

School of Government

**PUBL 430**  
**RESEARCH PROJECT IN PUBLIC POLICY**

Trimester 1, 2014

**COURSE OUTLINE**

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**Names and Contact Details**

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**Trimester Dates**

Monday 3<sup>rd</sup> March to Friday 27<sup>th</sup> June.

**Withdrawal from Course**

1. Your fees will be refunded if you withdraw from this course on or before Friday 14<sup>th</sup> March 2014.
2. The standard last date for withdrawal from this course is Friday 16<sup>th</sup> May. After this date, students forced to withdraw by circumstances beyond their control must apply for permission on an '*Application for Associate Dean's Permission to Withdraw Late*' including supporting documentation. The application form is available from either of the Faculty's Student Customer Service Desks.

**Class Times and Room Numbers**

This is a research course, with no class meetings.

**Expected Workload**

The expected total workload in the course is 300 hours, which can be evenly spread throughout the trimester.

## **Prescription**

Research project on a selected aspect of public policy.

## **Course Learning Objectives**

Students who pass this course should be able to:

1. Produce independent research including setting initial research questions and forming conclusions
2. Identify, plan, design and manage a research project (under supervision)
3. Discuss specific aspects of methodology raised by the research and justify the choice of method or methods
4. Write up and present the research in the form of a journal article.

## **Course Delivery**

No formal classes are associated with this course which is an independent research course. You can expect regular contact with the course coordinator and your supervisor (once assigned).

## **Readings**

There are no specified readings. There are several guides to research which can be borrowed from the library. A book which is useful for post-experience students is Zina O'Leary, *The Essential Guide to Doing Your Research Project*, Sage, 2010. This book can be borrowed from the VUW Library and a copy of the book can be purchased through VicBooks, the VUW bookshop, Rutherford House, Pipitea Campus ([www.vicbooks.co.nz](http://www.vicbooks.co.nz)). Your supervisor may also assist you in locating readings which will be helpful to progress your research.

Please refer to a separate booklet, *School of Government Research Guidelines 2014*, available from the Administrator, which supplements this course outline.

## **Assessment**

A project report (7,500 words) is due on 27 June and is worth 100% of the course grade. All course learning objectives will be assessed through the final report, and a letter grade will be awarded. The report should be set out in the manner of a journal article, and according to the specific guidance of your supervisor.

A research proposal (1,250 words) is due on 24 March. The proposal is a mandatory course requirement.

## **Assessment Detail**

### **Research Proposal, due Monday 24 March 2014**

The proposal is a mandatory requirement. There are penalties for lateness and for proposals that are unacceptable (see the deadlines section in this outline).

When submitting your *proposal*, include a front page with the following details:

- Course code and name
- Assessment item descriptor (final proposal)
- Due date (and date submitted, if different)
- Name of candidate

- Student ID number

Please email your final proposal in a Microsoft Word attachment to [amanda.wolf@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:amanda.wolf@vuw.ac.nz). DO NOT pdf the file.

Your proposal, which should be approximately 1,250 words, should include the following:

1. A title
2. A summary statement
3. A brief summary of the background, objectives, merit, and methodology of the proposed research
4. A brief outline of the final report
5. A statement of any particular conditions that apply
6. A HEC statement
7. References

The job of a proposal is to seek permission to carry out the study: it is an exercise in persuasion, in which you set out and justify a compelling study. It is concise and clear, and is fully referenced.

### ***The Proposal in Detail***

1. The Title

Titles should be short and descriptive. Journals are good sources of ideas for titles.

2. The Summary Statement

The summary statement should first provide a ‘narrative hook’ that alerts the reader to your general field of interest, such as child health policy or interagency collaboration. Second, it should raise a feature for focused examination. Third, it should convey the purpose of the research. Finally, the summary statement should convey the nature of the answer you will provide. The summary statement should be about 4 to 6 sentences.

The summary statement contains the overall research “in a nutshell”. It is similar to an abstract for an article or report (except that it is written before the results of the research or the main messages are known). A reader will be able to clearly see the research problem you want to study.

3. Background, Objectives, Merit and Methodology

This section provides an overview of the objectives and merits of the research, and an indication of the methodology to be used. If there is some relevant background or context that the reader needs to understand your objectives, then this section should include a brief note on it. This section should be no longer than three or four paragraphs.

The purposes of this section 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 and methods match the study objectives. 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 the summary as a whole in light of the course objectives.

### A Note on Methodology

A research methodology is the strategy with which you will achieve your objectives. The summary section should clearly state your strategy and the rest of the proposal should develop it in a consistent manner.

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 muster theory and evidence in a way that allows the reader to follow you and be able to judge for themselves the conclusions you have reached? How will you go about putting together a convincing chain of evidence and reasoning?

#### 4. Brief Outline

Here you will *describe what each section of your final report 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 should be about two pages long. You should NOT write a reduced version of the expected final content.

Depending on your topic or methodology, you may have more or fewer sections than the rough guide below, which provided “generic” section headings for an essay that includes some literature review, an application, analysis and interpretation. Note that the proposal should comment on the content and appropriate methodology for each section (as applicable). You may find it helpful to include indicative word limits for each section.

##### *Introduction*

For the proposal, you may briefly state something like: “This section will set out the research question/s and provide a reader’s guide to the paper.” You may also state if the introduction will include some particular context or motivation that will raise the reader’s interest and justify the study (for example, a recent event or publication).

##### *Background*

This section of the essay will provide the reader with key *facts* that set the scene for your investigation. It could include a summary of legislation, a brief history, or a description of the state of the world with regard to your topic. If your work is comparative, you may describe aspects of the comparators here. If your work is mainly theoretical, you may describe the real-world salience of your analysis. ***Your proposal should indicate what content will be included and the general sources for that content.***

##### *Concepts, theories or ideas*

Concepts, theories or ideas (or whatever word you prefer) provide the framework and terms for your investigation. In this section, you will report on a selection of literature, summarise its relevance, define and justify concepts and related tasks. ***In your proposal, you need to identify the content of this section and/or the way in which you are going to come up with the content*** (for instance by drawing on several

different strands in the literature, or synthesising several frameworks used in other jurisdictions).

### *Findings*

In this section of the essay you will present your research findings. To the extent possible, you should plan to present these results first and then (in the next section) tell the reader how you have interpreted them. In other words, you should first *describe* your findings and how you arrived at them. However, this is not a hard and fast rule. You should plan to write up what information you have collected, organised in some sensible way. ***Your proposal, therefore, needs to explain what evidence you will collect, or use, and how.***

### *Analysis and interpretation*

In this section of the essay you will interpret your evidence in light of your concepts, theories or ideas. ***Your proposal needs to make clear how you will analyse and interpret the evidence.*** Analysis may fit better in the “findings section”, depending on your methods. The key is to clearly imagine your final essay, and to be able to explain how the various sections will come together.

### *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.

## 5. Statement of Particular Conditions

State any particular conditions that apply, such as the involvement of a third-party mentor (such as a workplace supervisor), the relationship of the research to your paid employment, or whether the research builds on a paper you submitted to another course in your current degree or previous study. If your research may suggest conflicts of interests or political sensitivities or similar, discuss how you plan to deal with these.

## 6. HEC Statement

State either: “HEC approval is not required” OR “HEC approval is required”

**NOTE:** 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.

## 7. References

The last required part of the proposal is a reference section, which will probably contain at least 10 items. The references 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. References should be presented in the correct format. Check that you have listed here all references used in the text and that there is at least one reference for every claim in the text that calls for one.

## ***Proposal Approval***

Approval of research essay proposals is the responsibility of the School. Three decisions are possible:

1. Approved, with the student and supervisor invited to consider any refinements to the proposal;
2. Conditionally approved, with the student to address issues or make changes as indicated on the approval form, to the satisfaction of the supervisor before proceeding to undertake further work;
3. Not approved. This option requires the student to submit a revised proposal for review (within 10 days, if the proposal was submitted on time), taking into account comments on the approval form, and incurs a penalty (see section on penalties below).

Comments, suggestions and conditions (if any) will be conveyed to you in writing. After receiving the review decision, YOU must contact your supervisor to arrange a meeting or phone call to discuss the decision and make plans for the remainder of the course.

### **A Note on HEC Process**

*(Note that you should aim to apply for the 1 April deadline. You must develop your application with your supervisor).*

Pipitea Human Ethics Committee applications are to be submitted online at <https://rme.vuw.ac.nz/RMENet/>. Your supervisor needs to have selected a Pipitea HEC rep (peer reviewer) on or before 1 April.

This step-by-step guide <http://www.victoria.ac.nz/research/support/research-office/ethics-approval/human-ethics/Using-the-Online-Ethics-Form-Guide-for-Applicants.pdf> will help you through completing the form. If you are unable to log onto the system, this form: <http://www.victoria.ac.nz/research/support/research-office/ethics-approval/human-ethics/Access-to-Online-Ethics-Applications-form.docx> should be completed and sent to [ethicsadmin@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:ethicsadmin@vuw.ac.nz).

Quick overview: When a student application is submitted, it goes firstly to your supervisor for approval. Your supervisor needs to select the School's Pipitea HEC rep to provide you with a preliminary review, following which the supervisor can release the application to go to the Head of School for approval. Once the Head of School has approved the application, it is forwarded to the committee. Applications might be returned for revisions, and in these cases comments on the screen will give details of changes which need to be made.

The University Research Ethics pages are here <https://www.victoria.ac.nz/research/support/research-office/ethics-approval/human-ethics>

Pipitea HEC members and further information is available from your supervisor

If you have any trouble completing the form online, please contact ITS on extension 5050.

### **Penalties**

The grade on the final report may be penalised if the proposal is late, or is inadequate. Such penalties will be assessed on a case-by-case basis. A maximum penalty of 20 marks will apply to a proposal that is adequate only after 10 additional days have elapsed from the due date. If 10 days are insufficient, the mandatory course requirements will not have been met, and the student will be required to re-enrol.

### **Use of Turnitin**

Student work provided for assessment in this course may be checked for academic integrity by the electronic search engine <http://www.turnitin.com>. Turnitin is an on-line plagiarism prevention tool which compares submitted work with a very large database of existing material. At the discretion of the Head of School, handwritten work may be copy-typed by the School and submitted to Turnitin. A copy of submitted materials will be retained on behalf of the University for detection of future plagiarism, but access to the full text of submissions will not be made available to any other party.

### **Mandatory Course Requirements**

Submission of research proposal.

If you cannot complete an assignment or sit a test or examination, refer to [www.victoria.ac.nz/home/study/exams-and-assessments/aegrotat](http://www.victoria.ac.nz/home/study/exams-and-assessments/aegrotat)

### **Class Representative (Not applicable, as this is a research course)**

A class representative will be elected in the first class, and that person's name and contact details made available to VUWSA, the course coordinator and the class. The class representative provides a communication channel to liaise with the course coordinator on behalf of students.

### **Communication of Additional Information**

Additional information or information on changes will be conveyed to students by email.

### **Student feedback**

Student feedback on University courses may be found at [www.cad.vuw.ac.nz/feedback/feedback\\_display.php](http://www.cad.vuw.ac.nz/feedback/feedback_display.php)

### **Link to general information**

For general information about course-related matters, go to <http://www.victoria.ac.nz/vbs/studenthelp/general-course-information>

### **Note to Students**

Your assessed work may also be used for quality assurance purposes, such as to assess the level of achievement of learning objectives as required for accreditation and academic audit. The findings may be used to inform changes aimed at improving the quality of VBS programmes. All material used for such processes will be treated as confidential, and the outcome will not affect your grade for the course.