Difference between MPhil and LLM Dissertation

The main differences between MPhil and LLM Dissertation are 1) length and 2) expectation of scholarly contribution.

1) Length

LLM Dissertation is significantly shorter in length as compared to a MPhil dissertation. The length of a 9-credit LLM Dissertation is 8,000~10,000 words (i.e., a typical peer-reviewed law journal article of the UK tradition), while that for a 18-credit LLM Dissertation is 16,000~20,000 words (i.e., a typical U.S. law review article). A MPhil dissertation typically is around 30,000 to 40,000 words.

The difference in length reflects the breadth and depth of analysis. It is not uncommon to find a well written 9-credit LLM Dissertation that simply focus on a selected single legal issue, while a 18-credit LLM Dissertation typically have to either holistically engage several inter-related issues on the controversy, or have in-depth comparative/interdisciplinary approaches to the core legal issue. A MPhil dissertation is more akin to a short PhD dissertation, with the accompanying expectation of a well-grounded theory of research methodologies, comprehensive literature review and more substantial analysis and arguments when compared to LLM Dissertation.

2) Scholarly Contribution

While both the MPhil dissertation and LLM Dissertation aim to cultivate original legal scholarship, the expectation differs. For MPhil dissertation, original scholarly contribution worthy of publication is the benchmark for a pass and the mandatory criteria for award of the degree.

For LLM Dissertation, an A grade (A+, A, A-) requires original scholarly contribution worthy of publication, but one can still pass the course (and obtain course for satisfaction of degree requirement) without it. In this regard, there is no difference between the grading standard for 9-credit LLM Dissertation and 18-credit LLM Dissertation beyond those inevitably connected to length (i.e., more content/analysis for 18-credit LLM Dissertation).

General Office
Department of Law

13 January 2017