

Postgraduate Applications Assessment Criteria



This document sets out the criteria that the Institute for Sustainable Futures (ISF) will use to assess and rank postgraduate research student applications in 2011.

Places in the ISF postgraduate program are limited, highly sought after, and highly competitive. Transparent processes¹ are needed to assess and rank applicants in order to make offers of placements and scholarships.

At its September 2011 meeting, the Faculty Board of the Institute for Sustainable Futures (ISF) agreed to implement a well-specified qualitative (i.e. not numerical) assessment process that takes account of career stage, and considers both quality and impact, comprising four equally weighted criteria that have been carefully chosen to span a breadth of professional and academic experiences and potentials:

1. Professional Experience - strength & relevance relative to the candidate's opportunities (impact)
2. Research Output (quality and impact)
3. Research Proposal (quality)
4. Academic Merit (quality)

Please note that these criteria complement and extend the requirements in UTS' *Application for Admission and Scholarship HDR Form, last updated 24/08/11*. 'Professional Experience' and 'Research Output' relate to *Section 8 Relevant Research and Professional Experience*; 'Research Proposal' relates to *Section 5 Proposed Research Project/Topic*, and 'Academic Merit' relates to *Section 6 Academic Qualifications*. Applicants should follow the advice in the UTS application form and the accompanying guidelines for documentation requirements.

Applicants for ISF should prepare and submit an additional document entitled 'Response to ISF Assessment Criteria' which specifically addresses each of the four criteria as set out below.

The Faculty Board will review all applications, and together agree on the assessment and ranking of applicants.

Where necessary, interviews will be used to extend the information available to the Board e.g., to distinguish between applicants ranked equally on the above criteria.

1. PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE (IMPACT): STRENGTH AND RELEVANCE

Professional experience is primarily about the demonstrated impact of an applicant's work to date. The term 'professional experience' should be interpreted broadly, for example it may include both paid employment and volunteer roles. The strength of the professional experience will be assessed relative to the candidate's opportunities, including stage of career. The relevance of the professional experience will be assessed relative to the applicant's proposed field of study.

¹ Whilst scoring has always occurred at a Faculty level, the scoring system has, until now, been centrally determined i.e., historically there has been a single numerical scoring system across UTS. In 2011, the Graduate School Board agreed on a new arrangement: all postgraduate research student applications are now assessed and ranked at the Faculty level by a Faculty-determined process. For the purposes of administering its postgraduate program, ISF is a Faculty.

Applicants should give details of their professional experience in their CV as per the UTS application form requirements and make a case for its strength and relevance in their 'Response to ISF Assessment Criteria'.

2. RESEARCH OUTPUT (QUALITY AND IMPACT)

Research outputs will be assessed on their quality and impact relative to the candidate's opportunity. Research outputs include publications (e.g. research reports, contributions to industry publications, conference papers, academic journal papers, etc), and presentations (e.g., seminars, conferences, digital media, etc).

Applicants should include documentation of their research outputs as required by the UTS application form. In their 'Response to ISF Assessment Criteria', applicants should make clear their role in the research behind and the production of the outputs, because research is very often a team affair, and should consider and respond to the dimensions below in making a case for the quality and impact of their outputs.

Quality will be assessed according to

- i. the quality of the contribution, using our critical thinking scale (see Appendix), and with reference to the University of Adelaide's Research Skills Development Framework – see <http://www.adelaide.edu.au/clpd/rsd/> for details, including articles that explain the framework. Generally, ISF applicants will be expected to demonstrate 'good' to 'excellent' critical thinking skills, and Level IV or V research skills.
- ii. the quality of the location of the contribution e.g., the standing of the publication, conference, etc.

The impact of the research outputs will be assessed by considering what has changed as a result of releasing the research output. For example, how was the output received by in the organisation/sector/field; to what extent has it been taken up in the organisation/sector/field, cited by others, adopted in practice, etc.

3. RESEARCH PROPOSAL (QUALITY)

Guidelines for an ISF Research Proposal have been separately prepared, and are included in the Appendix for ease of reference. A research proposal is required at the screening stage of our application process. Applicants are at liberty to submit a modified and improved research proposal at this final stage of the application process. The quality of the final research proposal will be assessed using our critical thinking scale (see Appendix) and the University of Adelaide's Research Skills Development Framework – see above for links. Applicants should include a research proposal as a section within their 'Response to ISF Assessment Criteria'.

4. ACADEMIC MERIT (QUALITY)

Academic merit will be assessed on

- i. the extent of successfully completed studies (e.g., Bachelor's degree, Honours degree, Masters undertaken largely by coursework, Masters undertaken largely by research, etc
- ii. the demonstrated and verified level of attainment in those studies

Applicants should follow the guidance in the UTS application form for documentation of academic qualifications. Applicants may choose to include a section in their 'Response to ISF Assessment Criteria' if they wish to provide the panel with additional guidance on interpreting the extent and level of their academic achievements.

APPENDIX

CRITICAL THINKING ASSESSMENT FRAME

This frame has been adapted from material gleaned in pre-internet days from something that was then called the Centre for Critical Thinking in the USA. It provides a useful starting point for assessing Research Outputs and Outlines of Intended Research developed by prospective research students at ISF. Generally, candidates should demonstrate 'good' or 'excellent' critical thinking skills.

Excellent	Good	Sound	Shaky	Poor
Clear Well-reasoned Insightful Self-evaluation evident Raises important questions Recognises important assumptions Clarifies key concepts Identifies competing points of view Reasons from a clearly stated premise Shows sensitivity to important implications and consequences Shows that basic concepts and principles are internalised Gives an in-depth analysis of questions and problems	On the whole is clear, precise and well-reasoned, but without depth of insight Comprehension of basic concepts and principles. Demonstrates competence in self-evaluation Often raises questions and issues Recognises some questionable assumptions Sometimes identifies competing points of view. Demonstrates commitment to reason from clearly stated premises. Sound reasoning and problem-solving within a field	Mixed thinking and performance Inconsistently clear, precise and well-reasoned Doesn't display depth of insight. Inconsistent comprehension of and internalisation of basic concepts and principles Sometimes raises questions and issues Sometimes recognises key assumptions Inconsistently uses language in accordance with educated usage Sometimes identifies competing points of view Does not demonstrate a commitment to reason from a clearly stated premise. Inconsistent reasoning and problem solving within a field	Acquisition of knowledge by memorising rather than comprehension Thinking is typically unclear, imprecise and poorly reasoned Superficial or mistaken comprehension of basic concepts and principles. Does poorly in self-evaluation Superficially analyses questions and problems Only partially clarifies concepts Rarely identifies competing points of view Does not recognise his/her assumptions Insensitive to important implications and consequences Poor reasoning and problem-solving	Acquisition of knowledge by memorising rather than comprehension Regularly unclear, imprecise and poorly reasoned Basic terms and distinctions are regularly incorrectly used Mistaken comprehension of basic concepts and principles Does not raise questions and issues Does not recognise his/her assumptions Does not clarify concepts Does not use language in keeping with educated usage Confuses his/her point of view with the truth No understanding of a commitment to reason from clearly stated premises Oblivious to important implications and consequences Incompetent reasoning and problem-solving

RESEARCH PROPOSAL: ISF GUIDELINES

ISF requires prospective students to prepare a Research Proposal.

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance about what the Institute for Sustainable Futures expects to see in a Research Proposal.

Aim for about 5 pages. You will need to work hard to be pithy and concise, at the same time as demonstrating excellence in your critical thinking and communication skills, consistent with entry level requirements for research higher degree students.

Introduction and Significance (½ page)

- State your research problem first.
- Make a case for the significance and importance of your intended research. Why does it matter? To whom? What use will it be?

Background (1-2 pages)

- Explain the background to the research problem through a review of relevant literature that demonstrates a sound knowledge of past and recent work in your domain of interest. Be sure to include peer-reviewed literature in your reading and analysis, as well as popular and/or industry material if that is relevant.
- Summarise and critique the main findings reported by others

Proposed Research Questions and Contribution (½ -1 page)

- Link your findings from the literature review with your own ideas. That is, specifically, what will you ask and answer? Are there any hypotheses to be tested?
- What are the expected outcomes? What do you see as your contribution to the topic under study? What use will it be? To whom? In what ways?

Preliminary Research Design (1 page)

- Theoretical Framework: What are your preliminary ideas about theoretical frameworks that might guide your study?
- Methodology: What methodology fits well with your question and your theoretical framework e.g., Do you plan to set up a mainly quantitative or qualitative study or something in between? Are you thinking of using case studies, surveys, models or some other method?
- Data: What type of data will help you answer the questions? Where and how will you collect the data?

Budget (½ page)

- Think through the costs of your study and specify how you plan to cover them. Distinguish between your project costs (e.g., travel, fieldwork, software, etc) and your personal costs for undertaking postgraduate study (living allowance, tuition fees, etc).

References (½ -1 page)

- List your readings