

University of St Andrews

**School of
International Relations**

**IR 4099
Honours Dissertation**

Academic session 2011-2012

Dissertation module coordinators:

Dr Michelle Burgis until September 2011

Dr Frederic Volpi after September 2011

ir-4099@st-andrews.ac.uk



IR 4099 Dissertation Module

Contents

Module Objectives, Transferable Skills, Learning Outcomes	p 2
Assessment and Marking	pp 3-4
Late Submissions and Extensions	p 4
Feedback	p 5
Format of the Dissertation	pp 6-7
Advice on Style	p 8
The Role of Supervisors	p 9
Timetable and Deadlines	pp 10-11
Appendix (samples of past dissertations' titles)	pp 12-13

1. Module objectives

This module, that the School regards as valuable and stimulating, provides the opportunity for students to develop their skills in research, writing and presentation, and to focus a larger than usual share of their energies on a single topic of their own choosing, subject to appropriate supervision. The dissertation, which is produced, can also be shown to potential employers or postgraduate admission officers as evidence of a student's ability to work on her or his own to a high standard. Indeed, the dissertation represents a particular opportunity for candidates to undertake a distinctive, individual piece of academic work

The dissertation counts for 30 credits and must be taken in the first semester of the Senior Honours year. **The dissertation module is compulsory for Single Honours IR students and may be taken by Joint Honours IR students.**

2. Transferable Skills

Students writing a dissertation will be able to demonstrate a wide range of skills and abilities:

- ability to gather, organize and use evidence, data and information from a variety of primary and secondary sources;
- ability to identify, investigate, formulate and advocate solutions to problems;
- ability to construct reasoned arguments, synthesize relevant information and exercise critical judgement;
- ability to seek and make use of constructive feedback, and to communicate effectively in writing;
- ability to use information technology for the retrieval and presentation of information;
- ability to work independently, demonstrating initiative, self-organization and time-management.

3. Learning Outcomes

By researching their chosen topic, arranging it in a logical and interesting fashion, and by writing up a fairly substantial piece of scholarly work, students will:

- have the opportunity to apply concepts, theories, methods used in the study of international relations to a subject matter of their choice, subject to available supervision;
- develop further their capacity to think critically and independently;
- learn to evaluate different interpretations of world political events and issues;
- reflect and take responsibility for their own learning;

Students will be assisted in achieving their potential by being provided with a supervisor who is receptive of their needs and encourages their independence.

4. Assessment and Marking.

In assessing your dissertation the following criteria will be used:

- **Theoretical underpinning and structure of the argument.** As you have learnt over the years from regular essay writing, an argument is – to put it bluntly – reasoning plus evidence. An argument is a logically connected series of propositions that establish a hypothesis. A hypothesis is a proposal that puts forward a possible explanation of, or answer to, a problem. Your argument must be supported by evidence gathered from (empirical or theoretical) research. It must proceed clearly and logically from assumptions to conclusions.
- **Competence of the argument:** It is pointless to discover the wheel for the second time. With your dissertation you must show competence in recent research developments in your chosen topic. Evidence of this competence is also provided by proper documentation of sources, adequate footnoting of direct quotations and a fully detailed bibliography at the end of the dissertation; if you engage in empirical research you must show awareness of the studies in your area and of the appropriate methodology to use.
- **Presentation of the argument:** You should plan the presentation of your central idea or thesis in an organized and logical structure. The Introduction is extremely important because it signposts to the reader what you will be arguing and how you will be arguing it. Without a good introduction the reader is unsure of what to expect, and/or what it is you are trying to say. Define the key terms, spell out very clearly your hypothesis and explain how you intend to structure your argument. Part of what we are testing is your ability to prioritize, to summarize and to express yourself concisely and effectively. A concluding Chapter is desirable. Sum up what you have said, but without repetition. Address the hypotheses made in the Introduction and throughout the work. Re-drafting each chapter several times will help not only with the content, but also with the style and polish that will make it read smoothly and coherently. Spelling and grammar do count. Spelling mistakes suggest inadequate attention and seriousness of purpose on your part. Grammatical errors interrupt the flow of your writing and may even confuse the meaning of your argument. They are essential rules for communicating your ideas to your readership (internal markers and external examiner). This is another ‘transferable skill’ that the School is trying to teach throughout the years. Also avoid pointless repetition, tautology and redundancy in language.
- **Novelty of the argument.** Although you are not expected to discover a new continent, your dissertation must show some degree of independence of thought. Some degree of originality is essential if you are aiming at a first.

Marking Scales and Degree Classification

The School has posted a comprehensive explanation of the 20 point-marking scale, and the qualitative distinctions which distinguish work in different degree classes, (i.e 1st, 2:1 etc) **on the School webpage.**

The penalties for late submission of work and rules for obtaining prior permission for extensions are **on the School webpage**.

Dissertations are double marked, i.e., separately by two members of academic staff, and are also subject to moderation by the External Examiner. The written feedback received by every dissertation candidate is the agreed comments and mark agreed through this intensive assessment process. Marks awarded on dissertations are not therefore subject to appeal regarding academic merit.

Students may find the following checklist (which forms the basis for assessing Honours dissertations) a useful guide in planning, researching, and writing their dissertation:

- Does the dissertation address directly and effectively the issue/topic in the title?
- Are the theoretical underpinnings of the work explicitly stated and appropriately applied?
- Is the material presented in a logical order and properly structured?
- Are the major themes and arguments clearly identified and analysed?
- Is the evidence used effectively in support of the thesis?
- Does the dissertation show critical judgement and evaluation?
- Is the relevant literature acknowledged and examined?
- Is the range of sources wide enough to provide adequate coverage and specific enough to provide depth?
- Is the writing style precise, clear, and incisive?
- Do footnotes and references provide evidence of a scholarly approach?

5. Late Submissions, Extensions and Special Needs

For all relevant policies, please consult the School Handbook:

http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/intrel/media/IR_School_Handbook.pdf

6. Feedback

Students will receive a feedback sheet on their marked dissertation explaining why a mark has been agreed and awarded. In addition, supervisors are available to their supervisees to explain strengths and weaknesses that the various markers have found in the dissertation.

Each student will receive the Dissertation Feedback Sheet reproduced below:

RATING OF PERFORMANCE	Excellent 16.5+	Very Good 16.4-15	Good 14.9-13.5	Adequate 13.4-10.5	Weak 10.4-7.1	Fail <7.0
(a) Does the dissertation address directly and effectively the issue/topic in the title?						
(b) Is there a theoretical underpinnings of the work? Is it explicitly stated and appropriately applied?						
(c) Is the presentation of the argument properly structured? Does the demonstration of the thesis proceed in logically clear steps?						
d) Is the writing style precise, clear, and incisive?						
(e) How effectively is the thesis supported by evidence?						
(f) Is the relevant literature acknowledged and examined? Is the range of sources wide enough to provide adequate coverage and specific enough to provide depth?						
(g) Does the dissertation show competence, independence of thought, critical judgement and evaluation?						

Students will also receive written comments explaining the mark.

7. Format of the Dissertation

Dissertations are to be in black typescript, on A4 paper of good quality, (one side only) and bound in Clear Velobinds. (Students will take their completed dissertations directly to the Print Unit, 65 North Street, St Andrews).

- Double spacing should be used except for indented quotations or footnotes where single-spacing should be adopted. Margins at the binding edge are to be no less than 40 mm and other margins no less than 20 mm.
- Font size should be no less than 12
- Pages should be numbered consecutively throughout the thesis with the numbers located centrally at the bottom of the page.
- The title page shall give the following information in the order listed:
 - (i) full title of the dissertation and sub-title if any
 - (ii) the name of the author
 - (iii) the statement that:
“This dissertation is submitted in part requirement for the Degree of M.A. (Honours with International Relations) at the University of St Andrews, Scotland, and is solely the work of the above named candidate”.
 - (iv) your signature;
 - (v) date of submission.
- The table of contents shall immediately follow the title page. It shall list, in sequence, all relevant sub-divisions of the dissertation, including the titles of chapters, sections and sub-sections, as appropriate; the bibliography; the list of abbreviations used in the dissertation (if applicable); any appendices.
- Immediately following there shall be a summary of the dissertation of approximately 300 words. This summary shall provide a synopsis of the thesis and shall state clearly the nature and scope of the research undertaken. There should be a brief statement of the method of investigation where appropriate: an outline of the principal arguments and a summary of the conclusions reached.
- The first chapter of the dissertation shall be preceded by an Introduction defining the relation of the thesis to other works in the same field and referring to any findings or propositions and to the main points about sources of treatment.
- A concluding chapter emphasising the main points of the thesis, the results achieved, the particular difficulties encountered, etc., is desirable.
- You can use footnotes printed at the bottom of each page, or endnotes at the end of each chapter.
- A complete bibliography should be supplied at the end of the dissertation, and arranged in a logical order, for example alphabetically by authors, in broad subject classes.
- Primary evidence (e.g. interview transcripts, survey data, etc.) should be included as appendices. Appendices should not include any argument, evaluation, comment, or analysis (the contents of appendices is not included in the dissertation word count).
- The finished dissertation shall be **10,000 words** with a margin of +/- 10% (including footnotes, the abstract, title page and table of contents, but excluding bibliography and any appendices). **Penalties** for exceeding the word limit will be imposed as indicated on the school webpage.
- **TWO** copies of each dissertation are to be submitted, one of which will be retained by the School.

8. Advice on Style

A dissertation is a piece of scholarly work and as such it must conform to certain rules.

- Grammar and spelling: sloppy grammar is often a sign of sloppy thinking and is to be avoided. Poor spelling is an indication of hurried writing and/or lack of attention to detail. Both colloquialisms and abstruse style do not belong in an academic dissertation.
- **Footnotes/endnotes** are an essential part of scholarly work. All material reproduced or paraphrased from other sources **must** be referenced fully and precisely. Failure to do so may trigger the penalties applied for plagiarism (see below). **You may choose to have footnotes** (numbered consecutively and typed at the foot of each page) **or endnotes** (numbered consecutively in each chapter and typed at the end of each chapter) **or you may use the Harvard system**, whereby brief references are inserted in the main text (e.g. “as Morgenthau suggests (Morgenthau, 1964, p. 23)”) and all references are cumulated in the bibliography.
- **Bibliography:** You should list all the works you have consulted for the essay and not just the ones you have used in the footnotes. References should be by author, in alphabetical order and presented in the following format. The recommended style of reference is as follows:

For books:

Author's Surname, Author's Initials., *Book Title*, Place of Publication: Publishers, Year of Publication, page(s) cited.

Example: Stevenson, L., *Seven Theories of Human Nature*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974, p. 53.

For articles in journals:

Author's Surname, Author's Initials., “Article Title”, *Journal Title*, volume number (issue number), date, article's pages, page(s) cited.

Example: Snidal, D., “The limits of hegemonic stability theory”, *International Organization*, vol. 39 (4), Autumn 1985, pp. 579-614, p. 584.

For contributions to edited books:

Author's Surname, Author's Initials, “Title of Contribution”, in Editor's Initials, Editor's Surname (ed.), *Book Title*, Place of Publication: Publishers, Year of Publication, contribution's pages, page(s) cited.

Example: Giddens, A., “States and Military Power in Social Theory”, in L. Freedman (ed.), *War*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994, pp. 112-118, p. 113.

9. The Role of Supervisors

- The general **role** of the supervisor is to give **guidance** and **advice** and to **encourage independence**.
- At this advanced stage of their studies and for a project that is individual research, **candidates are required to build their own bibliography** by using printed bibliographies and by doing catalogue and database searches. The role of supervisors is to advise specifically if students are missing something, e.g., a theoretical dimension, contrasting literature, or on other case studies.
- **You will be advised of your supervisor by the end of the pre-sessional week in September, most likely by a modular email.**
- **If, in the unlikely event, you have NOT been assigned a supervisor by the start of the first semester it is your responsibility to contact the dissertation coordinator immediately.**
- As soon as allocated a supervisor, students are advised to contact her/him by e-mail to arrange a preliminary meeting before the examination diet.
- **Students are required to meet with their supervisors in the first or second week** of the Martinmas semester to confirm their research question and preliminary research. This meeting must also confirm the date of a formal, extended meeting to review the student's progress in **week 5 or 6**.
- Supervisors are expected to **comment on the Introduction to the dissertation and one fully drafted chapter only**.
- You may consult other staff members about your dissertation in an informal manner, but please do so during **office hours**.
- **The deadline for the submission of any material to the supervisor for comments is Friday 18 November.**
- For feedback on their marked dissertation, students may contact their supervisor during exam feedback week at the start of the Spring semester.
- Supervisors are not responsible for editorial and typographic corrections
- **Supervisors cannot comment on the final draft of the dissertation.**

10. Timetable and Deadlines

- Meeting with the dissertation coordinator: **Wednesday 27th April at 1pm** in the Arts Lecture Theatre
- Students taking the dissertation module should submit (on the appropriate form) an **outline** of the topic electronically to **ir-4099@st-andrews.ac.uk** by **12 noon on Monday 29 August 2011**. The outline, 150–200 word long, should contain a clear statement of the problem with which the dissertation deals. It should not be too vague or too ambitious, nor should it be too narrow in scope, though *the structure may change as the research develops*. Ideally, a student should provide also a detailed work plan and some bibliographical references. This will enable supervisors to offer excellent guidance and advice.
- Students will be allocated a supervisor by the beginning of the Martinmas semester. Wherever possible, students are matched with a member of staff with expertise in their dissertation topic. Students, however, cannot be guaranteed this and must note that all members of staff are competent to supervise any topic at the Honours level. If students wish, they may discuss their topic with other members of staff in their office hours.
- **If a student fails to submit dissertation work according to the outlined schedules in this booklet, candidates may be subject to receipt of Academic Alerts and may ultimately not be awarded credit for the dissertation module.**
- Although the dissertation module formally begins in September students are welcome and encouraged to start working on their dissertation during the summer months before meeting their supervisor in week 1 or 2 of the Martinmas semester. Students are strongly recommended to work on the dissertation very regularly throughout the Martinmas semester. **It is worth remembering that the dissertation constitutes fully one-half of your academic work time and therefore is equal to at least some 20 hours of academic work per week. The quality of your dissertation can be judged in those terms.**
- Given the word count required for the dissertation, students should also consider that they are to produce more than is required for the two short essays or one long essay on any taught module. This is a good comparative discipline to apply to their progress.
- **Students are required** to arrange a meeting with their supervisors **in the first or second week of the Martinmas term** to inform supervisors of the work they have done during the summer, to confirm subject and readings, and to schedule a formal, extended **second** meeting to review their progress **in week 5 or 6**.
- The deadline for the submission of any material to the supervisor for comments is **Friday 18 November**. As mentioned above, supervisors can comment on the Introduction to the dissertation and one fully drafted chapter only. A third and final meeting can then be arranged.

- **Two identical copies of the complete dissertation** must be submitted to the School Office (NOT to the supervisor) **by 12 noon on Friday 9 December 2010. EARLY SUBMISSION IS WELCOME.**

For information purposes only, these are examples of dissertation topics previously submitted to the School. You may peruse some past dissertations by requesting this at the School Office.

- Can terrorism ever be justified?
- Why have religious freedoms been curtailed in the Russian Federation?
- Is universal jurisdiction the best solution for every (transitional) society?
- Should the non-proliferation treaty be regarded as a strong or a weak security regime?
- Can international criminal justice prevent future atrocities?
- Managing tribal identities in the Middle East
- The notion of Order in 21st century IR theory
- Is the UN necessary for the maintenance of peace and security in the 21st century?
- The axis of opportunity: Russian-Chinese relations
- Human and Capital Causes of West African Poverty
- US-South Korean Relationship :development and Future of Korean Peninsula
- The problem with liberalism: a feminist perspective
- Why has NAFTA been unsuccessful in Southern Mexico?
- Is China on the path to democracy?
- The battle against AIDS in Africa
- Are new wars more virtuous than old ones?
- Democracy: the ideal form of government or only for some countries?

Any general questions regarding the dissertation (i.e., not for your supervisor) are to be directed to this email: <ir-4099>

We wish you every success in this undertaking and hope and trust that you enjoy this opportunity for independent academic research.

GOOD LUCK!