not to be directly related to my own research interests.
WHICH OF THESE HAVE YOU SEEN OCCUR THAT IF FIXED COULD ENHANCE A STUDENT'S DISSERTATION?

OTHER ANSWERS

85% of sources are academic articles within past 4 years that actually address their research question/solution

Referencing format, using current references

Using the literature to support their statements about the need for the research and thinking that it is only a technical project

Critical analysis

INTERESTING!
When students are waiting to hear back about a chapter, what should they do as they wait for your response?

**Other Answers**

- If the official draft version of the chapter (we are only allowed to review one version of the chapter) then sending it to the Writing Centre first would be helpful.

- They must read and catch up with the latest on their topic. It is no so much “writing” the next topic but at least start planning it.

- Re-read and critique their submitted chapter.
FROM YOUR VIEW, STUDENTS WHO HAVE TRAVELED DURING THE DISSERTATION, DID IT HELP THEM?

IF YES, HOW? IF NO, HOW? OR DOES IT DEPEND.

Traveling takes time and the time to complete a dissertation is short

Do not know

Time wasting

I have clicked no but I guess it depends what the travelling was.

I ticked No to the above question because there was no "I do not know" option. I haven't really been informed of many students travelling.

Internet issues, travelling time interrupted studies
FOR STUDENTS WHO EXCELLED, WHAT DO YOU THINK THEY DID DIFFERENTLY WITH THEIR TIME MANAGEMENT?

Time management is only one factor in many. I had one student who was poor at time management, but he still got a distinction because he was technically very good.

Broke their plan down to weekly increments and kept to plan

Managed their time better

spend almost all after work time on the DS

They have a good idea of what the problem is and their proposed solution.

Focus on replying at least once a week. Family support is also important

They had a strict timetable that they followed so that they kept the momentum going - and! They usually had a peer student as part of their network who was encouraging of them

(a) Read a lot (b) ability to critically analyse the literature (c) keep to the timeline (c) Most importantly follow the advice of the DA.

Developed a realistic schedule for their work and stuck to it with little deviation

They did not rush the drafts

They accessed the DA classroom regularly and responded to chapters reviews quickly. They were also aware of the ethics requirements before the dissertation started.
HOW DID YOU BEST COMMUNICATE WITH YOUR STUDENT?

- University E-mail
- Incorporating Skype
- Forum in Blackboard
- Other

WHAT WAS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THOSE YOU CONNECTED WELL WITH, AND THOSE YOU DID NOT CONNECT WELL WITH?

- They promptly replied to e-mails
- They took in feedback well
- They were not afraid to ask questions or respectfully challenge you as well
- They were clear in their communication
- We connected in other areas as well (had other connections besides the topic)
- Other or Please elaborate

OTHER ANSWERS

- They showed a genuine interest in their topic area (not just doing it to 'finish the degree' or they sent me drafts on a timely basis so I could help them!
- I think you have an important point here. Those who ask questions or even "challenge" advice do very well.
- Were active in the DA class
Did you ever face an obstacle with a student you advised?

If so, how did you overcome this obstacle?

- Post/email if they were missing over 2 weeks. Have student advisor contact if missing more then 3 to 4 weeks.
- They did not take my feedback well. I told them it is their choice
- Mainly writing issues which is solved by the Writing Centre
- Most obstacles have to do with 'disappearing' or writing. Disappearing is addressed by email and also involving the SSM. Writing is helped by using the Writing Centre
- Yes, this happens to everybody as students differ. Some of them do their "own things" rather than act on the advice of the DA.
- Synchronous communications
- The obstacle was over-reliance on the tutor for guidance. Pointing out the terms of the DA - Student agreement helped.
DID YOU EVER GET SICK OR HAVE SOMETHING UNEXPECTED HAPPEN DURING THE DISSERTATION PROCESS?

If yes, did you tell your student? Or how did you handle this?

- Usually inform them, but not always in a timely fashion
- This happens all the time. Usually I let students know that I may not be able to respond quickly
- Emailed them to let them know what was happening. However, I generally don’t find that this kept me from responding, but it might take the whole 10 days for a review (I try to do the review within 7 days)
- It is most important that the students are made aware of when you are not or cannot be available. This is critical and is a question of trust really.
- Yes, told students
WHAT DO YOU WISH YOU HAD KNOWN ABOUT WORKING WITH STUDENTS DURING THE DISSERTATION?

Probably more about the obstacles they face

about their capability

I should only review the paper once

I’ve been supervising since 2002. What I have learned over time is that the modules should include something about potential research topics so that the student has been thinking about it for a while. Even though we’ve done this, some students just ‘scrape through’ the modules and don’t think about their topic. The RMT was adjusted to address the other weakness - matching with a DA with a poorly formed proposal. - without a well designed proposal, time is then lost in getting approval.

I think this is difficult to answer really. As I said students differ considerably and have different needs. So, there is no overall preparation for it.

Level of skill will vary amongst students and my style may not work with all.

The different countries ethics processes.

HOW HELPFUL DO YOU THINK STUDENTS SHOULD TALK WITH OTHER STUDENTS DURING THEIR DISSERTATION?

[Bar chart showing the frequency of responses from 0 to 10, with the highest response being "Very Helpful" at 10 times chosen.]
IS THERE ANYTHING IN PARTICULAR THAT YOU FEEL SHOULD BE CHANGED OR THAT STUDENTS SHOULD CHANGE IN THIS PROCESS, THAT CAN HELP THEM?

- Different guideline / template for those doing people vs those doing software/hardware (no people).
- Other than extending the time, or having them take a time management course, there's nothing I can think of
- Submitting a sample to the writing centre to be a must for all students to get some feedback about their academic writing.
- Getting more students into a webinar about the Dissertation. If we did these webinars, just for Computing students, while they are in their 6th or 7th module, it might be helpful
- Understanding of expectations of the dissertation process and their work with the DA
- Yes, allow the research question too be developed with the person who will end up supervising it.
- Find out in advance what is needed for local ethics

WHAT DO YOU THINK A STAR OR EXCELling STUDENTS DID DIFFERENTLY FROM OTHER STUDENTS, IN ORDER TO GET SUCH HIGH MARKS AND/OR AN AWARD?

- Time management increased: 9
- They knew their topic well: 6
- They collaborated with an organization: 2
- They chose a topic near to their heart: 7
- They were confident and worked hard: 9
- They were not afraid to ask hard or unique questions: 5
- They used the Library a lot: 6
- Their Literature Review was the key and strong: 6
- Please elaborate here: 3

OTHER ANSWERS

- They wrote well. I check that they know their topic before because all students come to the actual dissertation class with a topic and some type of proposal.
- When 'pushed' they responded well!
- Had strong skills in research methods and analysis and good written communication.
Plan for the unexpected; have contingency; write up as much as they can as they go along; aim for high quality peer reviewed literature.

In every course I encourage them to develop their database of academic literature and be thinking how this course might contribute.

that they will need to spend a significant amount of time on the project and will be responsible for their own time management.

They should know their topic well and be passionate about it.

It is a serious project that requires dedication and good time management.

Read about your topic and the research that has already been accomplished. Look for what others have accomplished in the research and their suggestions for new research. It can give you many clues on what you might want to do.

Choose the topic wisely. It has to be a topic that they are very interested in. Think about the practicality of the investigation. It will be most interesting to know if there is life on Mars, but it might not be practical for a Masters Degree and to complete in 40 weeks.

Be comfortable with dissertation process expectations prior to starting the dissertation and create a realistic timeline during the RMT module.

Read around the topic before you decide on it to see if you have enough literature to truly substantiate your research question and identify a gap in the literature.

Try to be critical in your approach to the literature review and Discussion of the findings.

That I care and want to help them complete the project.

They are approachable always by emails.

We really are here to guide you, but that you ultimately, are the one responsible for project. When you 'disappear' we can't help you.

I think when they start they already know a lot their DAs and other DAs. They have the WhatsApp group and Facebook and they learn a lot about the DAs. Yes, I have been told about that by a number of students. I also get email from students who request to work with specific DAs or at times NOT to work with certain DAs. I do not think knowing about the DA is an issue.

I am not only a DA and have other duties and wide array of expertise.

I can't think of anything at the moment. We do provide a biosketch.

That they should not be overwhelmed by a one to one interaction with their DA and that their DA is there to help and guide them.
Thank you,

FOR READING FURTHER ON HOW TO MAKE YOUR PROCESS MORE VALUABLE. THIS WAS A PLEASURE TO MAKE AND I HOPE THAT YOU ENJOYED READING ON SOME OF OUR TOP STUDENTS' TAKE ON THE DISSERTATION.

ALSO, THANK YOURSELF, FOR FURTHERING YOURSELF IN KNOWLEDGE.

MAY YOUR JOURNEY BE SUCCESSFUL, MAY YOUR JOURNEY BE GREAT.