PhD thesis quality: Predicting examiner recommendation as one measure of thesis quality

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In our previous work, codes developed from the text of 804 examiner reports on 301 PhD theses were factor analysed to form five separate constructs: positive summation, negative summation, formative evaluation, prescription and dialogic elements. The constructs were developed from four areas of coding – examiner and process commentary, assessable areas covered, dialogic elements and evaluative elements – found in the examiner reports. The dataset is now complete with 2121 examiner reports being available on 804 PhD theses across all discipline areas at eight Australian universities.

Since then, we have refined the coding scheme to allow us to distinguish between positive, neutral and negative comment on the assessable areas covered, and we have added these codes to the dataset. The robustness of the five constructs are now being tested against the enriched dataset. The newly-developed constructs will then be combined with a range of candidate and examiner information and entered into a regression equation as explanatory variables with examiner recommendation as the response variable. The regression equation will be multilevel with examiner reports at level 1, candidates at level 2 and discipline at level 3. The relative importance of each variable that is significant for examiner recommendation and the overall explanatory power of the model will be reported and discussed.