

THE UNIVERSITY OF NEW SOUTH WALES
SCHOOL OF PSYCHOLOGY

Guide to Research Projects for Master of Psychology (Organisational) - 2009

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., AGSM), 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/resources/researchparticipation.html>

Thesis Due Date: 23 October 2009; 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 (introduction, methods, results, discussions, and appendices) should be between 9,000 and 10,000 words. 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. In fact, you should aim to place the bulk of your literature review into an appendix, so that the introduction will be approximately 1,500 words or less.

Thesis Format: 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.

Marking: The thesis is marked by two members of the academic staff of the School. The supervisor is 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.

First, 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 ready access to participants. In most instances, it should be possible to play a role in determining some aspects of design and its implementation. To gain the maximal benefit, students should take 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.

Third, it may be advantageous in some projects for the research to be carried out by a group of 2-3 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.

The completed thesis is marked by two members of the academic staff of the School. The supervisor is not involved in marking 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: A Masters computer lab is located in Mathews Room 1101. Additional computers and printing facilities are in Mathews Rooms 209, 209A and 422. 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 3 bookable labs (201, 1002 and 1022) which are available to conduct research.

Computer labs are booked through Camilla Leung in the Psychology General Office.

Equipment: Students may use School equipment available for loan from the Technical Support Unit in Mathews Room 148 (e.g., tape recorders, slide projectors), tests available from the Test Library in Mathews Room 803, 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 issues

All research must comply with University ethical standards, no matter what the source of your participants. For all research, you must go to

<http://www.psy.unsw.edu.au/research/resources/researchparticipation.html>

Details on ethics approval are available here including the application form. You must have an approved and signed copy of the application form back from the Head of School before you can commence your research. In addition to School approval, you may need approval from other bodies. Your supervisor will have details.

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, whether part-time or full-time, are normally required to enrol in PSYC7126 Research Thesis (Organisational) 1 (Semester 1) and PSYC7127 Research Thesis (Organisational) 2 (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:

1. the application is in writing,

2. the delay is due to circumstances beyond your control (e.g., illness, equipment breakdown, constraints on collaborative research),
3. the circumstances are documented (medical certificate, statement by supervisor), and
4. 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 2008/2009

November 10: Complete form detailing preferences for topics and supervisors and return it to the Psychology General Office. 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: The School will write to you advising of supervisor and co-supervisor. A meeting or exchange of e-mails with your supervisor before Christmas would be advisable to start your reading on your topic. You should maintain weekly communication with your supervisor throughout the year until the thesis is submitted.

February: Start meeting with your supervisor with the aims of designing your project, finalising the topic, carrying out a literature review, and designing the procedure. Write a research proposal (1,500 words) giving a brief theoretical background, the specific questions of interest, the procedure to be used, and the proposed analysis.

April: Submit your research proposal of no more than 1,500 words to the Master's Committee via the Psychology General Office (Mathews Building Room 1011). Your proposal will be reviewed by academic staff. If there are substantial issues to resolve, a meeting with your supervisor, co-supervisor, and any other parties involved in the research may be needed to finalise the proposal.

Stage 2 2009

July 1: By this time, data collection should be well underway, and a draft of the Method section should be completed.

September 4: Data collection should be completed, a draft of the Introduction written, and analysis commenced.

October 9: Final draft of thesis available for supervisor.

October 23: 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. However, unless these instructions indicate otherwise, 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. These standards can be found in *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (5th ed. 2001). You can obtain a copy from the APA Order Department, P.O. Box 2710, Hyattsville MD 20784, USA. Although the manual is not available online, a Google search will reveal many websites with instructions that cover APA format.

The thesis (introduction, methods, results, discussions, and appendices) should be between 9,000 and 10,000 words. 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. In fact, you should aim to place the bulk of your literature review into an appendix, so that the introduction will be approximately 1,500 words or less.

Copies of recent Masters theses written as a journal article are available from the School Thesis Library (Mathews Building Room 803). 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. This is arranged through the Psychology General Office. 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 Test Librarian (Heather Proudfoot). 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.
3. The only way in which your submitted thesis should be different from a manuscript which you would submit for publication in your selected journal is in the following:
 - You should include a title page indicating that what follows is a thesis submitted for your degree.
 - You should then include the **Certificate of Originality** shown below.
 - You may also include 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.

After these initial pages, what follows should be exactly as required for the top copy of the manuscript to be submitted to the journal you have chosen.

- **As with any journal submission, you should include a covering letter to the editor of the 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

Once marked 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.