

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

Revised October 2010

*Local Government Program Committee
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, work on the research report may 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, and to develop a research question by the beginning of their second term. Many students use the research proposal assignment in the Research Methods course as an opportunity to explore a possible research question and methodology.

This document provides guidelines as well as suggestions to 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 project is intended to fulfill both academic and professional objectives and is considered an integral part of the student's learning process. It 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 of the political and/or administrative process within a local government or not-for-profit organization, 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 theoretical analysis and conceptual skills

The MPA Research Report should demonstrate the student's ability to conceptualize at an abstract level by providing a review of relevant literature and presenting a theoretical framework that synthesizes the student's understanding of that literature.

Students graduating from an academic Masters program should be able to develop a theoretical or conceptual framework to explain a phenomenon. 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 construct a coherent understanding of the question under study. These abilities are emphasized in several MPA courses, including 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 research by collecting and analyzing relevant information from appropriate sources. The information should permit the student to critically examine, test or illustrate the conceptual framework that he or she has developed.

Students graduating from an academic Masters 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 is also acceptable. 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 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 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 primary 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 employer's or 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, provide a review and analysis of literature relevant to the topic, develop a conceptual framework or model to explain the topic, 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, a purely scholarly analysis, or a broad review of a topic. Its purpose is to demonstrate that the student can apply theory to practical situations, problems or cases. The report should focus on a specific question or issue, select the most relevant literature and theory for the

analysis of this question, and present and test or illustrate a conceptual framework that is useful to the specific situation.

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.

You are required to submit your research proposal (described below) via e-mail to the Local Government Program Director, Martin Horak, by March 1 (assuming the course is taken in the summer term).

Part time students should submit their research proposals by March 1 of their second year of study.

It is important that you submit the research proposal on time so that you can be matched with a supervisor, and so that you will be prepared to meet the requirements of the Issues course in June. Please note that the timeframe between submitting the proposal and completing the research report is less than five months for full time MPAs and 17 months for part time MPAs.

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, you will be matched with an academic supervisor. The supervisor will help you refine your proposal, if necessary, and will guide your research process and be one of the two evaluators of your report. However, the student bears the 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 July 30 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.

C. The Research Proposal

Your proposal should include the following:

1. cover sheet showing your name, whether a full time or part time student, and the title of your project

2. statement of the question or issue you intend to examine. The question or issue must be clearly focused and specific, yet significant enough to merit attention.
3. a paragraph or two explaining the issue, the specific context and rationale for your project: What is the problem and why is it important to local government? Why have you chosen this as your topic?
4. a brief introduction to the most influential theoretical sources and summary of the theoretical framework you expect to use.
5. a description of the methodology and sources of data or information for your research. You should explain how you will analyze the problem: the report should present an analysis, not a description.
6. Optional: if you have discussed your proposed project with a faculty member or have suggestions as to an advisor and/or second reader you may include them, but it may not be possible to accommodate your preferences.
7. a preliminary list of key readings and resources you will start with.

Your proposal should be 3 to 5 pages, plus the cover sheet.

D. The Role of the Supervisor

MPA research is usually supervised by a full time or part time member of the MPA faculty, although it may be supervised by a member of another department or program in certain circumstances. The Director (Martin Horak) will notify you of who your academic supervisor is.

As soon as you are assigned a supervisor you should ensure that he or she has your research proposal. The supervisor should provide feedback on your proposal. If the supervisor requests revisions to the proposal, you should revise and resubmit it to the supervisor. After there is agreement on the content of the proposal, a typical next step is for the student to submit to the supervisor an outline (as detailed as possible) of the prospective report and a list of most of the resource materials to be used. After the supervisor and student are both satisfied with the outline and resource list, the student will submit a request for review by the Research Ethics Committee of the Department of Political Science, if such a review is needed in the opinion of the supervisor (see the discussion below). After receiving ethics approval the student will carry out the research and write a draft of the report. These steps should be concluded by the end of May in order to allow sufficient time to write the report in June and July (assuming the course is taken in the summer term).

It is up to the supervisor and student to agree on their working relationship, the steps they will carry out, and the schedule. For example, there should be an understanding of whether and when the student will submit drafts for review, means of communication, etc. The timing of vacations and other events that interrupt communication between the student and supervisor need to be considered in agreeing on a schedule. Questions about the supervisor's role, or about evaluation of research reports, should be referred to the Director.

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 to the Department of Political Science Research Ethics Committee for 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. Further guidance may be obtained from the Review form at the end of this document. Application for an ethics review should be made to the Research Ethics Committee of the Department of Political Science, through the Program Coordinator, using the form at the end of this document. Applications should not be sent to the University's Ethics Review Board. The Political Science review process takes up to three weeks, although it may be shorter than this.

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. Coercion may be an issue where research participants are employees or clients of the researcher, or are otherwise vulnerable or dependent in relationship to the researcher. Usually, completion of a written questionnaire constitutes acceptable evidence of consent to participate. In telephone interviews the interviewer should describe the study and details about participation, using a prepared script. All participants should be informed of the identity and auspices of the researcher, and what is involved in participating.

If you are interviewing persons in positions of responsibility about their personal experiences as administrators or politicians, you should inform them in writing of the purpose and nature of the research and the use to which it will be put, so that they can give their informed consent. You should identify yourself and provide contact information, inform the person about how you intend to gather information (eg. tape recording, note-taking), and how the research material will be stored and disposed of. If your project requires disclosure of the individual's identity, consent to such disclosure or quotation should be obtained.

F. Final Submission of the Research Report

The final date for submitting the completed research report is **July 30** (assuming the course is taken in the summer term). The student is responsible for submitting **two hard copies AND one digital copy** of the completed report to the Program Coordinator. 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 Coordinator, Josh Morgan at: jmorga8@uwo.ca

Each hard copy must be submitted loose leaf in a manila file folder: pages must not be stapled, bound or hole punched.

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".

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. Readers are encouraged to suggest minor changes throughout the paper and the students will have the ability to submit a clean copy with minor changes before the reports are bound. General comments to students may be written on a separate sheet.

If a report is found Unacceptable by one of the two initial readers, the Program Director will immediately 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).

G. Reports Available in the Local Government Library

Unless students specifically request otherwise, copies of the completed research reports are available to the public through the Local Government Program Office. 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 submit a letter to this effect 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 or a maximum of about 12,000 words; reference list and appendices may be supplemental.

Title page: should conform to the attached model

Margins: MUST be as follows to allow binding:

Left margin: 1 1/2 inches; Right margin: one inch

Top and bottom margins: one inch

These margins apply to all pages including diagrams, maps, charts, tables, etc.

Typing: Use a clear font such as Arial or Times New Roman, 11 point, for text. Double space all text. Footnotes, reference list and long quotations should be single spaced. Print on one side of the page only.

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

Acknowledgement (if used)

Table of Contents, including chapters and appendices

List of tables and charts (if applicable)

Text of your report, divided into chapters

References: listed in alphabetical order using correct 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 in the boxes outside the department office.

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
July 2000

**Department of Political Science
Review Procedure for Research Involving
Human Subjects**

Graduate student research involving human subjects must be reviewed by the Departmental Research Ethics Committee to ensure it conforms to University guidelines. This includes all research which involves interviews or surveys. For the purposes of this review, interviews do not include personal contacts which are designed to find documentary sources or other sources of information of use to the research project. They do include personal contacts which provide data on which the research result will rest.

In order that the committee may assess your research proposal, please complete Part A and the appropriate sections of Part B.

Part A

1. Name:
 2. Title of Research Project:
 3. Are you seeking external funding for the project? Y N
 3. Will your research design include interviews or surveys, as defined above? Y N
- If no, briefly describe the method to be used and stop. If yes, proceed to the questions below.
5. Will your research involve statistically based surveys? Y N
If yes, see section 1 of Part B.
 6. Will your research interviews be with persons who have held significant public positions and who are sharing their reminiscences, views etc. with you? Y N
If yes, see section 2 of Part B.
 7. Will you ensure the cooperation of interviewees is voluntary? Y N
 8. How will you store the data or information gained?

Part B

1. If you are using statistically based surveys, you must attach a copy of your survey instrument and the covering letter you intend to use when contacting participants. In that letter you must state what the purpose of your research is; how long it will take to complete the questionnaire; that participation will be voluntary; what the disposition of the data collected will be; and how the data will be used.

You must also inform the ethics committee of any potential harmful effects of the research and/or your findings on respondents. In such cases, state what you plan to do to minimize those effects.

If you are using tricks, or are concealing the purpose of your research from the potential respondents, you must inform the committee of your reasons and explain how you will redress the subterfuge later.

If the survey is to involve personal contact, or if it is to delve into personal matters, a consent form must be completed by the interviewee and held by the researcher.

2. If you are interviewing persons who have held public positions and the interviews are designed to gather their memories and perceptions, the committee requires copies of two draft letters. The first is to be supplied to the interviewee before, or when, you request the interview. It must state the purpose of your research, what you wish to discuss with the person in broad terms, how long the interview may take and what you plan to do with the information provided.

The second letter will confirm the meeting (hopefully thanking the interviewee), state what you plan to do with the material and confirm any special arrangements over rights of prior review which were agreed to at the interview.