

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

Revised July 2017

*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.

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 Program Director and/or with course instructors.

The preliminary milestone towards finishing the Research Report is completion of the Research Proposal. This process takes place as part of the evaluation requirements of the Research Design course and occurs in two stages.

First, students will submit a brief abstract about their proposed research project through a standardized on-line form. This will not be a fully developed proposal. It will include your name, the project title, a brief description of the research question, method, and anticipated findings or goals (maximum 300 words), whether you expect that information will be gathered from human subjects, and subject keywords. It will be submitted between the second and third weekend of the fall Research Design course. The specific due date will be determined annually by the Director and the Research Design instructor. The Director will assign you an academic supervisor based on your proposed project abstract. You are encouraged to discuss your research interests in advance with possible supervisors, and to identify in your abstract any supervision preferences you may have.

In consultation with their supervisor and the instructor of the Research Design course, students will then prepare and submit their Research Proposals. The Research Proposal will include a research question and description of a research design, among other things (see Section C for more detailed instructions). The due date for the Research Proposal will be determined by the instructor of the Research Design course. The proposal and the feedback received on it, are intended to serve as the basis for the writing of the final Research Paper. The Research Proposal is deemed approved on successful completion of the Research Design course.

Your project will naturally evolve through discussion with your supervisor and your further academic work. Your supervisor will help you refine your research design, and will guide your research process and be one of the two evaluators of your report.

Students may choose to pursue a new topic or research direction after completing the Research Design course. In this eventuality, a revised Proposal must be approved by the Director and the supervisor.

The student bears final responsibility for completing the research report by the deadline, and for meeting the academic and professional objectives. Report deadlines are determined by the term of enrollment. **Full-time MPA students all complete the Report in the summer term.**

C. The Research Proposal

Normally, your proposal will be developed in the Research Design course. At a minimum, the final proposal should include the following elements:

1. Cover sheet showing your name, whether a full time or part time student, and a working title for your project.

2. A statement that that presents the specific research question and a justification of why it is relevant and important.
3. A review of the literature that outlines what is already known about your topic to lay the groundwork for your research.
4. An outline of your proposed research design, including:
 - a. a description and justification of your choice of units or cases,
 - b. whether your research is cross-sectional or longitudinal,
 - c. a description and justification of your information sources and strategy for collecting them,
 - d. a plan for analyzing the information you collect, and
 - e. a discussion of research ethics (if dealing with human subjects)

Please refer to the more detailed proposal requirements distributed in the Research Design course.

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 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, a review of your abstract, and proposal brainstorming. After the proposal has been approved, 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.

Research Ethics Reviews for MPA research reports are approved through the University's Office of Research Ethics. The process involves the student setting up an account on WesternREM, and then submitting an ethics review protocol through that system. Supervisors must also have a WesternREM account, as they are responsible for signing off on student Research Ethics submissions.

Guidelines and supporting documents for Research Ethics submission can be found at: http://localgovernment.uwo.ca/masters/courses/final_research_paper.html

The Research Ethics process takes a substantial period of time. Students should expect to spend several hours at least preparing a draft ethics submission; turnaround for feedback from the Ethics Office averages 1 – 2 weeks, after which the student may be asked to make revisions and resubmit. Therefore, it is important for students who anticipate making an ethics review submission to budget sufficient time for this.

Research ethics and Western's review process are discussed in the Research Design course.

F. Final Submission of the Research Report

DEADLINES

Enrolled in MRP to complete Fall Term

Proposal Due Date: During Research Design course

Final Paper Due Date: November 30th

Graduation: February (In Absentia)

Enrolled in MRP to complete Winter Term

Proposal Due Date: During Research Design course

Final Paper Due Date: March 30th

Graduation: June

Enrolled in MRP to complete Summer Term

Proposal Due Date: During Research Design course

Final Paper Due Date: July 30th

Graduation: October

Extensions beyond these deadlines will be granted only in extenuating circumstances, and requests must be made in writing to the Program Director.

The student is responsible for submitting one digital copy of the completed report to Program Administrative Staff. No hard copy is required. 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 by 11:59 p.m. on the due date.

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

Upon receipt of a Report, Administrative Staff will distribute copies of the report to the supervisor, and to a second reader chosen by the Program Director. The two readers must each return a percentage grade supported by written comments to Administrative Staff within ten days of receipt.

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 schedule a meeting with the Director of the program to talk about options.

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

Abstract: should be no longer than 250 words, and state (a) the research question, (b) methods used, and (c) findings or recommendations

Subject keywords: include up to six subject keywords from the prescribed list.

Geographical keywords: list all municipalities, provinces (if outside of Ontario), and countries (if outside of Canada) analyzed in your paper

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, abstract, and subject and geographical keywords

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 ASA and Chicago (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

Subject keywords: Planning, Public administration

Geographical keywords: Toronto

MPA Research Report

Submitted to

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

David Oikawa
July 2010