



## School of Psychology

# 2018-2019 Master of Psychology (Clinical) Guide to Research Projects

### **Nature of research**

#### **Area**

Research projects may be carried out in any area that is relevant to clinical or abnormal psychology. Research into normal psychological processes (e.g., memory, emotion, attitude change) is appropriate, provided that the project is designed to throw light on some abnormal or clinical issue (e.g., amnesia, depression, cognitive therapy). Clinical research may be concerned with assessment (e.g., questionnaire development) as well as therapy, and this includes professional issues such as program evaluation, training, service delivery and needs assessment.

#### **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. The research may be theory-driven or exploratory, but in the latter case it is still necessary to spell out the theoretical context and indicate the significance of various potential outcomes. Qualitative data may be generated in some projects, requiring specific strategies (e.g., content analysis) 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), which facilitate analysis.

Single case designs and a case series would normally be presented as part of a larger study in order to illustrate a particular issue. 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. Research based on existing data sets may be permitted when a case can be made that 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, mere norming of a psychological test would not constitute a thesis.

#### **Participants**

Participants may be drawn from clinical populations (e.g., individuals with depression, anxiety disorders), other special populations (e.g., elderly individuals, children), the general community, undergraduate students (recruited from the Psychology 1 participant pool), or animals (e.g., to test an animal model of addiction). Access to sufficient participants from the desired population within the timeframe of the project is crucial to its viability. The School cannot provide access to clinical or special populations. However, recruitment of these populations may be possible through ongoing research

projects by staff members, through advertisement (e.g., radio or newspaper interviews), or by arrangement with clinical agencies outside of the University. Please discuss this with your supervisor.

## **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 access to participants. In most instances it should be possible to play a role in determining some aspects of design and implementation, and a primary role in conducting the 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 that is commissioned or requested by an 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, in some cases it may be advantageous for the research to be carried out by a small group (e.g., 2-3) of Masters students. This arrangement is particularly useful when a great deal of data collection and analysis is involved; for example, in a randomised controlled trial. In such cases, the design and implementation of the project may be shared, but each student is required to write and submit an independent thesis, and to focus on a unique aspect of the project.

## **Supervision**

Each student is assigned a primary supervisor. The supervisor will be a member of the academic staff of the School. However, you may also have a co-supervisor, who may be a psychologist with an academic or research position in another University unit (e.g., National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre). In many projects, particularly those conducted in agencies 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:* Masters students can use the following computer labs: Mathews Rooms 209, 209A, as well as the computers on Level 8. Students are given their own Psychology account and are assigned a print quota. Students have access 24 hours a day/7 days a week to these facilities.

Computer labs are booked through Camilla Leung ([psychology@unsw.edu.au](mailto:psychology@unsw.edu.au)).

There are a number of bookable labs in the Mathews Building that are available for data collection. Please discuss this with your supervisor, and contact Camilla Leung ([psychology@unsw.edu.au](mailto:psychology@unsw.edu.au)) if you would like to book testing rooms. In addition, most supervisors will also have lab areas in which you may be able to conduct research – please discuss with your supervisor.

*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 Test Library, as well as the equipment 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 the University's ethical standards, no matter what the source of your participants. Your supervisor will advise you as to whether your project requires approval from the HREAP or from the UNSW HREC.

For studies with low ethical impact, please see the following link for the HREAP ethics approval form <http://www.psy.unsw.edu.au/research/research-resources>. **If you receive ethical approval from the HREAP, please note that you cannot commence your research until you have received an approval email from the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research).** In addition to HREAP approval, you may need to obtain approval from other bodies (for example, if your research is supported by ARC or NHMRC funds, or involves a collaboration with a researcher outside UNSW). 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 that is 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 required to enrol in PSYC7221 Experimental and Clinical Psychology 2 (ECP2) in 2018 to submit their Research Thesis Proposal. In 2019, students will enrol in

PSYC7227 Research Thesis (Clinical) 1 (Term 1) and PSYC7228 Research Thesis (Clinical) 2 (Term 3) in 2019 and submit the thesis by the end of Term 3 of that year.

You should work closely with your supervisor to ensure that the scope of your project is conducive to meeting the research deadlines as well as your other commitments (e.g., coursework, clinical placements). The timetable for research projects is outlined below.

### **Stage 1: 2018**

*April:* Complete the form detailing preferences for topics and supervisors and return it to the School Office ([psychology@unsw.edu.au](mailto:psychology@unsw.edu.au)). The School attempts to achieve an equitable distribution of staff thesis supervision loads across Fourth Year, and Clinical and Forensic Masters. In order to achieve this it may not be possible for all students to receive their first preference.

*May:* You will receive an email to notify you of your supervisor. Liaise closely with your supervisor in designing the project, including finalising the topic, determining relevant theoretical background, designing the procedure, and sourcing participants.

*August/September.* **Submit Research Thesis Proposal by end of Week 6, Semester 2.** This proposal forms part of the assessment in ECP2. Submission guidelines will be detailed in the ECP2 course outline. A member of academic staff will be allocated to review the proposal. The trainee should arrange a panel meeting with their supervisor and this academic staff member within one month of the proposal submission. The trainee should email a soft copy of the proposal to the academic staff member **at least three days before** the panel meeting. At the panel meeting, the trainee, supervisor and academic staff member will discuss the proposal. Subject to satisfactory completion of this process, the next step is to finalise the procedure and start work on the project.

### **Stage 2: 2019**

*January/February:* You should check in with your supervisor early in Year 2 (if you are not already in regular contact) to ensure that your progress is satisfactory. If your supervisor is concerned that your 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 upon to ensure completion of your project within the designated time. A review meeting can be arranged at this time to discuss progress and deal with any problems that may have arisen if you or your supervisor believe that this would be of benefit. By this time ethics approval should have been obtained, and any pilot testing finalised. Data collection should be well underway, and a draft of the Method section should be completed.

*June.* A draft of the Introduction and Methods should be written and data collection almost finalised.

*Early September.* Data collection should be completed, and analysis commenced.

*Early October.* Final draft of the thesis should be available for your supervisor to review.

**Friday, 25 October 2019: Thesis due**

**A late thesis** will be penalised one (1) mark for every day that it is late. If you believe that your thesis is late because of special circumstances, then you should (a) discuss the situation with your supervisor in the first instance, and (b) inform the Program Director that your thesis is going to be late by way of a written explanation (with relevant documentation) asking for special consideration with regard to the late penalty. Applications for Special Consideration are to be submitted via myUNSW (<https://student.unsw.edu.au/special-consideration>). Your supervisor cannot grant you an extension.

Applications for the waiving of a late penalty will only be considered by the Program Director 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 Program Director is notified of the circumstances as soon as they arise.

### **Preparing your research proposal**

Your research proposal should be relatively brief (8-10 pages in total). It should include a critical review of the relevant literature, an outline of the specific questions of interest, and hypotheses. Information about the proposed procedure to be used and analysis to test the hypotheses should be provided in enough detail that the reviewing member of academic staff can comment adequately on the proposal. This document will provide a useful resource for developing the introduction of your thesis.

### **Preparing your thesis**

#### **Format**

The thesis is to be prepared in the format of a journal article that is suitable for submission to a specific refereed journal. The journal should be a well-respected journal that publishes 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 and/or presented on the journal's website. For many journals the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* (6th ed. 2009) will be your bible in the preparation of the manuscript. See <http://apastyle.org/> for further details.

Although some journals do accept very short articles, **the length of the thesis should be approximately 7,500 words.**

Copies of recent Masters theses written as a journal article are available from the School Test Library. 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.

## Submission

Two paper copies of your thesis should be submitted to the School Office, using the standard folders supplied by the School. An e-copy of your complete thesis (as a PDF file) is to be submitted to the [Administrative Officer \(Postgraduate Support\)](#) on the same day. An e-copy of both your thesis (as a PDF file) and the data collected (in either SPSS or Excel) should be emailed to your supervisor. You will also be required to upload a copy of your thesis (from Abstract to Discussion) to the Turnitin link set up on Moodle.

After marking, one copy of your thesis will be retained by your supervisor, and the second copy will be available for you to collect from the School Office. 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.

## Differentiation from Journal Article

The only way in which your submitted thesis should be different from a manuscript that you would submit for publication in your selected journal is as follows:

- a) You should include a title page indicating that what follows is a thesis submitted for your degree.
- b) You should then include the **Certificate of Originality** shown below.
- c) You may include figures, 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.
- d) 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 a manuscript, although the latter should be included as appropriate.
- e) **As with any journal submission, you should include a cover letter to the editor of the journal.** Your supervisor can provide you with examples as a guide.

With the exception of (a) above, your thesis should be exactly as required for the manuscript to be submitted to the journal that you have chosen.

## 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**

The Research Thesis Proposal will be graded on a pass/fail basis and will represent part of your ECP2 mark.

Once your thesis is marked, you will receive a numerical mark out of 100 and the corresponding grade. This mark will contribute 25% to your overall grade for the Master of Psychology (Clinical) degree.