

Joseph and the broken promises

This is a tale about the failure of the university to abide by its own regulations.

I recently submitted my final Ph.D. corrections. Pending my internal examiner signing off on my corrections, I will finally graduate. Unfortunately, although I was led to believe that I would graduate in December 2011, I will not be graduating until July 2012.

My area of study was the creative arts and I was awarded a UK-funded tuition and maintenance studentship. I was determined to complete my degree within the 3 years the studentship covered and made this goal clear to my supervisor(s) and the head of school, both in person and in writing on several occasions. As I understood, it was also beneficial to the department and the university as a whole if students completed their degrees within the timeline of such studentships and so I assumed I would receive support because of this. In May, 2011, just under three years from starting, I lodged my 'intention to submit' form indicating that I would submit the following September. I made it clear to my original supervisor, and his successor, my strong desire to graduate in December 2011. I submitted my thesis in September as planned and requested that my viva be as soon as possible in order to facilitate a December graduation.

Timeline

- 1) The university Ph.D. regulations state that "your thesis should be submitted not later than 15 September" for December graduation. I submitted on this deadline.
- 2) My viva was the end of October. I had only minor corrections to make and was given 3 months to complete them.
- 3) My list of corrections was emailed to me in early November, although I had begun to make corrections immediately following my viva.
- 4) Student records then informed me that to be eligible for December graduation both the examiners' report forms and the final hardbound copies of my thesis would need to be submitted by the last week of November.
- 5) I sent, via email to my internal examiner, most of my corrections in early November with the final ones by the third week.
- 6) After one or two email exchanges in November and nothing for all of December, I finally received a short email the third week of January from my internal supervisor stating he was "happy" with my corrections.

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| Submit in September = Graduate in December = FALSE ADVERTISING |
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How can the university have a regulation that states one *can* graduate in December if you submit in September, when in reality this is not true? There is simply no time for all parties to complete the necessary steps. My email pleas in November to student records, the student union, and my internal examiner to graduate in December were basically ignored or I was given some 'big brother speak' such as the following:

“Guidelines for corrections are there to ensure that students have sufficient time to correct any issues raised by the Viva committee. These guidelines do not take into consideration when the next graduation dates are. They also must consider when an external examiner can look at the final document and when a school examination board meets.”

In my case my corrections were being overseen by the internal examiner, which I assumed would speed up the process and give me hope of graduating in December. I submitted on time in September, my viva was held within 6 weeks, and the outcome of the viva was the ‘best case scenario’ where I had only minor corrections to make. Although I was given three months to make my corrections, I was able to complete them within three weeks. I should have graduated in December.

So, why didn't I graduate in December?

The short answer is because the university does not honour its own regulations.

I worked extremely hard to meet the Sept 15th deadline because I wanted to graduate in December. I actually went to meet the student records representative in person (I know, very old school) in my 3rd year to raise my concerns about wanting to graduate in December and the tight timeline. He made a very interesting admission, which resonated with me throughout the submission, viva and resubmission process. He basically told me that although the university requires the viva to be held within 6 weeks of submission, that student record cannot ‘force’ the academics to hold the viva within 6 weeks. So, I guess I was ‘lucky’ that my viva was held within 6 weeks. I also assume that this lack of control over the academics means that student records cannot ‘force’ the examiner(s) to review the corrections in a timely fashion so that a student might graduate on time. This has to be true because if student records had some power over the academics then they could have ‘made’ the internal examiner look over my corrections in November so there might have been some sliver of hope for me to graduate in December. But the timeline is ridiculous if you just look at dates:

Sept. 15th – submit thesis

end of Oct. – viva

last week of Nov. – deadline to receive final hardbound ‘approved’ thesis

second week of Dec. – graduation

There is barely time to complete the viva before the ‘final’ submission was due. It is unrealistic to expect the internal examiner to find the time to review the corrections unless he/she was dedicated to helping the student graduate in December (something mine was not) and expedite everything immediately. The only way anyone could graduate in December is if they have no corrections to make post the viva, but simply to reprint and hard bind their thesis. I can imagine that is a very rare occurrence and assume that the majority of students would have, as I did, minor corrections to make with the standard ‘three months’ to complete them.

Some people reading this may think: "What's the problem? You will graduate in July and in the end it doesn't matter when you graduate but rather that you completed your PhD." This is a valid point and is how I am trying to view the situation. However, nothing will change the fact that the university basically misled me and ignored their own regulations. They should not state in the written PhD regulations that if you submit on X you will graduate on Y. Or at a minimum they should qualify the statement by indicating that this is highly unlikely given the processes involved. The date you expect to graduate is a life-changing event and should not be taken lightly by the administration. Such important events as moving abroad, applying for jobs and taking up new positions are all affected by your graduation date. It just shocks me that the university does not seem to care about such an important aspect. The fact that I expected to graduate in December and successfully followed all the 'rules' in order to do so but now have to wait an additional seven months to graduate in July infuriates me. Having to look at my degree that says July 2012 instead of December 2011, as it should, will always soil the memory of my PhD studies at this university.