

### Key Points

**This page is only a summary and must be read in the context of this entire document**

**Aim:** The aim of the project is to provide you experience in the practicalities of conducting research and communicating its results in written form in an applied area relevant to organisational psychology. Research in organisational settings is encouraged, but laboratory studies using volunteers from the general public can be justified, e.g., evaluation of a general training method. Beyond the specific content of the project, it is aimed at improving your formal writing skills and your ability to critically understand research literature you may use in your professional career.

**Supervision:** Each project has a primary supervisor and a co-supervisor, who liaise with the Masters Committee. The co-supervisor may be another member of the School, an academic elsewhere in UNSW (e.g., ASB), or a suitably qualified psychologist in an external organisation. The primary supervisor, however, is entirely responsible for supervision at the stage of analysis of results and writing of the thesis.

**Ethics:** You must have written ethical clearance for your project before you start data collection. For the application form and instructions, go to <http://www.psy.unsw.edu.au/research/> and scroll down.

**Thesis Due Date:** **4pm Friday Week 12 (21 October 2016)**; extensions are rarely granted and are at the discretion of the Masters Committee. See the Timetable section for further milestones in producing the thesis.

**Thesis Length:** The thesis (abstract, methods, results, discussions.) should be around 7,500 words. The word count excludes references and appendices. The aim of this restriction is to refine your thinking about professional communication away from the premium placed on thoroughness and complexity at the honours level toward the succinct presentation and sharp focus required in most report writing and other professional writing in organisational settings.

**Thesis Format:** For more details regarding this topic please see the section headed "Preparing your thesis" at the end of this document. The thesis should be prepared as "an article suitable for submission to a peer-reviewed international scientific journal." As a rule, the format of the thesis should conform tightly to the standards of the American Psychological Association for submission of a manuscript, which is effectively the world-wide standard for psychological publications. See in particular Chapter 2 of the APA Publication Manual, 6th Edition (2009) regarding manuscript preparation.

**Feedback on drafts:** The supervisor is permitted to read the introduction, methods and results section twice before submission. The supervisor (and co-supervisor) are not permitted to provide feedback on the discussion section of the thesis.

**Marking:** The thesis is marked by two members of the academic staff of the School. The supervisor and co-supervisor are not involved in marking the thesis.

## Nature of Research

### Area

The project may be carried out in any area relevant to organisational psychology. Research into basic psychological processes (e.g., learning, attitude change, decision-making) is appropriate, provided the organisational significance of the findings is clearly indicated. Theoretical or historical analyses are generally not appropriate since the intention of the project is to provide experience in the practicalities of carrying out a research or evaluation project in an applied area. In every case, the topic and approach should be developed under the guidance of your thesis supervisor.

### Design

A wide variety of research strategies may be employed to meet the specific scientific aims of the project. Common strategies include experimental, quasi-experimental and correlational designs. Qualitative data may be generated in some projects, requiring specific strategies to condense and organise the results and to allow conclusions to be drawn. Often quantitative measures may be extracted from qualitative data (e.g., ratings by judges, counts of word usage).

Single case designs and case series would normally be presented as part of a larger study in order to illustrate a particular issue. Research based on existing data sets may be permitted where 1) the question of interest is best addressed by existing data, and 2) other aspects of the research process (e.g., theoretical analysis, data analysis) can be expanded to compensate for the absence of any contribution to the procedure and data collection. In all cases, care should be taken to ensure that there is sufficient scope in the project to satisfy thesis requirements. For example, norming of a psychological test would not be sufficient for a thesis.

### Participants

Participants (aka “subjects”) may be drawn from a variety of organisational settings or, where appropriate, the general public. For example, projects on training methods often rely on volunteers from the general public. Access to sufficient participants from the desired population within the time frame of the project is crucial to its viability. The School cannot guarantee access to the targeted population, although assistance will be given where possible.

### Investigators

Often it is beneficial for a research project to be conducted in collaboration with other researchers. Firstly, it may be possible to work within an ongoing project, either within or outside of the School. While this arrangement may reduce the scope for determining the aims of the project, and to some extent the design and procedure employed, these costs may be offset by other benefits such as access to participants or payment of a salary. In most instances, it should be possible to play a role in determining some aspects of design and implementation, and a primary role in data analysis. Where aspects of the design have been constrained, it is important to spell these out in the thesis, provide a critical analysis of the design, and consider alternative approaches that might have been used.

A second example of collaborative research involves contracting to conduct a project commissioned or requested by some organisation. The benefits of such an arrangement are similar to those described above, but there is generally greater scope in determining the research strategy to meet the specified aims.

Finally, it may be advantageous in some projects for the research to be carried out by a small group (e.g., 2-3) of Masters Students. This arrangement is particularly useful where a great deal of data collection and analysis is involved. Design and implementation of the project is shared, but each student writes an independent thesis.

## **Supervision**

Each project has a primary supervisor and a co-supervisor, who liaise with the Masters Committee. The supervisor and co-supervisor are normally members of the academic staff of the School. However, one (but not both) may be a person with an academic or research position in another University unit (e.g The Australian School of Business). In many projects, particularly those conducted in organisations external to the University, another person may have a major role in overseeing the design and conduct of the research. In such cases there should be close cooperation between the person concerned and the supervisor. The academic supervisor, however, is entirely responsible for supervision at the stage of analysis of results and writing of the thesis.

## **Statistical consultation**

The supervisor has primary responsibility for advising on research design and data analysis. However, a supervisor who feels that additional advice is necessary can organise a meeting with an appropriate statistical consultant. Both the supervisor and student should attend such a meeting.

## **Resources**

*Computing:* [Computing facilities](#) are available in several areas of the School. Students are given their own Psychology account and are assigned a print quota. Students have access 24 hours a day/7days a week to these facilities.

In addition there are two bookable labs (142 and 1125) which are available to conduct research. Computer labs are booked through Camilla Leung ([c.y.leung@unsw.edu.au](mailto:c.y.leung@unsw.edu.au)).

*Equipment:* Students may use School equipment available for loan from the Technical Support Unit in Mathews Room 138 (e.g., tape recorders, slide projectors), tests available from the School's Test Library (Mathews building Level 8, with the Psychology Clinic), and equipment under the control of their supervisor.

*Consumables:* Normally, photocopying and other consumables are paid for by the student or by other parties involved in the project.

## **Ethical Approval**

All research must comply with Commonwealth ethical standards, no matter what the source of your data. Ethics approval is required even if secondary data analysis is conducted. See <http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/guidelines/publications/e35>.

First, discuss the ethical issues that may arise in connection with your research with your supervisor. Then, you may obtain the application form and associated instructions at <http://www.psy.unsw.edu.au/research/research-resources> and scroll down.

Before you can commence recruiting participants, you and your supervisor must receive email advice from the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research) stating approval and assigning the project a file number. For projects approved through Psychology's Human Research Ethics Advisory Panel (HREAP), the file number will be a four digit number.

If you are being supervised by a member of another school, typically the Australia School of Business (ASB) you may apply for ethics approval through either the Psychology HREAP or the HREAP relevant to that school. Most students and their supervisors find it easier to apply through the Psychology HREAP.

In the case of collaborative research, it is important to clarify in advance the nature of the research relationship – for example, the issue of “ownership” of the project and of the data. In some cases it may be appropriate to spell out these issues in writing.

### **Publications**

The thesis is to be presented as a journal article suitable for publication in a specific journal and students are encouraged to submit their research for publication in that journal and to present the research at relevant conferences. Order of authorship should be determined by the degree of contribution to the final product, including design, data collection, analysis and writing of the manuscript.

### **Timetable**

Students are normally required to enrol in PSYC7126 Research Thesis (Organisational) 1 in Semester 1 and PSYC7127 Research Thesis (Organisational) 2 in Semester 2 and submit the thesis by the end of Semester 2 of that year.

The timetable for research projects is outlined below. Applications for extensions will only be considered by the Masters Committee when:

- The application is in writing,
- The delay is due to circumstances beyond your control (e.g., illness, equipment breakdown, constraints on collaborative research),
- The circumstances are documented (medical certificate, statement by supervisor), and
- The circumstances are notified as soon as they arise.

It is in your interest to control the scope of the project so as to be able to meet the research deadlines as well as other commitments (e.g., coursework, field placements).

### **Stage 1**

*Late October/early November:* Complete form detailing preferences for topics and supervisors and return it to the [Administrative Officer \(Postgraduate Support\)](#). The School attempts to achieve an equitable distribution of staff thesis supervision loads across Fourth Year, and Clinical, Forensic and Organisational Masters. In order to achieve this it will not usually be possible for all students to receive their first preference.

*December-February:* In December the School will write to you advising of supervision and co-supervision arrangements. Liaise closely with your supervisor in designing the project, including finalising the topic, determining relevant theoretical background, designing the procedure and sourcing of participants. Write a research proposal (8-10 pages) including a critical review of the relevant literature, the specific research questions of interest, the procedure to be used, and the proposed analysis. At this time it is essential to identify research partners involved in data collection and it serve their commitment letters of support are required as part of your ethics procedures.

### **Stage 2**

*1 April:* Submit a research proposal to the Masters Committee via Moodle. You will find the “Thesis Proposal Submission” section under PSYC7126. The proposal should have approximately a 500-word statement of the aims and their scholarly rationale, plus a 500-700 word description of the method and proposed data analysis. Do not neglect specifying your dependent variables. In formulating your proposal, please be as specific as possible. However, keep in mind the proposal is just a plan that may have to be adjusted along the way; it is not a binding contract.

*By 22 April:* After submitting the proposal, arrange a meeting with your supervisor, co-supervisor, and any other relevant parties to discuss the proposal. (Unlike previous years, there is no need to wait for approval from the School.) This meeting is meant to assist you, not evaluate you. For example, students – and sometimes supervisors – want guidance on the scope of their research, its design, dependent variables, and analysis. The student may also wish to talk over their ethics application during this meeting. Nearly all ethics approvals for MPsych (Org) theses are obtained using the application form for the Human Research Ethics Advisory Panel. This form can be found on the School website in the lower right of Research Resources page <http://www.psy.unsw.edu.au/research/research-resources>.

*Late June:* You should check in with your supervisor in June (if you are not already in regular contact) to ensure that progress is satisfactory. If your supervisor is concerned that progress is unsatisfactory, your project will be reviewed by the Program Director and, in consultation with your supervisor and co-supervisor, a course of action will be decided to ensure completion of your project within the designated time. A second panel meeting can be arranged at this time to discuss progress and deal with any problems that may have arisen if you or your supervisors believe this would be of benefit. By this time, the literature review should be completed, data collection is well underway, and a draft of the Method section is complete.

*August:* Data collection should be completed, a draft of the Introduction written, and analysis commenced.

*Late September:* Final draft of introduction, methods and results sections available for supervisor.

*4pm Friday Week 12 (21 October 2016):* Thesis Submitted.

## Preparing your Thesis

1. The thesis required is a journal article suitable for submission to a specific refereed journal. The journal should be a well-respected journal publishing standard-length articles. In your proposal you should indicate which journal you have in mind and this should be approved by your supervisor. After you have determined the topic of your thesis and the appropriate journal you should obtain a copy of the “Instructions for Authors” for that journal. Often such instructions are printed in each copy of the journal, but sometimes a separate document must be obtained from the journal publisher.

For many journals, the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (6<sup>th</sup> ed. 2009) will be your bible in the preparation of the manuscript. See <http://apastyle.org/> for further details.

The length of the thesis should be approximately 7,500 words (including abstract but excluding references and appendices). Markers will give credit for clean and concise writing.

Copies of recent Masters theses written as a journal article are available from the School’s Test Library (Mathews building Level 8, with the Psychology Clinic), via Test Librarian [Caterina Manea-Ward](#). Given that your Fourth Year Honours thesis will normally have been written in the conventional format for an empirical dissertation you are advised to look at submitted Masters Theses to see what is required.

2. Two copies of the thesis should be submitted in the standard covers supplied by the School [via the [Administrative Officer \(Postgraduate Support\)](#)]. You must also submit an e-copy of the thesis as well as the data collected in either SPSS or Excel to your supervisor, and an e-copy of the thesis only to the [Administrative Officer \(Postgraduate Support\)](#). After marking, one copy is retained by the supervisor while the second is available to be collected by you. You should make as many additional

copies as you may need for your own purposes. For example, any organisation or individual who was particularly helpful to you in your research may appreciate receiving a copy of the thesis.

The only ways in which your submitted thesis should be different from a manuscript which you would submit for publication in your selected journal are described below. Examples of the first few pages of your thesis can be found on Moodle under course PSYC7126. See the file entitled “Examples of thesis front pages” under the Course Info tab. They include:

- A copy of a letter to a journal indicating length of the manuscript, the number of figures and tables. A short paragraph should cover the main findings of your study.
- A title page indicating that what follows is a thesis submitted for your degree.
- The **Certificate of Originality** shown below (and included in the examples of thesis front pages).
- Figures and tables, etc., either (a) in the main body of the text rather than at the end of the document, or (b) at the end of the text as per a normal journal submission.
- A separate Acknowledgments page if you wish. Long and sentimental tributes should be avoided, but you may feel that you wish to include acknowledgments which are slightly longer than those normally given within the manuscript, although the latter should be included as appropriate.

Apart from these differences, the thesis should be exactly as required for the top copy of the manuscript to be submitted to the journal you have chosen.

If the journal does not use APA formatting, defer to this formatting for the purpose of preparing your thesis and adjust before submitting to the preferred journal

### **Certificate of originality**

The following statement, signed by the student, should be included on a separate page between the title and acknowledgment pages:

I declare that:

This assessment item is entirely my own original work, except where I have acknowledged use of source material such as books, journal articles, other published material, the Internet, and the work of other student/s or any other person/s. This assessment item has not been submitted for assessment for academic credit in this, or any other course, at UNSW or elsewhere.

I understand that:

The assessor of this assessment item may, for the purpose of assessing this item, reproduce this assessment item and provide a copy to another member of the University. The assessor may communicate a copy of this assessment item to a plagiarism checking service (which may then retain a copy of the assessment item on its database for the purpose of future plagiarism checking).

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Student's Name \_\_\_\_\_

## **Assessment**

You will receive a percentage mark and corresponding grade for your thesis. It contributes 25 percent to the overall grading for the Master of Psychology (Organisational) degree.