External MS Part II Briefing Notes

These notes are to give you some guidance only, on making arrangements for external Part II projects. They are not exhaustive and no two cases are quite the same. There are many pitfalls to making such arrangements and whilst it is your own responsibility to organise external projects yourselves, it is important that you keep the Part II Project Organiser (currently Dr Keyna O’Reilly) in the loop to offer guidance, to ensure that the arrangements (host institution, project) are appropriate for an Oxford Part II, and to help protect your interests if necessary.

Responsibility for Organising External Projects

Making arrangements for carrying out a Part II project outside of Oxford is entirely the student's responsibility, although we can of course offer some guidance and help and you should be keeping the Part II Project Organiser in the loop. Although external projects are allowed, we do not necessarily encourage them, and particularly not for all students. Whilst carrying out a project abroad is an attractive addition to one's CV, you should be aware that there are risks involved in such projects: we may not know the external supervisor or how well respected they are, we cannot guarantee that an external supervisor fully understands what is required of the Part II, we cannot keep a constant eye on the progress of the student or their project, etc. Given those risks, we will only allow a student to carry out their project externally if we feel that the external supervisor is appropriately senior, the project is appropriate for the length and standard of Part II, and that the college tutor, the Part II Organiser and the appointed internal Oxford academic supervisor feel that the student is academically able and sufficiently self-motivated and strong to work well away from Oxford.

Project Length

The Part II year is longer than usual. Projects must be at least 37 weeks long and are carried out over "extended" terms which are longer than the normal 8 week terms. The Part II year starts in mid-September and runs until the end of June (The thesis is handed in on Wednesday of 7th week of Trinity Term). All Part II students must spend the whole of Trinity term of their Part II in Oxford, and so you would need to return to Oxford shortly after Easter, but not later than Monday of 0th week of Trinity Term.

Assessment

The thesis is key to the assessment of Part II. The external institution is not required to provide any formal assessment of the project, but all supervisors are requested at the end of
the project to make some comments on the way the student has dealt with the project, if any difficulties arose, how much help they had etc. After submitting the thesis you will be subject to a viva voce exam in week 9 or 10 of Trinity Term. In addition to the thesis all Part II students are required give a presentation (early Trinity Term), but the presentation does not count towards the exam mark.

Lecture Courses
The Part II is a research project and you are not required by us to sit any lecture courses, but we do encourage Part II students to attend some lectures that might be of use to their projects or be of general interest. In Oxford these often take the form of postgraduate lecture courses or departmental seminars/colloquia for instance. Part II students carrying out their projects in Oxford may be required to attend lectures associated with training for the use of certain experimental techniques, e.g. electron microscopy, or safety lectures. Essentially then you would be at the host institution there to do research, but it is likely that host institutions will take a similar approach to us and you should attend any courses necessary, as required by the host institution, for training on instrumentation and safety etc.

Publication
There is no requirement to produce published works from your Part II project, although some research publications are produced after projects have been completed, and the examiners may well consider if the work is publishable.

Confidentiality and Intellectual Property
It is possible that your host institution will be concerned with issues of confidentiality and intellectual property (IP). For instance your project may be part of a large research programme that has restrictions on what information can be released, or you may be working as part of a team that invents something that could be of commercial benefit to the host institution. It is better to avoid such projects if possible, but if these issues are apparent then a research contract will need to be drawn up between the host institution and the University of Oxford which will establish what measures need to be taken to preserve confidentiality and to assign the ownership of any IP that might be developed during your project, and to protect your interests in ensuring that you are not prevented from fulfilling the requirements of your degree. Such negotiations can be very protracted and it is best that we know if this is likely to be an issue at the earliest possible stage.
Oxford Academic Supervisor
Given that you must return to Oxford for the final term, it is likely that the time spent abroad would be for practical work and reviewing the literature, whilst the bulk of the thesis will be written once the student has returned. As a result, and to ensure that the student's progress is being monitored continually, we insist that an internal (Oxford based) supervisor is appointed to the project. The internal supervisor should be knowledgeable in the field in which the student will be working. It is up to the student to find an internal supervisor that is willing to oversee their progress remotely, and to give guidance during the preparation of the thesis (of course the student should keep in contact with the external supervisor during this period). We will also ask the internal supervisor to comment on the suitability of the project in the first place. If an internal supervisor cannot be found, the project will not be approved.

Project Management
All Part II students, including those carrying out external projects, are required to complete a series of project management forms during the Part II. This process is to encourage you to think periodically about your objectives and progress. You should discuss the completion of these forms with both your external and internal supervisors.

Costs
Any costs associated with carrying out the project externally (e.g. travel, maintenance, health insurance, course fees required by the host institution) must be met by the student, although we can offer some assistance in applying for funding to contribute towards the costs. Your college will still require fees for the full year.

It is quite possible that your project will be carried out at an institution at which students from other Oxford departments are also spending periods of time. Those students may be at that institution as part of a specific scheme and may be in receipt of funding from Oxford (University, Department, College) under the terms of that particular scheme. You should not expect to receive similar funding. One such example is an exchange scheme between Oxford and Princeton. A small number of Oxford departments, e.g. Chemistry, participate in an Oxford-Princeton undergraduate exchange scheme. The Department of Materials does not participate in this scheme, but has previously participated in an Oxford-Princeton research exchange scheme for which funding no longer exists.
A Final Word
By the end of MT you should be aiming to have identified a host institution, identified a supervisor at the host institution, identified an internal Oxford academic supervisor, have agreed an outline project description.

Checklist
- Identify host institution.
- Identify supervisor at host institution.
- Inform the Part II Organiser of your plans (he will seek the opinion of your College tutor on your suitability for an external project).
- Approach host institution. Make the host supervisor aware of the MS Part II Course Handbook, so that s/he can familiarise themselves with the course requirements.
- Obtain one or more project descriptions (one side of A4 for each project should be sufficient).
- Identify an internal Oxford academic supervisor.
- Discuss project descriptions with Part II Organiser, College Tutor and Oxford supervisor.
- Put your proposed host institution supervisor in contact with the Part II Organiser to discuss any confidentiality/IP issues.
- Identify personal costs for the project, and apply for supporting funds.

Dr Keyna O'Reilly (Part II Projects Organiser), August 2012