

## Introduction of coursework in the VU PhD

VU is introducing a coursework component into its PhD program commencing in 2012. This initiative aligns with the trend across universities recognising the value for students of more structured elements as part of their research training experience. Such structured elements both assist in the systematic building of research-related skills, but also to foster a strong culture of intellectual engagement and peer learning and support for students.

The VU coursework has been designed with extensive input from research supervisors to support you in the initial stages of your doctoral degree studies, particularly focussing on assisting you in preparing for candidature and preparing you for practice as an independent researcher in the Australian and global research environment.

Two core coursework units will be offered to all PhD students who are commencing their studies in Semester 1 2012.

The two units are:

**ROP8001 Conceptualising and Contextualising Research**

**ROP8002 Research Integrity and Ethics**

Each unit involves approximately 20 hours of class participation together with additional reading and tasks to be completed outside class. Both learning activities and assessment tasks in these units are designed to contribute directly to the development of a high quality candidature proposal (and Ethics Application if required) in the context of your discipline, and to the success of your candidacy.

In Semester 1, 2012 the units will be offered in two class formats:

- A weekly class comprising 9 x 2hr classes per unit across 12 weeks (day and late afternoon options)

OR

- A one day intensive class per month per unit over 3 months

with all students coming together for a 1 day mini-conference in mid-July.

Weekly classes will commence in the week of 23/4/2012. Burst mode monthly intensives will commence in May.

If you are enrolled full-time in the PhD program you normally will be expected to complete both units in your first semester. If you are enrolled part-time you normally will be expected to undertake one unit per semester across your first year of study.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### PhD Coursework

#### Am I required to complete these units?

YES, all PhD students commencing in Semester 1 2012 are expected to enrol and complete the units. The only grounds for credit or exemption from this requirement are as follows:

- you can demonstrate that you have covered the equivalent content for one or both units to an equivalent standard through making a successful application for RPL/Advanced Standing. You might be eligible for this if you have previously successfully completed doctoral level coursework units covering similar content either at VU (eg. in the EdD or DBA) or at another university.
- you commenced your studies for the current semester **early** (eg. between Nov 2011 and end of January, 2012). In this case depending on your progress to date in preparing to present for candidature your supervisor may recommend that you be granted exemption through advanced standing for ROP8001.
- you are unable to come on campus to access one of the delivery options available in Sem. 1 2012. In such cases decisions will be made on a case by case basis in discussion with you and your supervisors.

Please note that applications for exemption may be made after enrolment in the units. A successful application for exemption will not involve any change to your study load for visa or Centrelink purposes.

#### Will how I perform in the units affect my progression to candidature?

NO, at least for this initial implementation of the coursework units, regardless of how you perform in the units you will be permitted to proceed to present for candidature. In line with University policy you have a maximum of 6 months EFT following the completion of the final unit in which to present for candidature. However, we would expect that most students would be prepared to present for candidature prior to this and as soon as their supervisors determine that their proposal is of a suitable standard.

#### Do I need to pay extra for the units?

NO, these two units are a required part of your PhD program and the arrangements you have for your fees or support for your fees will not involve any additional charge.

#### Will I still meet with my supervisor/s while I am studying the units?

YES. You will be expected to have regularly meetings with your supervisor/s and to continue to work closely with them while you are studying the units. The units have been designed to complement the work you are doing with your supervisors and you will be expected to be having regular

supervision outside class with your supervisors as well as regular interactions with other students and researchers in your area to maximise the benefit you get from the learning within each unit. In addition, much of the assessment for the units is designed to be directly able to be incorporated into your candidature proposal and related documentation (eg. ethics application, where required).

**Can I enrol in one or more of these units if I commenced in the PhD program in 2011?**

NO, unfortunately we do not have the capacity to make these units available to already enrolled students. However, there are other training and development workshops offered by the University that may assist you, so please discuss with your supervisors the other options that are available to assist you in preparing for candidature.

**Can I enrol in one or more of these units if I am commencing in the Masters by Research in Semester 1 2012?**

NO. These units have been designed to meet the needs of new students in the PhD program. There are other options that might be appropriate to you in your Masters by research program, including research preparation units of study offered within your Faculty for Masters (and, in some cases, honours) students, and other training and development workshops offered by the Office for Postgraduate Research. Please discuss your initial development needs with your supervisor/s to determine what might be appropriate for you.

## Planned Schedule for Class Modes and Groups – PhD Core Coursework Units\*

### ROP8001 – Conceptualising and Contextualising Research

Classes to be held in P134, Bldg P, FP Campus

Group	Date	Time
Group 1 – Mondays	Classes will be held on 23/4, 30/4, 7/5; 21/5, 28/5, 4/6; 18/6, 25/6, 2/7	9-11am
Group 2 – Mondays	Classes will be held on 23/4, 30/4, 7/5; 21/5, 28/5, 4/6; 18/6, 25/6, 2/7	4-6pm
Group 3 – Saturdays	Classes will be held on 28/4, 26/5, 23/6	9am-4pm

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All Groups:

Mini-conference (shared with ROP8002) – full day 20/7

### ROP8002 – Research Integrity and Ethics

Classes to be held in P134, Bldg P, FP Campus

Group	Date	Time
Group 1 – Thursdays	Classes will be held on 26/4, 3/5, 10/5; 24/5, 31/5, 7/6; 21/6, 28/6, 5/7	9-11am
Group 2 – Mondays	Classes will be held on 23/4, 30/4, 7/5; 21/5, 28/5, 4/6; 18/6, 25/6, 2/7	6.30-8.30pm
Group 3 – Saturdays	Classes will be held on 12/5, 2/6, 7/7	9am-4pm

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All Groups:

Mini-conference (shared with ROP8001) – full day 20/7

\* Please note that these times and dates are still provisional and we reserve the right to make amendments if these are required. All students will be informed of the confirmed dates and times by early April.

## Unit outlines

### ROP 8001 Conceptualising and Contextualising Research

This unit provides postgraduate researchers with the opportunity to conceptualise and contextualise their proposed research within appropriate disciplinary discourses and paradigms as they develop their candidature proposal. It will develop their capacity to recognise and contextualise research questions or hypotheses within those disciplinary frameworks, and provide them with the opportunity to explore theoretical frameworks and research methodologies and techniques in relation to their particular research area. Topics Include: disciplines and paradigms, engagement with the literature, epistemologies and the application of knowledge, and choosing theories and methods.

#### LEARNING OUTCOMES:

On successful completion of this unit, to the level required for an initial research candidature proposal, students should be able to:

1. formulate an original and significant research question or problem that their research will address
2. demonstrate an understanding of the epistemological basis of their research discipline(s)
3. identify and specify how they will apply key theories and methodologies that relate to their area of research
4. locate their research project within existing knowledge as represented in the literature
5. justify their choice of theories and research methods and techniques within their chosen disciplinary framework(s).

#### ASSESSMENT:

Research Paper	Focusing on location of the problem in relation to existing knowledge and research approaches in its field. 3,000 – 4,000 words.	60%
Other	Abstract outlining proposed research project. 150 words.	20%
Presentation	Oral presentation on research problem in mini-conference format.	20%

### ROP8002 Research Integrity and Ethics

This unit of study provides postgraduate researchers with the opportunity to gain advanced level understandings of integrity and ethics in relation to the conduct of research in a range of disciplinary contexts. It will develop the postgraduate researchers' capacities to engage in current debates about research ethics and integrity, and to identify and develop positions on critical issues in research integrity and ethics in relation to their own research project area. Topics include research governance and community ethics, research conduct, authorship and intellectual property, research limits, consent and confidentiality, animal research and commercialising research.

#### LEARNING OUTCOMES :

On successful completion of this unit, students should be able to:

1. demonstrate an advanced understanding of fundamental principles and current debates about ethics and integrity in research;
2. demonstrate familiarity with relevant national codes and university policies that impact on research practice and appropriate conduct in various research environments;
3. identify key areas of ethics and integrity that relate to their own area of research practice;
4. demonstrate ability to critically evaluate options and approaches to resolve issues in research integrity and ethics that may arise in their field of research; and
5. argue to defend a position in relation to research ethics and integrity as it relates to their own area of research practice and design of their own research project.

#### ASSESSMENT:

Portfolio	Reflective portfolio on ethics and integrity in research. 1000-2000 words.	20%
Research Paper	Paper on research ethics and integrity in relation to proposed research area. 2000-3000 words.	60%
Presentation	Poster presentation on an ethical or integrity issue in own field	20%