

**GUIDELINES FOR THE
MASTER OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION RESEARCH REPORT**
Public Administration 9931

Revised July 2016

*Local Government Program
Department of Political Science, University of Western Ontario*

The Research Report is a requirement for graduation from the MPA Program. Students working on their reports enroll in Public Administration 9931, which counts for two course credits, after completing all their other course requirements. Both full time and part time MPA students enroll in PA9931 and complete the research report prior to graduation. However, preparatory work for the research report should begin soon after the student begins her or his MPA studies. Full time students are strongly encouraged to begin to identify a research topic soon after entering the program in the fall.

This document provides guidelines for students and their academic supervisors with a view to making the research report requirements and process as clear as possible. Any questions you have about the research report should be directed to the Director of the Local Government Program, who will be pleased to assist you. During the fall Research Methods course, the Director will make a guest presentation on the research report. This will provide structured opportunity for students to ask questions about expectations and process.

A. Objectives of the Research Report Requirement

The Research Report is intended to fulfill both academic and professional objectives and is considered an integral part of the student's learning process. The Research Report process requires the student, supported by a faculty advisor, to design and complete an original piece of social science research. The Research Report is viewed as a capstone to the MPA program in the sense that it should demonstrate the student's mastery of the theoretical and methodological understandings that have been acquired during the course work.

Its main objective is to apply what has been learned in the MPA courses to:

- (1) an analysis of some aspect(s) of political and/or administrative processes within the local government sector, or
- (2) an analysis of a policy problem at the local level, or
- (3) a critical conceptual, theoretical or normative analysis of one of the contemporary debates in public administration at the local level.

Academic Objectives

1. Demonstrate conceptual skills and mastery of relevant academic literature

The MPA Research Report should demonstrate the student's ability to conceptualize at an abstract level by providing a review of literature relevant to the chosen topic, and using this to help frame investigation into a concrete analytical research question.

Students graduating from an academic Master's program should be able to develop a theoretical or conceptual framework to guide original investigation of a research question. Developing this framework requires abstract conceptualization skills, including the ability to analyze academic and practitioner-oriented literature in relevant fields, and the ability to synthesize what the student has learned from this literature in order to guide investigation of the question under study. These abilities are developed in several MPA courses, including Research Methods, Theories of Public Administration, Advanced Local Government and Organizational Behaviour.

2. Demonstrate research skills

The MPA Research Report should demonstrate the student's ability to conduct independent, original research by collecting and analyzing relevant information from appropriate sources. The information should permit the student to critically examine or test a concrete research question that he or she has developed.

Students graduating from an academic Master's program should be able to approach the question "How do you know?" in a rigorous, objective manner. The research report should demonstrate the student's grasp of research methodology, as addressed in the MPA course in research methods. This includes the ability to frame a clear question, develop an appropriate research design, and select and implement approaches to the collection, analysis, and interpretation of information that is appropriate to the question under study and to the conceptual framework the student has developed. Whenever information is derived from interviews, focus groups or surveys, there must be a full explanation as to why, how and from whom the information was collected.

Various research approaches are acceptable for acquiring information, including survey research, case studies, in-depth interviews, observation, analysis of quantitative data from governmental or other reliable sources, interviews with individuals or focus groups, analysis of documents or records, etc. A well-focused theoretical analysis that draws upon published work to break new ground may also be acceptable, although the vast majority of Research Reports are empirical in nature. It is expected that the research report will do more than provide a review and analysis of previously published work: it will demonstrate the student's research abilities and capacity for critical analysis.

3. Demonstrate Communication and Reporting Skills

The MPA Research Report should demonstrate the student's ability to communicate clearly and effectively, in a manner that is free of errors of grammar, spelling and style, and that meets academic standards.

The report should be logically and coherently organized, and should be focused on systematically addressing the question the student has chosen to address. There

should be an introduction to the report that sets out the issue under study, and a conclusion summarizing what has been learned or accomplished.

All sources consulted must be listed in a list of references at the conclusion of the report, and sources must be cited in accordance with accepted academic practice.

See the style guides referenced later in this document for guidelines.

Professional Objectives

1. Be Relevant to Local Government

The MPA Research Report should demonstrate the student's ability to address an issue having some connection to local government, local government administration, and/or local communities. The issue under study should be important to local government, and in some cases the research may result in recommendations or options for the stakeholders who have an interest in the subject of the research.

Students graduating from a Master of Public Administration program specializing in local government should be able to identify and examine issues important to local communities or to the local level of government. Students with career interests in the not-for-profit sector, or in federal or provincial government, are permitted to select a topic and research question relevant to their interests, but with some local connection.

The research report should provide explanations and analyses pertinent to public administration and stakeholder interests at the local level. A student may wish to select a topic that is related to a current issue or case in their local government workplace. This is encouraged, however, *it is important to remember that the research report is an academic project, not a consulting exercise or work assignment whose purpose is to meet an employer's requirements or expectations.* The student and academic advisor will need to ensure that the MPA research meets the academic objectives set out above, while at the same time contributing to the student's career-related objectives. It may be necessary to consider how to manage the organizational politics surrounding the topic under study, if the student's workplace is the research site.

2. Be Concise and Focused

The text of the research report should be about 40 to 50 double-spaced typewritten pages in length – a maximum of about 12,000 words.

It should focus on a specific topic, develop a well-considered research question on this topic, provide a review and analysis of literature relevant to the topic, develop a conceptual framework and research strategy to answer the research question, and discuss the collection and analysis of information that tests or demonstrates the framework's utility for its specific purpose.

The research report is not intended to be a Master's thesis or a broad review of a topic. Its purpose is to demonstrate that the student can apply theory to empirical situations, problems or cases. The report should focus on a specific question or set of questions, select the most relevant literature and theory for the analysis of the question(s), and collect and analyze data to answer the question.

B. The Process and Schedule for Developing the MPA Research Project

MPA students should begin to consider various possibilities for their research project soon after they enter the program. You are encouraged to take the opportunities presented by course-related essay requirements to become more familiar with specific topics and to test out their feasibility as research topics. You are also encouraged to discuss your initial ideas about a potential research focus for the Research Report with the Academic Director and/or with course instructors.

All students are required to develop an initial draft Research Proposal in the MPA Research Methods course. This proposal, and the feedback received on it, serve as the basis for the writing of a concise final Research Proposal.

Full-time MPA students are required to submit a Research Proposal (described below) via e-mail to the Local Government Program Director, Martin Horak, no later than January 15 following completion of the Research Methods course.

Part-time MPA students are exempt from the January 15 deadline. However, they **must submit a final research proposal no later than 6 months before their target completion date for the Research Report.**

When submitting your proposal to the Program Director, please also copy localgov@uwo.ca so your submission can be tracked by Program Staff.

It is important that you submit your research proposal on time so that you can be matched with a supervisor in a timely manner.

The Local Government Program Director will review your research proposal and determine if it is ready to be passed on to a supervisor. If the research proposal is not well developed, the Director will return the proposal to you with suggestions for changes. You must then re-submit the revised proposal to the Director within two weeks. Once the research proposal is well developed, the Program Director will match you with an academic supervisor. You are encouraged to discuss your research interests in advance with possible supervisors, and to identify in your proposal any supervision preferences you may have. Your supervisor will help you refine your research design, if necessary, and will guide your research process and be one of the two evaluators of your report. Supervisors and students are expected to begin their work together with a discussion in which they mutually agree on frequency of communication and clarify their respective expectations regarding the research process. The student bears final responsibility for completing the research report by the deadline, and for meeting the academic and professional objectives.

In order to graduate in October, the final draft of the research report must be submitted by 8:00 a.m. on the final business day in July to the Program Coordinator (assuming the course is taken in the summer term). The submission deadline is firm. Late submission is likely to jeopardize autumn graduation and lead to the necessity of registering for another academic term.

If you are a part-time student and are completing your Report in a term other than the summer term, please contact localgov@uwo.ca for your report deadline.

C. The Research Proposal

Your proposal should be about 5 to 7 pages in length, plus the cover sheet. For many students, the final proposal will constitute a revised and abbreviated version of the proposal developed for the Research Methods course. However, students are free to develop a proposal on a different topic should they prefer.

At a minimum, the final proposal should include the following:

1. cover sheet showing your name, whether a full time or part time student, and a working title for your project
2. introductory statement of the issue you intend to examine, and identification of a specific research question (or set of questions). The question(s) must be clearly focused, yet significant enough to merit detailed analysis.
3. a section that briefly explains the rationale for your project. In other words: Why is the issue / subject that you have chosen to focus on important or relevant? What is the rationale for your specific research question (or questions)?
4. a brief discussion of some existing academic and/or policy research that is relevant to your topic and question. Focus on identifying relevant theories and concepts, and discuss how existing work relates to your research question(s).
5. an outline of your proposed research design, data gathering strategy (including discussion of likely sources of information), and analytical strategy.
6. Optional: if you have discussed your proposed project with a faculty member or have suggestions as to an advisor you may include them. However, it may not be possible to accommodate supervisor preferences in every case.
7. a preliminary list of key readings and resources you will start with (minimum 8-10 sources / resources recommended).

D. The Role of the Supervisor

MPA research is usually supervised by a full time or part time MPA / Political Science faculty member. The Director (Martin Horak) will notify you of who your academic supervisor is.

As soon as you are assigned a supervisor, you should contact them to set up a time for an initial discussion about your project. Your initial discussion should include clarifying mutual expectations (see above) and a review of your proposal. After there is agreement on the content of the proposal, the student and the supervisor should set out a schedule for next steps and deliverables. These may include a detailed research design, a complete literature review, initial empirical results, initial write-up of analysis, and first draft of the full Report. Specific deliverables and timelines, as well as frequency

of communication between student and supervisor, are to be worked out by mutual agreement.

E. Research Ethics Review

If data are to be collected from individuals by means of interviews, a survey or other means, the supervisor should advise the student as to whether it is necessary to submit the project for Research Ethics Review. If the research involves interviews that ask for information about the respondents' attitudes, experiences or other personal information, an ethics review is required. If interviews are conducted only for the purpose of gathering information about policies, programs, or other information about organizational activities, then generally speaking, an ethics review is not required.

The primary ethical considerations relevant to most MPA projects are to ensure that participants in research are protected from risk and from threats to their personal rights and dignity, and that they are participating voluntarily in scientifically valid projects. This means ensuring that participants are fully informed about the research, so that they are in a position to give informed consent to participate or not, without being coerced.

As of the beginning of 2016, Research Ethics Reviews for MPA research reports must be approved through the University's Office of Research Ethics. The process involves the student setting up an account on the ROMEO research system, and then submitting an ethics review protocol through that system. Turnaround time for ethics reviews is expected to be in the 1 – 2 week range.

A workshop explaining the details of the Ethics Review process will be held for all interested MPA students in late February or early March.

All students who plan to complete Research Reports in the summer term, and whose work requires ethics review, must submit their ethics review protocol through the ROMEO system **no later than April 1**.

Part-time students planning to complete their Reports in the fall or winter terms should submit any ethics protocols at least 3 months before the due date for their Research Reports (see above).

F. Final Submission of the Research Report

The completed research report must be submitted no later than 8:00 a.m. on the final business day in July (assuming the course is taken in the summer term). The student is responsible for submitting one digital copy of the completed report to Program Administrative Staff. The format of the report must conform to the MPA Research Report Style Guide (attached).

The digital copy is to be e-mailed to the Program Administration at:
localgov@uwo.ca

Since MPA Research Reports are academic reports (see discussion of Objectives above) that may deal with politically sensitive matters, students may want to ensure that

access to their report remains restricted after it is handed in. Thus, when submitting their final report, students should indicate the level of confidentiality with which they would like the report to be treated. The choices are:

1. Public: The report will be electronically distributed to anyone who asks.
2. Limited Circulation: The report is available only to current MPA students to review. Students are asked not to quote from the report and to delete it once they have reviewed it.
3. Confidential: The report will not be distributed to anyone.

If students do not indicate a confidentiality status, the default is "Public". In other words, unless students specifically request otherwise, copies of the completed research reports will be available to all who request them through the Local Government Program Office.

The submission deadline is firm. Late submission is likely to jeopardize autumn graduation and lead to the necessity of registering for another academic term. Special circumstances, such as illness or other compassionate reasons, or the unavailability of a supervisor, should be brought to the attention of the Director as soon as they are known so that an appropriate accommodation can be arranged.

G. Evaluation of the Research Report

In early August, the Program Coordinator will distribute copies of the report to the supervisor, and to a second reader chosen by the Program Director. The two readers must each submit a percentage grade supported by written comments to the Program Coordinator (Josh Morgan). A grade of 69% or less is considered "Unacceptable"; a grade of 70% to 87% is considered "Acceptable"; a grade of 88% or more is considered "Outstanding". An assessment of Outstanding is expected to be unusual, and is awarded only to the very best papers. In their assessment, evaluators will take into account the degree to which the research report fulfills the academic and professional objectives set out earlier in this document. Evaluators are encouraged to include written comments in a separate document. They may also choose to make comments within the text of the Report.

If a report is found Unacceptable by one of the two initial readers, the Program Director will ask a third reader to assess the report. If two of the three readers find the report Unacceptable, the student will fail the research report component of the MPA program and will have to schedule a meeting with the Director of the program to talk about the student's options.

The supervisor and second reader (and if necessary the third reader) must return all reports and comments for distribution to students to the Program Coordinator, together with the mark, no later than August 20 (assuming the course is taken in the summer term). These deadlines must be met in order for the student to graduate.

Signed comments and marks from all readers will be forwarded to the student. In order to achieve a final designation of "Outstanding", a research report has to be assessed as

“Outstanding” by *both* readers. Marks are not recorded on the student’s transcript. Transcripts note the Research Report as “Completed” or “Not Completed” (the latter designation applies if the student fails the Research Report).

It is understood that copyright remains with the author. A student who wishes to apply to have her or his report kept confidential because of its sensitive nature should indicate this when the report is submitted.

H. MPA Research Report Style Guide

All MPA research reports are expected to conform to the following guidelines.

Length: about 40 to 50 double-spaced typewritten pages of text (maximum of about 12,000 words), not including reference list and any appendices.

Title page: should conform to the attached model

Page numbering: Each page of text must be numbered. Numbers should be placed in the upper right corner.

Order of sections is as follows:

Title page

Page showing report title and abstract or executive summary

Acknowledgements (if used)

Table of Contents, including chapters or sections, and appendices

List of tables and charts (if applicable)

Text of your report, divided into chapters or sections

References: listed in alphabetical order using an academically accepted format (see below)

Appendices (if any)

Style guide for footnotes, citation of sources, and references

You should adopt a consistent and accepted style for handling your citations and references. Detailed guidelines for several styles, including APA and MLA (preferred), are available at: <http://www.lib.uwo.ca/essayhelp>

Plagiarism is a serious academic offense and is not acceptable. For a definition of what is meant by plagiarism, please consult the Department of Political Science's statement on plagiarism, available at:

http://politicalscience.uwo.ca/undergraduate/frequently_asked_questions.html

MODEL TITLE PAGE

Organizational Structures in the New City of Toronto:
An Analysis of Post-Amalgamation Organizational Structures
and Matrix Management in the City of Toronto and its
Urban Planning and Development Services Department

MPA Research Report

Submitted to

The Local Government Program
Department of Political Science
The University of Western Ontario

David Oikawa
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