

B COMM PROGRAMME 2012-2013

A Student Guide to the Business Research Project

Introduction

The Business Research Project will provide real world, hands-on research experience to students in a learning and supportive environment. The Project has a credit weighting of 10 credits, in Year III of the BComm Degree.

Each student is assigned an academic supervisor, who is a member of staff from the Department the student is majoring in. The student and supervisor will meet in April to outline the scope of the project and set out a schedule of regular meetings for the remaining months. The academic supervisor will advise the student via regular meetings. In the case of company projects, the student(s) will also meet with the specific company to plan the research work.

A series of research workshops will be provided to all research students and these will be organised by the Work Placement Manager, in conjunction with the Board of Studies.

These workshops will involve the following themes:

- Formulation of research questions/hypothesis, research design, developing and presenting an argument/hypothesis;
- Project management;
- Data Sourcing:
 - Qualitative research methods (structured/ narrative interviews, participant observation, documentary analysis)
 - Quantitative research methods (sample framing, sampling, data collection, analysis, interpretation)

The research project should address a business issue relevant to your major area of study. You may work with a particular company or organisation if this option is available and of interest to you. Alternatively the project can be a desk study using publicly available information. Various types of projects may be developed in conjunction with individual companies, such as single student company projects or joint student company projects (unpaid), devised by a specific company, mentored by a person within the company, and supervised by an academic member of faculty. In the case of these projects, students will be invited to apply for them and there may be a company interview involved. In all cases the company will have the final say in selecting students.

The approach you take for your project must be discussed beforehand with your supervisor. Examples of projects could include, assessing the business case for a new product, analysing the strategic direction of a company, assessing the acquisition strategy of a firm, analysing the role of innovation in economic development, or analysing the implications of competition law for a firm, etc...

In all cases, the research process for your specific project will involve:

- Choosing a research topic;
- Establishing the research question and setting objectives;
- Discussing the relevance of your research question for the company or organisation.
- Discussing the methodology – quantitative and/or qualitative approaches;
- Data sourcing;
- Data Analysis;
- Writing up the results of your research. This is sometimes considered the least problematic aspect of research, but it is vital to present your research results coherently and fully in order to make persuasive arguments.

The project should be no more than 6,000 words (10,000 in the case of joint projects) and should contain an executive summary, outlining the main points of the project.

The deadline for submission is Friday 30th August 2013.

Sample Contents

The Business Research Report should contain the following broad headings. The exact headings from 3 to 5 may change depending on your specific research project and this can be discussed with your supervisor.

1. Executive Summary
2. Defining the Research Question
3. Description of Company\Organisation
4. Methodological and Data Issues
5. Analysis and Findings
6. Conclusions, Future Directions and Challenges
7. References

1. Executive Summary:

The Research Report must contain an Executive Summary at the beginning of the report, maximum length of one page. From this Summary, the reader should be able to ascertain:

1. What the research report set out to analyse;
2. What are the key findings of the research, highlighting the information that is most important for the reader;
3. What conclusions or recommendations are being made.

2. Defining the Research Question:

This part of the report provides the reader with the background information for the research project and sets out the goals of your specific project. Its purpose is to establish a framework for the research, so that readers can understand what you are doing in this project.

In this section, the writer should:

1. Create reader interest in the topic;
2. Lay the broad foundation for the problem that leads to the study;
3. Reach out to a specific audience.

The key purpose is to:

- State the overall research problem. A problem might be defined as the issue that exists in the literature, theory, or for a particular company or organisation that leads to a need for the study. It is important in this section that the problem stands out. Sometimes, obscure and poorly formulated problems are masked in an extended discussion. In such cases, readers will have difficulty recognizing what the research problem is.
- State the problem in terms intelligible to someone who is generally sophisticated but who is relatively uninformed in the area of your investigation. Effective problem statements answer the question “Why does this research need to be conducted.” If a researcher is unable to answer this question clearly, then the statement of the problem will come off as ambiguous.
- Identify specific research questions:
 - Identify up to 3 specific questions connected to the main research problem
 - These questions should be formulated in very clear language and in a form of a question. Generally, there are two types of questions, which define the applied research methodology:
 - Descriptive – How things are?
 - Normative – How things should be?

3. Description of Company\Organisation

This section should give the reader a brief overview of the company or organisation, outlining the most important features relevant to the research problem.

This section should also contain a section justifying (or rationalising) the research problem in the context of the company or organisation. The author states in this part why the research is important for the company or organisation and if there are any implications of this for the wider community or economy.

This part can include references to journal and newspaper articles pinpointing the importance of the research area. Also estimations of the economic value of solving the problem may be stated, if appropriate.

4. Methodological and Data Issues

The methods section is a key part of your research project. The activities should be described with as much detail as possible and should indicate the methodological steps you have taken to answer every question identified in the earlier part (section 2) of your project.

The methodology section should describe in detail how you conducted the study. For example, what methods were used to answer your research question:

- Case studies (n = 1>5);
- Questionnaires (n>30+);
- Interviews;
- Statistical analysis of industrial or economic data, etc.

The methods need to be described in detail that shows the connection to the specific research questions and should include where you sourced your data. Specify the procedures you used to analyse the data, e.g. statistical techniques, triangulation, etc. A good method section describes the data collection in such detail, that somebody else could conduct this part based on your description.

5. Analysis and Findings

This section is your key contribution to the field. Here you should describe in detail your analysis and findings and how you came up with these. Everything in this section should be 'new', that is it should contain your contribution to the research problem.

6. Conclusions, Future Directions and Challenges

This section summarises; (i) what you did, and (ii) what you found. You should also briefly outline what challenges you faced in doing this research and what future research should be conducted in this area.

7. References

This list should include all references to studies, newspaper articles, web pages, etc. made in previous sections. See Appendix 1 for the appropriate Style Guide to use in your Reference section.

Role of the Academic Supervisor

The role of your Academic Supervisor is to:

- Ensure the project is appropriately defined and established;
- Provide guidance and direction on aspects of your project;
- Provide constructive criticism and comments on drafts;
- Your supervisor **will not** do your work for you, s/he will supervise **your** work;
- Grade your project on a Fail, Pass or Honours basis.

Assessment of Business Research Project

Guidelines and Criteria for Assessment of Business Research Project

A Fail judgement (0%-39%) may be recommended by the academic supervisor where:

- A student fails to address the learning outcomes of the project. There is no use of analytical skills and no originality or insight. Such work will have a degree of irrelevance and is presented with expression and style that is poor.

NOTE:

- **A fail judgement will mean that you are NOT eligible for the award of honours in your BComm Degree (i.e. in your Year IV exams).**

A Pass judgement (40%-59%) may be recommended by the academic supervisor where as a minimum:

- A student shows some awareness and understanding of the critical issues involved in the project but presents material that is workman like with some technical mistakes. There is some use of analytical skills and some originality or insight but the execution is not very competent.

An Honour (>60%) judgement may be recommended by the academic supervisor where as a minimum:

- A student demonstrates some awareness and understanding of deeper and subtle aspects of the project such as the ability to identify and analyse critical issues or problems, ability to adapt and apply ideas to new situations, and ability to evaluate new ideas. The Project is presented in a workman like fashion and is mostly well written.

Presentation of Business Research Project

All students are required to give a presentation on their Business Research Project when they return to College to complete their degree. These presentations will normally take place within 2 to 4 weeks of your return. The Placement Manager, the BComm Director and your academic mentor or their nominees may attend.

The Aims of the presentation are:

1. To gain a greater understanding of your project by presenting it in an informal yet professional and interested environment.
2. Provide members of the audience with the opportunity to acquire a greater understanding of your business project and to stimulate you with questions and suggestions for your consideration.
3. Enhance your verbal communication skills.

The presentation of the Business Research Project should be 10 minutes long, consisting of 4 slides covering the following:

1. Outline the aims of the projects and the main findings;
2. Outline what skills and experience you have gained in doing this project;
3. Outline where you believe the BComm programme helped you in your Business Research Project and identify any additional aspects of the programme that could be enhances based on your experience on this project;
4. Looking back now, what is your assessment of the Business Research Project in terms of its place in the BComm programme and how has it influenced your future career plans.

Submission of your Report:

You must submit two copies of your report **to your academic mentor** with the following information on the cover page:

- Your name;
- Your student ID number;
- The title of your project;
- The name of your academic mentor;
- The name of the company, if relevant
- The submission date.

The deadline for submission is Friday 30th August 2013

B Commerce Business Research Project Award

The Business Research Project award is being introduced to recognise exceptional student performance in conducting and completing the project.

One award will be available each year and the award will be presented to the successful student at the College of Business & Law Undergraduate Awards Ceremony in final year. If no students are nominated, no award will be given. The winner will receive a monetary prize and this prestigious award is also an excellent addition to the student's CV.

The award will be open to all 3rd Commerce students undertaking the Business Research Project option within the Transferable Skills module.

Nominations for the award will be accepted from the Academic Mentor member of staff involved in the assessment of the student's project or from the student's host organisation if s/he is carrying out the project on behalf of an organisation.

To nominate a student, a form must be completed by the Academic Mentor or the host organisation representative and returned to the Placement Office, accompanied by a supporting statement. Nominations must be submitted to the Placement Office, by email, fax or post, two weeks before the submit date of the project. Nominations will be invited from Academic Mentors/host organisations one month before the project submit date and the Award Nomination form will be emailed to all involved.

The B Comm Placement/Project Awards Committee will review nominations and select the winner. The Committee is made up of representatives from the B Comm Board of Studies.

For a student to be eligible, they must be completing their research project in the current academic year, be returning to University following the project period and must have submitted and presented their project by deadline.

The winner and all students nominated will be notified following the Committee's selection. In advance of selection, at the discretion of the Committee, nominated students may be asked to deliver a short presentation on their project experience.

APPENDIX 1

Referencing Style Guide

When referencing literature in the body of your report include the authors name and year of publication in brackets. Example: Smith (2006); Murphy and Ring (2009); or if more than two authors, Markov et al. (2003). Include the full reference in your Reference list at the end of your report.

References should be listed in alphabetical order, including the author's name, complete title of the work, title of the source, volume, issue, year of publication, and pages cited. Do not include any abbreviations. Use the following examples as a guide:

Journal Article:

Sawyer, S., and Tapia, A. (2005). The Sociotechnical Nature of Mobile Computing Work: Evidence from a Study of Policing in the United States. *International Journal of Technology and Human Interaction*, 1(3), 1-14.

Book, One Author:

Author, A. A. (1994). *Title of work*. Location/City, State: Publisher.

Book, Two Authors:

Author, A. A., and Author, B. B. (1994). *Title of work*. Location/City, State: Publisher.

Book, more than Two Authors:

Author, A. A., Author, B. B., and Author, C. C. (1994). *Title of work*. Location/City, State: Publisher.

Edited Book:

Zhao, F. (Ed.). (2006). *Maximize Business Profits Through E-partnerships*. Hershey, PA: IRM Press.

Chapter in an Edited Book:

Jaques, P. A., and Viccari, R. M. (2006). Considering Students' Emotions in Computer-Mediated Learning Environments. In Z. Ma (Ed.), *Web-based Intelligent E-learning Systems: Technologies and Applications* (pp. 122-138). Hershey, PA: Information Science Publishing.

Report from a University or Industry Body:

Broadhurst, R. G., and Maller, R. A. (1991). *Sex Offending and Recidivism* (Tech. Rep. No. 3). Nedlands, Western Australia: University of Western Australia, Crime Research Centre.

Published Proceedings:

Deci, E. L., and Ryan, R. M. (1991). A Motivational Approach to Self: Integration in Personality. In R. Dienstbier (Ed.), *Nebraska Symposium on Motivation: Vol. 38. Perspectives on Motivation* (pp. 237-288). Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.

Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation or Master's Thesis:

Wilfley, D. (1989). *Interpersonal Analyses of Bulimia: Normal-Weight and Obese*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Missouri, Columbia.

Conference Paper:

Lanktree, C., and Briere, J. (1991, January). *Early Data on the Trauma Symptom Checklist for Children (TSC-C)*. Paper presented at the meeting of the American Professional Society on the Abuse of Children, San Diego, CA.

Web Site:

VandenBos, G., Knapp, S., and Doe, J. (2001). Role of Reference Elements in the Selection of Resources by Psychology Undergraduates. *Journal of Bibliographic Research*, 5, 117-123. Retrieved October 13, 2001, from <http://jbr.org/chapters.html>

Magazine or Newspaper Article with an Author

Laurie, V. (2004). In the Eye of the Storm. *Irish Times*, November 20th, p. 5.

Magazine or Newspaper Article with no Author

Detection Proves its Worth for Cancer Prevention. (2003). *The Economist*, April 4th, p.22-24.

When quoting an author's work, the author's name, the date of publication, and the **page(s)** on which the quotation appears in the original text should follow the direct quote:

Example 1: Brown (2002) states that "the value of data is realized by most organizations" (p. 45).

Example 2: "In most organizations, data resources are considered to be a major organization asset" (Smith, 2003: 35-36) and must be carefully monitored by the senior management.