Changes in Examination Regulations to the University Gazette – Social Sciences Division

Social Sciences Board

Approved by the Teaching Audit Committee on 31 May 2013

Title of programme
MSc in Social Science of the Internet

Brief note about nature of change:
Changes to the dissertation word limit from a maximum of 10,000 words to a maximum of between 10,000-15,000 words in order to accommodate more qualitative thesis topics.

Effective date
1 October 2013

Location of change
Examination Regulations 2012

Detail of change
1. P.765, delete l.25-31 and substitute

   “G. A thesis of between 10,000 and 15,000 words on a topic within the subject of the course, to be specified jointly by supervisor and student, and approved by the programme director. Two written copies of the thesis must be delivered to the Examination Schools, High Street, Oxford, by noon of the weekday on or nearest to the 1st of August of the year in which the degree is to be taken. Successful candidates will be required to deposit a copy of their thesis in the Oxford Internet Institute Library.”.

Explanatory Notes
The Oxford Internet Institute (OII) has been offering an MSc in Social Science of the Internet since 2009. Given the relative youth of this degree programme the department is constantly monitoring the efficacy and fairness of the course design and are particularly
receptive to constructive feedback from student evaluations and comments from our Board of Examiners. One point of concern, consistently over the past three and a half years, has been the brevity of the thesis component, which currently has an upper word limit of 10,000 words. In particular, students, supervisors and members of the Board of Examiners have expressed a concern that this current word limit may unfairly penalise students carrying out qualitative research, as it makes it difficult to offer a rich picture of the data gathered using lengthy quotes from interviewees, detailed analysis of coding categories etc.

In this light, the department wishes to allow for the submission of theses between 10,000 and 15,000 words in length. The justification for retaining such a range, rather than a single upper limit, is that supervisors have emphasised that students undertaking heavily quantitative or formal theoretical analysis (for example in Internet Economics) should not feel obliged to increase the length of their thesis in turn. This point would be stressed in all course materials and guidance.