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July 17, 2006

Dean Professor Brian Austin
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Dear Professor Austin,

I have recently completed a Ph.D. in Mathematics at Heriot-Watt University and despite several years of very enjoyable research, I am leaving with a bitter taste in my mouth. This is due to my final moments; the thesis submission and graduation process.

The submission of my thesis was without a doubt the most infuriating experience of my life. I have attempted to capture my nightmare so that you may be made aware of the reality of submitting a thesis at Heriot-Watt. Please consider my comments as constructive feedback.

Submitting a Ph.D. thesis marks the end of several years of research and should therefore be an enjoyable and relieving experience. Many other universities celebrate this by having helpful submissions staff go to great lengths in order to make the process as simple as possible, even providing "well done, but what's next?" literature upon initial and final submission. But not at Heriot-Watt.

My initial submission was a nightmare costing me three full days away from my new employment. The reason for this was because the staff refused to accept my thesis before they had received the "appointment of external examiner" form, *which they had lost!* I do not understand why the staff could not simply hold my thesis until they had obtained the replacement letter instead of requiring me to take another day off work. I politely brought this to their attention at the time and gained no sympathy from them.

Heriot-Watt is quite inconveniently located, the submissions desk staff should be more accommodating because of this. I made it quite clear that I would have to take time off from work in order to travel out so far.

Upon submission I innocently asked what I should expect next, to which I was told "you will get corrections from your examiner". **This information was completely inaccurate.** The process is such that an examination will be arranged with an external and an internal examiner. The staff clearly need to be educated on correct procedure. What I actually wanted to know was if I

would be updated when the thesis had arrived with the correct people. Given how anxious the student may be, I would suggest implementing a feedback system so that they may hear when the thesis is received by the examiners. To avoid this potential pitfall, I simply resorted to e-mailing a digital version of my thesis to my examiners.

I thought it best to bring my final version for a check-up before it was hard bound. It was very lucky that I did, because I was informed that I would have been asked to resubmit my (£90) set of theses and miss the submission deadline because the Acknowledgements page was at the back of my thesis, instead of the front! *To reject a thesis on these grounds is appalling and Heriot-Watt should be ashamed of themselves for being so pedantic.* It is standard practise in mathematics to place acknowledgements at the end of a publication. The rules and regulations are set up in order to meet library requirements for filing and to ensure that the correct people have signed off on a final document in order to avoid falsification. The rules **do not** exist so that the submissions staff can have a final say on whether a student graduates.

My final submission required me to take two more days off from work; first to have the check made and the second to actually submit (not counting a third to collect the bound thesis). But upon submission, the staff were not initially willing to process my thesis because I had not brought the correct British Library submission form. As this is a simple and trivial form to complete I simply suggested they print me a copy and I could fill it out there and then. They plain refused, despite me humiliatingly begging them as I had a meeting to attend and was on a tight schedule. By this stage I had returned my office keys and had to spend a considerable amount of time hunting down a computer and printer which I still had access to. I was completely shocked that anyone could be so unhelpful! May I suggest that the staff be instructed to help students as much as possible to the extent of printing off these peripheral forms; it is not much to ask. The staff's attitude was one of obstruction and I would go so far as to say they were just plain rude.

These issues combined with the hidden graduation costs of £190 = £20 (temporary binding) + £90 (final binding) + £45 (graduation) + £35 (gown hire), makes for a very unpleasant experience altogether. I would also like to point out that the letter confirming graduation "subject to the senate" arrived only two days prior to my graduation day! This means that the above expenses, plus family travel and board, where all for a speculative graduation! This lack of proper notice is absurd.

I am very displeased with the service Heriot-Watt's thesis submissions staff provide and I would strongly suggest that the following main points be addressed so that future generations of students do not have the same bitter experience as I have:-

- Implement a feedback system. An e-mail to alert students that their thesis

has been sent to (preferably received by) their examiner would be sufficient. Further feedback, details and sufficient notice for the graduation process and ceremony should also be provided.

- Train the staff on how to deal with the public and educate them on the mental and financial state of the students they are dealing with.
- Demote the frivolous points of the thesis submissions rules to “recommendations” in order to avoid ridiculous rejections.
- Make the process of submission an enjoyable final moment at Heriot-Watt, not one that taints several years of enjoyable research.

Failing to allow doctorate students to complete the submission process in a convenient and enjoyable manner will only lead to a smearing of Heriot-Watt’s reputation and is therefore a serious issue.

Yours sincerely,

Samuel Halliday