

School of Government
STRA 526 Dissertation
Trimester 1/2 2006
COURSE OUTLINE

Contact Details

Course Co-ordinator:

Dr Amanda Wolf

Room RH 811, Level 8, Rutherford House, Pipitea Campus

Telephone: (04) 463-5712

Fax: (04) 463-5454

Email: amanda.wolf@vuw.ac.nz

Amanda is responsible for ensuring that you get general advice and support on academic matters up to the point at which you are underway with an approved supervisor. She is also responsible for other matters associated with the Part 3 options, including trouble-shooting supervisory problems, and ensuring consistent and accurate assessment.

For specific inquiries of an administrative nature, please contact:

Raewyn Baigent, Senior Programme Co-ordinator

raewyn.baigent@vuw.ac.nz (04) 463-5453

Darren Morgan, Masters Administrator

darren.morgan@vuw.ac.nz (04) 463-5458

Raewyn and Darren look after your enrolment and fees, notify workshops, provide support materials and track your progress.

For Human Ethics Committee matters, please contact:

Antong Victorio, HEC representative

antong.victorio@vuw.ac.nz (04) 463-5709

Antong is delegated by the Head of School to ensure that HEC standards are met, and to check all applications to the HEC from School staff and students.

Course Objectives

By the end of this course, you should have:

- Demonstrated the ability, at a high academic standard, to design and conduct an investigation that contributes to public sector understanding
- Developed an in-depth understanding of a body of theoretical or conceptual material and/or its applicability in a public sector arena
- Acquired skills in the fresh and critical examination of public sector issues
- Become well-informed in the subject area(s) investigated for the paper.

Course Content

This course is an independent research course.

Readings

There are no specified readings.

Please refer to a separate booklet, *Part 3 Project, Essay, Dissertation: Information for Participants 2006*, available from Darren Morgan, which supplements this course outline.

Mandatory Course Requirements

A formally approved proposal is required.

Communication of Additional Information

Any additional information will be communicated by email.

Assessment Requirements

OVERVIEW

Your grade is based on a final dissertation. However, there are three additional requirements, which are summarised and explained in detail below.

REQUIREMENT	DUE DATE
1. One-paragraph description of the intended topic	17 March **
2. Draft proposal for the dissertation, approx 5 pages	15 May
3. Final proposal, approx 5 pages	12 June
4. Final dissertation, 30,000-40,000 words	16 February 2007

** Note that the final date for withdrawal with refund from this course is 21 March 2006. If you do not provide a satisfactory topic description, you will be advised to withdraw and re-enrol in a later trimester.

YOU SHOULD AIM TO SUBMIT A PENULTIMATE DRAFT TO YOUR SUPERVISOR BY 19 JANUARY 2007 AT THE LATEST.

PENALTIES

Five marks will be deducted from the final grade for late submission of the final proposal, or if a final proposal submitted by the due date is not of an approvable standard.

Five marks will be deducted for each week the dissertation is late, up to a maximum period of 4 weeks, after which the student will be awarded a Q, and will need to re-enrol in the course to complete.

ASSESSMENT DETAILS: One-Paragraph Description of the intended topic, due 17 March 2006.

Set out in one paragraph the topic you intend to develop into your dissertation. The purposes of this paragraph are:

1. to ensure you make a timely start with proposal development
2. to assist the course convenor to identify likely supervisors for all research projects getting underway at the same time, and to achieve the best possible allocation of supervisors
3. to identify possible linkages between your research interests and that of other students and researchers in the School of Government, in order to explore possibilities for beneficial clustering of research activities.

Your paragraph should identify what “corner of the world” you are in. This corner may be substantive (child health, tax policy) or functional (consultation, decision-making). Next, you should raise a curious or puzzling feature for focused examination in that corner of the world. Third, if possible, you should convey the question(s) your research will address. The paragraph should be about 3 or 4 sentences (a fuller version of this paragraph will become the “issue statement” in your proposal).

Please email to amanda.wolf@vuw.ac.nz by 5.00pm on 17 March 2006.

ASSESSMENT DETAILS: Draft Proposal, due 15 May 2006 and Final Proposal, due 12 June 2006.

NOTE: The above dates are the latest possible dates. Earlier submission is encouraged.

A final proposal is due by 12 June 2006. The proposal is a mandatory requirement. An acceptable proposal is needed for you to be formally allocated a supervisor and for you to proceed with the proposed research. Feedback on at least one draft of the proposal is almost always needed in order for the final proposal to be accepted.

Your proposal, which should be about 5 pages long, should include the following:

1. A title
2. An issue statement
3. A brief summary of the background, merit, and methodology of the proposed research
4. A section-by-section outline of the proposed research, detailing the research focus, conceptual framework, and empirical focus
5. Particular conditions
6. A statement indicating if HEC approval will be required
7. An indicative bibliography

Proposal Details

The Title

Titles should be short and descriptive. Remember that title key words help others find your work in bibliographic searches. Journals are good sources of ideas on titles. Here are four from a recent issue of the *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*:

- Determinants of Initial Entry onto Welfare by Young Women
- The Environmental Impact of Suburbanisation
- Values, Conflict, and Trust in Participatory Environmental Planning
- Policy Analysis in the Presence of Distorting Taxes

The Issue Statement

The issue statement should achieve four things. First, let the reader know what “corner of the world” you are in. This corner may be substantive (child health, tax policy) or functional (consultation, decision-making). Next, you should raise a feature for focused examination in that corner of the world. Third, you should convey the question(s) your research will address. Finally, you should convey the nature of the answer you will provide. The issue statement should be about 4 or 5 sentences.

Summary

The summary also has three parts: the objective(s) of the research, the value expected from the results and an indication of the methodology to be used. This section can vary from one paragraph to about three or four, but should probably not exceed 150 words.

The purposes of the summary are to allow the reader to assess:

- The feasibility of the research;
- The coherence of the overall design and
- The academic merit of the proposed work.

In reaching this assessment, the reader will look at how well the indicated methodology matches the study objectives (will the methodology provide the desired type of answer?). The reader will judge feasibility mainly by looking at the stated objectives, but also by looking at the implied time and resources required for the indicated methodology. Academic merit will be established through scrutiny of all three components.

Section-by-section Outline

In this section, you will describe what each section of your dissertation will contain. As appropriate you will indicate the information you are going to draw on and how that information will be collected and interpreted. This section will be about two pages long.

As a general rule, most dissertations will have six chapters. However, depending on your topic or methodology, you may have anywhere from five to about nine. For instance, you may divide any of chapters 2 to 5 below into two parts. You may need to have a stand-alone chapter on methodology if your methodology is difficult or unusual. The suggested chapters are given below, with commentary on what should be in the proposal.

1. Introduction

This section will typically lay out the issue and provide a reader's guide to the paper. It is usually helpful to provide some context for the research, which serves to raise the reader's interest and justify the study. You need not say much in the proposal.

2. Background

This section will provide the reader with key facts about the area of empirical investigation. It could include a summary of legislation, a brief history, a description of the state of the relevant world. If your work is comparative, you may describe aspects of the comparators here. Your proposal should indicate the content and general sources/approaches you will use.

3. Conceptual frame

Concepts, theories or ideas (or whatever word you prefer) provide the framework and terms for assessing your evidence. In this section, you select, summarise and justify concepts. In your proposal, you need to identify your concepts or the way in which you are going to come up with them (for instance by drawing on several different strands in the literature, or synthesising several frameworks used in other jurisdictions).

4. Empirical focus

In this section, you will present the results of your research. To the extent possible, you should present these results first and then (in the next chapter) tell the reader what to make of them. However, this is not a hard and fast rule. For instance, if some of your evidence is collected with a survey, you might present the statistically significant results here. However, for the most part, you should write up what information you collected, organised in some sensible way. Your proposal, therefore, needs to explain what evidence you will collect, or use, and how.

5. *Analysis and interpretation*

In this section, you interpret your evidence in light of your conceptual frame. Your proposal needs to make clear how you will analyse and interpret the evidence.

A Note on Methodology:

A perennial weakness with proposals is inadequate attention to *methodology*. In general terms, a research methodology develops the strategy with which you will test/explore the relationships among concepts in your particular study and explains how you will measure your concepts and how you will know that you have measured what you say you are measuring.

Attention must be paid to methodology in two important respects:

- What information are you going to use and how are you going to get it?
- How are you going to construct your argument? That is, how are you going to “marry” theory and evidence in a way that allows the reader to follow you and be able to judge for themselves the judgements or conclusions you have reached? It may help to think of making an argument - imagine that you must convince a boss to let you do a study. How will you go about putting together a chain of evidence and reasoning which will stand up to close scrutiny?

6. *Conclusions/Implications*

This final section reports your conclusion and recommendations (if any). In the proposal, you should re-iterate from your issue statement the *nature* of these conclusions. This does not mean that you will state your actual conclusions. In other words, NOT “this research will show that government should stick with the status quo”, but rather, “this research will recommend that government either stick with the status quo or do X.”

What you say here will be used to help judge the merits of the proposed research, but also serve to check that you are not overpromising.

Particular Conditions

Note any particular conditions that apply, including arrangements with a third-party mentor. A third-party mentor may be a workplace supervisor, another public sector employee, or a member of the School’s academic or research staff (other than your supervisor). If your research has workplace implications (e.g. controversy, conflicts of interests, political sensitivities), discuss how you plan to deal with these.

HEC Statement

State whether HEC approval will be required.

If your research will involve getting information from people, you may find that working through the Human Ethics Committee application at the same time as you write your proposal will make both processes easier. Remember that HEC approval must be secured before you embark on research involving people.

HEC Process

Pipitea HEC guidelines and application form are **only** available at www.vuw.ac.nz/fca/research/committees.aspx#pipiteahec

Full HEC requirements are at www.vuw.ac.nz/home/research/overview.html#hec this link is to be used **only** to refer to the Victoria University Policy - **NOT** to download the application form.

If approval is needed, you will need to draft an application, with advice you're your supervisor.

Forward draft applications electronically to Antong Victorio (antong.victorio@vuw.ac.nz). Please use a subject heading in the format: HEC SoG Application your name. Antong, with authority delegated by the Head of School, checks the application and, if amendments are required, notifies the applicant and supervisor.

Corrected applications are forwarded electronically by Antong in one rtf file to the FCA HEC secretary, Maggie Teleki-Rainey. When HEC notice of approval is received, you must forward a signed hard copy to the FCA HEC secretary. Student research requires three signatures, the student's, the supervisor's, and the Head of School's, (or delegate, Antong Victorio). When an approved signed copy is sent in, the approved research may begin.

Indicative Bibliography

The last required part of the proposal is an indicative bibliography, which will probably contain at least 10 items. The bibliography will show that you have undertaken sufficient preliminary investigation to have identified the key sources of facts, concepts, methodology, comparisons or whatever else is relevant for your study. As you compile the bibliography – which should be presented in correct format – check that you have at least one reference for each type of published information that you have described in section 4.

When submitting your proposal, use the following standard conventions:

Front page

Include a front page with the following details (centred):

- Course code and name
- Assessment item descriptor (e.g. draft or final proposal)
- Due date (and date submitted, if different)
- Name of candidate
- Candidate Student ID number

Please email your proposal in an attachment to amanda.wolf@vuw.ac.nz.

Approval

Approval of dissertation proposals is a collective responsibility of the School. While Bill Ryan and Amanda Wolf have distinct responsibilities regarding programmes and

research, each six months a group of staff is designated as a Research Committee. The Research Committee may make one of three recommendations:

1. Approve, with the student and supervisor invited to consider the Research Committee comments
2. Conditionally approve, with the student to address issues or make changes as indicated by the Research Committee, to the satisfaction of the supervisor before proceeding to undertake further work.
3. Not approve. This option requires the student to submit a new proposal, taking into account the comments of the Research Committee, and incurs a penalty (see section on penalties below).

Comments and suggestions on the research are referred to the student and supervisor for their further consideration. This approval process is used in order to ensure that you pursue research that meets programme standards and to ensure that your proposal gets careful scrutiny from a range of perspectives/disciplines. This process also ensures that the best possible student-supervisor arrangements are made (supervisors are assigned on the basis of knowledge of the topic and workload balances, including leaves of absence. Because we do not restrict the topics you may choose to study, and because staff are broadly trained and experienced, occasionally supervisors will be matched to a topic which is not among their main interests or areas of expertise).

ASSESSMENT DETAILS: Final Dissertation, due 16 February 2007

The final report, of 30,000 to 40,000 words, is worth 100% of your grade for this course. It should be completed in accordance with your approved proposal and with the advice of your supervisor.

The course co-ordinator will contact you and your supervisor about two months before the deadline in order to check that you are making satisfactory progress.

No major changes can be made to an approved proposal without speaking to Amanda Wolf. However, it is recognized that as information becomes available during the research process, the original proposal may need to be modified. Modest modifications can usually be approved by your supervisor.

Format and Procedures for Submission of the Research Essay

Abstract

Include an abstract of no more than 200 words, written for a wide audience without specialized knowledge. Avoid acronyms. State the research issue, the conceptual framework or theory and empirical content used, and indicate the main conclusions. The abstract should follow the title page, and precede other front matter.

Other front matter

In addition to a required Table of Contents, you may wish to provide acknowledgements, and lists of tables and figures.

Style of Presentation

The dissertation is a piece of academic writing and so differs from the formats used in government reports. The ideas and information presented in the dissertation should be understandable to a wide audience and prior detailed knowledge of institutional arrangements or terminology specific to a particular discipline should not be presumed. Refer to the 2006 Postgraduate Handbook for further details on style and presentation.

Be sure to:

- Appropriately document reference material, using a consistent style of your choice
- Provide a full bibliography
- Devise a consistent system of headings
- Use 1 ½ line spacing
- Print single sided

Submission

Submit one clean copy to Raewyn Baigent by the due date. Raewyn will forward a copy to your supervisor and a second examiner for assessment. The second examiner may be someone from another university or institution or may be from Victoria University. The second examiner must not have had any direct involvement in the supervision of the work.

After the paper has been assessed, you will need to supply a corrected copy (as needed, see Library copies below).

Include a title page, with title, your FULL name, degree and date. Special covers and binding instructions are available from Raewyn Baigent.

Library Copies

Dissertations are lodged in the VUW library after completion, and are therefore available to all browsers and borrowers. Obviously, it is everyone's interest that these copies be error-free to have the best possible copies available to the public. If you provide your penultimate draft to your supervisor at least one month before the due date, you will have plenty of time to correct any errors of fact, referencing, etc, noted by your supervisor, as well as plenty of time to thoroughly proofread your final version. If your final version nevertheless contains numerous typos or related errors, you will be required to supply corrected copies. In addition, errors in the final version can affect your grade. As a courtesy, you might ask your supervisor if they would like a final copy for their own bookshelves. The library will, on request, seek permission from the Head of School to photocopy your entire work to meet a request of a person not able to visit the library.

IF YOU DO NOT WISH THE HEAD OF SCHOOL TO APPROVE SUCH REQUESTS, YOU MUST MAKE THIS KNOWN WHEN YOU SUBMIT YOUR PAPER.

Assessment

Assessment of post-graduate research is not a formulaic process. There is no "right" or "wrong". The professional judgement of the examiner plays a significant role. Because students have a right to know the assessment considerations, a number of points are given below. In general, one may assume that a "passing" competence must be demonstrated on *each* point. That is, a brilliant insight in a conclusion cannot be used to cancel shocking grammar, spelling, and documentation of sources. It is also assumed in what follows that the

student prepared and kept to an approved research design (which means that many assessment criteria for the research design carry through to the finished project). The main criteria are:

- Completion of intended objectives (as set out in the research proposal, or as modified with approval)
- Coverage of theory
- Depth of understanding and analysis
- Adequate and proper use of resources
- Logical coherence of arguments
- Structure and expression
- Technical aspects of production
- Difficulty and originality
- Recommendations and conclusions follow from theory and analysis of issue
- Adherence to acceptable research methods.

Faculty of Commerce and Administration Offices

Railway West Wing (RWW) - FCA Student Administration Office

The Student Administration Office is located on the ground and first floors of the Railway West Wing. The ground floor counter is the first point of contact for general enquiries and FCA forms. Student Administration Advisers are available to discuss course status and give further advice about FCA qualifications. To check for opening hours, call the office on (04) 463-5376.

Easterfield (EA) - FCA/Law Kelburn Office

The Kelburn Campus Office for the Faculties of Commerce & Administration and Law is situated in the Easterfield Building - it includes the ground floor reception desk (EA 005) and offices EA 125a to EA 131 (Level 1). The office is available for the following:

- Duty tutors for student contact and advice;
- Information concerning administrative and academic matters;
- FCA Student Administration forms (e.g. application for academic transcripts, requests for degree audit, COP requests);
- Examinations-related information during the examination period.

Check with the Student Administration Office for opening times on (04) 463-5376.

General University Policies and Statutes

Students should familiarise themselves with the University's policies and statutes, particularly those regarding assessment and course of study requirements, and formal academic grievance procedures.

Student Conduct and Staff Conduct

The Statute on Student Conduct together with the Policy on Staff Conduct ensure that members of the University community are able to work, learn, study and participate in the academic and social aspects of the University's life in an atmosphere of safety and respect. The Statute on Student Conduct contains information on what conduct is prohibited and what steps can be taken if there is a complaint. For queries about complaint procedures under the Statute on Student Conduct, contact the Facilitator and Disputes Advisor. This Statute is available in the Faculty Student Administration Office or on the website at: www.vuw.ac.nz/policy/StudentConduct.

The policy on Staff Conduct can be found on the VUW website at: www.vuw.ac.nz/policy/StaffConduct.

Academic Grievances

If you have any academic problems with your course, you should talk to the tutor or lecturer concerned or, if you are not satisfied with the result of that meeting, see the Head of School or the Associate Dean (Students) of your Faculty. Class representatives are available to assist you with this process. If, after trying the above channels, you are still unsatisfied, formal grievance procedures can be invoked. These are set out in the Academic Grievances Policy, which is published on the VUW website: www.vuw.ac.nz/policy/AcademicGrievances.

Academic Integrity and Plagiarism

Academic integrity is about honesty – put simply it means no cheating. All members of the University community are responsible for upholding academic integrity, which means staff and students are expected to behave honestly, fairly and with respect for others at all times.

Plagiarism is a form of cheating which undermines academic integrity. Plagiarism is prohibited at Victoria.

The University defines plagiarism as follows:

Plagiarism is presenting someone else's work as if it were your own, whether you mean to or not.

'Someone else's work' means anything that is not your own idea, even if it is presented in your own style. It includes material from books, journals or any other printed source, the work of other students or staff, information from the Internet, software programmes and other electronic material, designs and ideas. It also includes the organization or structuring of any such material.

Plagiarism is not worth the risk.

Any enrolled student found guilty of plagiarism will be subject to disciplinary procedures under the Statute on Student Conduct (www.vuw.ac.nz/policy/studentconduct) and may be penalized severely. Consequences of being found guilty of plagiarism can include:

- An oral or written warning;
- Suspension from class or university;
- Cancellation of your mark for an assessment or a fail grade for the course.

Find out more about plagiarism, and how to avoid it, on the University's website at: www.vuw.ac.nz/home/studying/plagiarism.html.

Students with Disabilities

The University has a policy of reasonable accommodation of the needs of students with disabilities. The policy aims to give students with disabilities an equal opportunity with all

other students to demonstrate their abilities. If you have a disability, impairment or chronic medical condition (temporary, permanent or recurring) that may impact on your ability to participate, learn and/or achieve in lectures and tutorials, or in meeting the course requirements, then please contact the Course Co-ordinator as early in the course as possible. Alternatively, you may wish to approach a Student Adviser from Disability Support Services to confidentially discuss your individual needs and the options and support that are available. Disability Support Services are located on Level 1, Robert Stout Building, or phoning (04) 463-6070, email: disability@vuw.ac.nz. The name of your School's Disability Liaison Person can be obtained from the Administrative Assistant or the School Prospectus.

Student Support

Staff at Victoria want students' learning experiences at the University to be positive. If your academic progress is causing you concern, please contact the relevant Course Co-ordinator, or Associate Dean who will either help you directly, or put you in contact with someone who can.

The Student Services Group is also available to provide a variety of support and services. Find out more at www.vuw.ac.nz/st_services/ or email student-services@vuw.ac.nz.

VUWSA employs two Education Co-ordinators who deal with academic problems and provide support, advice and advocacy services, as well as organising class representatives and faculty delegates. The Education Office is located on the ground floor, Student Union Building, phone (04) 463-6983 or (04) 463-6984, email education@vuwsa.org.nz.

Manaaki Pihipihinga Maori and Pacific Mentoring programme (Faculties of Humanities and Social sciences and Commerce and Administration)

- **What:** Academic Mentoring for Maori and Pacific students studying at all levels in the above faculties. Weekly sessions for an hour with a mentor to go over assignments and any questions from tutorials or lectures. Registered students can use the faculty's study rooms and computer suite, at any time, at Kelburn and Pipitea.
- Mature student and Post grad network

If you would like to register as a mentor or mentee, please contact the co-ordinator.

Where:

Melissa Dunlop
Programme Co-ordinator
Room 109 D
14 Kelburn Parade: back courtyard
Phone: (04) 463-6015
Email: Maori-Pacific-Mentoring@vuw.ac.nz

Please Note: A mentoring room will also be running at Pipitea Campus starting January. Please contact the Programme Co-ordinator for details.