GUIDELINES FOR MARKING HONOURS THESES

1. Marking of Theses
The marking of Honours theses is undertaken by one examiner and one assessor. The examiner and the assessor may be drawn from members of the academic staff of the Law School, members of the academic staff of other Law Schools or members of the legal profession. The supervisor will normally be appointed as the assessor.

2. Honours Thesis Marking Guidelines
The Law School has adopted the following Honours Thesis Marking Guidelines.

Examiners should award marks for substance and presentation taking into account the following criteria:

(a) Substance
- logical development of argument
- clarity and general persuasiveness
- depth of research
- understanding of relevant policy issues
- comparative analysis (where appropriate)

(b) Presentation
- command of English
- observance of word limit
- appropriate use of quotations
- appropriate use of chapters, headings, subheadings, etc
- appropriate use of footnotes

Range of marks
All dissertations should be marked in the range between 65% and 85% unless the thesis is extraordinary in material respects. An examiner wishing to recommend a mark outside this range should expect to be called upon by the Board of Examiners to justify that mark. This range reflects the fact that the Honours students are in the top 20% of the graduating class and that, on average, they have obtained coursework grades in the distinction and high distinction range. A mark of 77% for an Honours dissertation would indicate that the work was in the mid-range of what is expected from an Honours dissertation.

Categories, Marks and Conceptual Criteria
The following conceptual criteria are indicative only, and the fact that an examiner may classify a thesis as belonging in a particular category and recommend a particular mark does not mean that the examiner must make a positive finding on every single criterion listed for that category. Higher achievement in some areas may be offset by a lesser achievement in others.

In general, theses that are recommended as belonging in the Outstanding or Excellent categories should be strong in all areas.

Outstanding
A mark of 86% or better
Substance: A thesis that is absolutely outstanding on all criteria; the area of the thesis is a challenging one; exploration and treatment of the topic is independent, original and insightful; outstanding theoretical framework and conceptual analysis; development of thesis is exceptional; research has uncovered or created novel material; mastery and strong critical evaluation of primary and secondary sources.

Presentation: Concise, clear and persuasive written expression; appropriate use and differentiation of chapters, paragraphs and sentences; use of footnotes and quotations is of the highest order; no flaws of grammar, spelling or punctuation.

Excellent
A mark of 80–85%
Substance: A thesis that is outstanding on most criteria; the area of the thesis is a difficult one; exploration and treatment of the topic is independent, original and insightful in part; theoretical framework and conceptual analysis is of a high calibre; thesis is well developed and argued; research has been thorough; mastery of primary and secondary materials.

Presentation: Concise, clear and persuasive written expression; appropriate use and differentiation of chapters, paragraphs and sentences; use of footnotes and quotations is very good; only a few minor blemishes in grammar, spelling and punctuation, but not so as to detract from overall presentation.

Very Good
A mark of 75–79%
Substance: A thesis that has a few excellent aspects (or, alternatively, is generally very competent, but has a few small defects of substance); the area of the thesis is a difficult one; treatment of the topic is occasionally original and insightful; theoretical framework and conceptual analysis is consistent and sound; display of very competent research skills; primary and secondary materials appropriately melded in development of the thesis.

Presentation: Generally sound written expression; appropriate use and differentiation of chapters, paragraphs and sentences; use of footnotes and quotations is sound; minor blemishes of grammar, spelling and punctuation.
Good
A mark of 70–74%
Substance: A thesis that has a few aspects that are very well done, but these are counterbalanced by some substantial defects; the area of the thesis is a common one and analysis is sound but derivative; treatment of the topic, while coherent, is only occasionally original; theoretical framework and conceptual analysis is sound but unimaginative; research has overlooked some important materials; primary and secondary materials are handled competently.
Presentation: Generally sound written expression; usually appropriate use and differentiation of chapters, paragraphs and sentences; use of footnotes and quotations is sound; occasional flaws in grammar, spelling and punctuation.

Modest
A mark of 66–69%
Substance: A thesis that has few aspects that are very well done; the area of the thesis is a common one and analysis is almost wholly derivative; treatment of the topic, while coherent, is rarely original, and the approaches are well-trodden; theoretical framework and conceptual analysis is sound but unimaginative; research has overlooked some important materials; occasionally materials are not well handled.
Presentation: Generally competent written expression; inappropriate use and differentiation of chapters, paragraphs and sentences; use of footnotes and quotations is overdone or underdone; significant flaws in grammar, spelling and punctuation.

Poor
A mark of 64% of less
Substance: A thesis that has no aspect that has been well done; the area of the thesis is a common one and analysis is pedestrian; treatment of the topic is occasionally incoherent, distorted or unbalanced; theoretical framework and conceptual analysis is lacking; research has not been of adequate standard; significant gaps in management of primary and secondary materials.
Presentation: Many errors in written expression; inappropriate use and differentiation of chapters, paragraphs and sentences; use of footnotes and quotations is poor; repeated flaws in grammar, spelling and punctuation.

3. Examination and Assessment of Dissertations
   It has been the usual practice for the examiner and the assessor to read the dissertation independently and to reach tentative views about the merits of the dissertation before discussion takes place between them.

   (a) Examiner’s Responsibilities
   The examiner is responsible for preparing a draft report on the dissertation. The draft report should canvass the strengths and weaknesses of the dissertation and the mark that the examiner proposes to recommend to the Board of Examiners. The draft report will normally be no more than one or two A4 pages of typewritten comments. The examiner must submit the draft report to the assessor.

   (b) Assessor’s Responsibilities
   The role of the assessor is to act as a check upon the examiner, to draw to the attention of the examiner any matter that has been undervalued, and to cause the examiner to reexamine if the assessor thinks that the examiner has overlooked something or has not awarded marks in accordance with the merit of the work. The assessor is not expected to act as the student’s advocate in agreeing a mark with the examiner.

   (c) The Final Report
   After considering the assessor’s comments, it is the examiner’s responsibility to submit a final report and recommended mark to the Chair of the Honours Committee. The content of the final report and the recommendation of the mark is the sole responsibility of the examiner. All reports must identify the examiner and the assessor, unless, in exceptional circumstances, the Honours Committee permits the report to be anonymous. The examiner’s report should state whether the examiner and assessor agree on the mark, and, if not, the extent of the disagreement and reasons therefor.

4. Receipt of Examiners’ Reports
   All examiners’ reports are tabled at the December meeting of the Board of Examiners. The Board of Examiners usually accepts the report and mark recommended by the examiner, but is not obliged to do so. The Board is responsible for recommending to the Faculty of Law which candidates should be awarded Honours and the relevant class.

   In the event that the examiner and assessor cannot agree on a mark, the examiner must report this to the Chair of the Honours Committee. The Board of Examiners may take such further steps as it sees fit in order to determine a mark for the thesis. This may include asking the Chair of the Honours Committee to send the thesis, and all documentation relating to it, for external appraisal by another examiner. Usually, the Board will accept the advice of the external examiner as to the merits of, and the appropriate mark for, the thesis. In doing so, care is taken to ensure that any advice relating to the mark is consistent with the Honours Thesis Marking Guidelines.

5. Availability of Reports/Appeals
   A student may obtain a copy of the examiner’s report that pertains to his or her thesis from the Reception Office of the Law School once the Faculty of Law has agreed to publish the results. A student is entitled to discuss the report with the examiner or assessor. In the event that a student is dissatisfied with the mark awarded, he or she may appeal against it.