

School of Psychology & Neuroscience



University of
St Andrews

PS5013 Research Project Handbook 2019-2020

Key facts

Supervision: Supervisors allocated during the first two weeks of Semester 1. Following allocation, a minimum of one meeting per month with supervisor during semester 1 and 2; more frequent contact while the research is being implemented

Assessment: Research project report with a maximum (not a target) of 15,000 words

DEADLINE for submission: 6th August 2018 at 5PM via MMS - TBC

Credits: 60

Module PS5013

Coordinator: Dr. Manon Schweinfurth

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Overview

Most of the Master's programme has been designed around taught modules in which the emphasis is conveying information and learning by undertaking various research-related exercises. However, it is arguable that students learn as much about research by actually conducting a research project. Thus, the goal of this module is to provide students with the experience of designing, conducting, analysing and presenting a research project. In some sense the module can be seen as the definitive demonstration of research competence imparted by the Master's programme.

For further detailed information the University's policy for Master's research project modules can be found at: <http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/media/teaching-and-learning/policies/final-module-pgt.pdf>.

Module aims

- (1) to provide the student with structured contact with an active, experienced researcher who will guide the development of the research project.
- (2) to provide the student with the practical experience of conducting research from the inception of a project to its completion.
- (3) to reinforce proper scientific conduct and scholarship

Learning outcomes

In the research report each student should be able to demonstrate knowledge of:

- (1) the existing literature on the topic of their research thesis
- (2) the justification for the particular data acquisition and data analysis approach used in the study
- (3) the practical processes involved in conducting research
- (4) the legal and ethical issues that arise from the research project
- (5) the limits to the research that has been undertaken and possible avenues of further productive research

Transferable skills

The module will provide you experience in the following practical skills:

- (1) integrating individual research reports into a coherent structure on which future research can be built
- (2) evaluating the feasibility and utility of alternative research approaches to a given scientific problem
- (3) engaging in problem-solving as it relates to performing research
- (4) performing data analysis to answer a given research question
- (5) presenting technical information in a structured document
- (6) keeping accurate and clear records
- (7) communicating technical information verbally with colleagues (e.g., with the supervisor)

Module structure and assessment

The module will consist of a series of tutorials with your supervisor that usually begins informally in the first semester so that the groundwork for the research is fully prepared by the end of the second semester. These tutorials can cover any topic relevant to your research proposal, such as the selection of the research topics, the design of research, discussions of the background literature, data analysis and presentation of research findings. Your supervisor has the authority to select the topics of these tutorials, but it is your responsibility to provide your supervisor with possible topics that you believe would be helpful.

The Master's thesis should follow the general format required by the University (see below) and should conform to standard scientific structure for research reports. Thus, each project should include a title page and the following sections:

- Abstract,
- Introduction,

- Methods,
- Results,
- Discussion,
- References;
- Acknowledgements and
- Appendices.

Note that it is a requirement that any **relevant letters of ethical approval be attached as appendices** to your Master's thesis. In addition, all data and supporting documents (SPSS or other data analysis files and output, spreadsheets, video or photographic files, interview transcripts, records associated with the research, etc.) should be handed into the School office (with Matriculation information and Course code), or given directly to the Project Supervisor. In the latter case, you should attach as an appendix a letter from your supervisor that they have received and stored the relevant files.

Students are required to conform to the University's policy prohibiting plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct such as data fabrication. Your supervisor is allowed to comment on **one draft only** of the Abstract, Introduction, Methods, Results and Appendices sections of the project thesis, but is not allowed to comment on the *Discussion* section. This is to allow you a chance to demonstrate in the *Discussion* the degree to which you have developed independence as a researcher.

The module is assessed by a research project report that has a *maximum* of 15,000 words (excluding references and appendices). The maximum word limit is precisely that: an upper limit and **not** a target. The research project report is uploaded electronically in MMS. Typically, the first marker will be your project supervisor and the second marker will be assigned by the module coordinator. The markers will consider any adverse circumstances that might have place constraints on the scope of thesis, such as technical difficulties in performing the research that were beyond your control. However, the markers can only assign a mark appropriate for the submitted thesis. In a case where the

1st and 2nd marker cannot agree on a grade, a 3rd marker is employed. The 3rd marker acts as an arbitrator. That is, they read the piece of assessment along with the comments and feedback provided by the 1st and 2nd markers and determine a final grade. All marks assigned are preliminary until scrutinised by the external examiner, officially submitted by the examinations board and approved by the University. The form that is used by internal markers in assessing the thesis is attached.

Periods of leave of no more than two weeks' duration will be considered acceptable. Longer periods are not advisable for the student to be away from the University. Requests for longer periods of leave will require Leave of Absence. Students are expected to be in residence at St Andrews during the module period (which includes the summer) unless they have permission for their study location to be outside St Andrews in accordance with the Location of Study policy, eg to conduct essential research, for industrial placements, or as part of programmes jointly run with another university.

University regulations regarding the project thesis, including the format and required student declaration, can be accessed at: <http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/media/teaching-and-learning/policies/final-module-pgt.pdf>.

Suggested schedule

There is considerable flexibility in the scope of the module to distribute the workload as the student and supervisor see fit. However, if the work is left too late, it causes stress and precludes adjusting plans if problems arise during data collection. Thus, a **suggested** schedule is given below. The schedule should be considered a rough guideline only, for some types of research require more time to set up than others, others are constrained with respect to when data can be collected, and some students take more time than others to decide on their project. Please note that during the

summer the supervisor might be unavailable due to holidays or scientific conferences. The supervisor should arrange with the student in advance alternative supervision.

Date	Suggested milestone
Semester 1, week 2	Introductory meeting with supervisor
Semester 1, week 7	Delineation of the area of research topic (week after Independent Learning Week)
Semester 1, week 14	Delineation of the general research design (final week of classes in Semester 1)
Semester 2, week 8	Ethical approval submitted (week following Spring vacation)
Semester 2, week 11	Ethical approval obtained
Semester 2, week 16	Research resources in place & initiation of data collection (week following the end of examinations)
End of July	End of data collection
Two weeks before deadline	Draft report sent to supervisor
One week before deadline	Supervisor returns comments on draft
Deadline	Research report due in MMS by 5PM

Support

The primary support for this module will be your supervisor, but all members of staff endeavour to support postgraduate students in their research. If the supervisor is not available in St. Andrews (e.g., due to research leave), then a local member of staff will be nominated to help the students with practical issues in St. Andrews. However, the primary responsibility for the student remains with the supervisor. Please contact your module controller if you have any questions about the structure or the administration of the module.

General criteria for assessment

Grade	Class
16.5 – 20.0	Distinction
13.5 – 16.4	Merit
10.5 – 13.4	Pass
7.0 – 10.4	Marginal Pass
4.0 – 6.9	Fail (right to reassessment)
0.0 – 3.9	Fail (no right to reassessment)
Grade & Descriptor	Key Characteristics of the Work
16.5 or more Distinction at 5000 Level	<p>Excellent work at 5000 Level. Work in this category will meet all of the requirements for a Merit and at least one of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • exceptional knowledge and understanding beyond the core issues. • demonstrates a very high level of critical awareness. • excellent structure and sophisticated argument. • takes an independent or original approach appropriate to the given task.
13.5 to 16.4 Merit at 5000 Level	<p>Strong work at 5000 Level. Work in this category will show all of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • very good knowledge and understanding of the core issues. • demonstrates a high level of critical awareness. • clear structure and consistent argument. • fully addresses the given task.
10.5 to 13.4 Pass at 5000 Level	<p>Competent work at 5000 Level. Work in this category will show three or more of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reasonable knowledge and understanding of the core

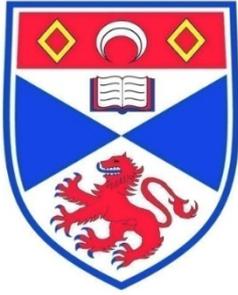
	<p>issues.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrates reasonable critical awareness. • adequate structure and argument. • mostly addresses the given task.
<p>7 to 10.4 Marginal Pass at 5000 Level</p>	<p>Adequate work at 5000 Level. Work in this category will show one or more of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • limited knowledge and understanding of the core issues. • demonstrates only basic critical awareness. • weak structure or inconsistent argument. • does not fully address the given task.
<p>4 to 6.9 Fail with right to re- assessment</p>	<p>Inadequate work at 5000 Level. Work in this category will show one or more of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • very limited knowledge and understanding of the core issues. • seriously deficient in critical awareness. • lacks structure and logical argument. • does not address the given task.
<p>0 to 3.9 Fail without right to re-assessment</p>	<p>Inadequate work at 5000 Level. Work in this category shows one or more of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • no serious, demonstrable, attempt to carry out the task assigned. • no attempt at analysis and very little understanding or knowledge demonstrated.

A more detailed criteria sheet is available below as part of the Template provided for your dissertation submission.

Further information

For information regarding the Ethical Review process or Health and Safety please refer to the Postgraduate (Taught) Handbook for this session. Many other queries can be addressed to the module controller Dr Manon Schweinfurth. Dr Schweinfurth does not have office hours as such but can be reached easily by email (ms397).

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School of Psychology and Neuroscience

Module code: PS5013

**Research Project for MSc in Evolutionary and Comparative
Psychology**

Module controller: Manon Schweinfurth

PROJECT TITLE:

Student ID:

Word Count:

Submission deadline:

I hereby certify that this dissertation, which is approximately **XXXXXX** words in length, has been composed by me, that it is the record of work carried out by me and that it has not been submitted in any previous application for a degree. This project was conducted by me at The University of St Andrews, from **XXXXXX** to **XXXXXX** towards fulfilment of the requirements of the University of St Andrews for the degree of *Master of Science in Evolutionary and Comparative Psychology* under the supervision of **XXXXXX**.

Date:

Signature:

PS5013: MARKING CRITERIA SHEET – DETAILED INFORMATION

The following sheets are for guidance for markers to enhance consistency in evaluations. They are not intended to indicate an overall grade by application of weighted averages – sections will be weighted according to the nature of the project and the structure of the report.

Section		Appropriate range of marks					
		1-4	5.0-10	10.1-12.9	13-13.4	13.5-16.4	16.5-20
Abstract		Missing.	Inaccurate; misleading or mostly incomplete summary.	Unnecessary details and/or insufficient necessary detail.	Some aspects of study summarized accurately and adequate organisation.	Material included is relevant, necessary and well organised.	Precise, accurate summary of purpose, methods, results and conclusion.
Introduction	Content	Mostly irrelevant or missing background material indicative of poor scholarship; any evidence of plagiarism.	Unsatisfactory depth of literature review; over-reliance and uncritical acceptance of other sources.	Frequent use of secondary or out-of-date material with some substantive errors; little evidence of critical analysis.	Some use of secondary sources or out-of-date material ; some minor errors; some evidence of critical thought .	Scholarly depth of literature with considerable critical evaluation. Few minor errors and no substantive errors.	Scholarly depth of literature review plus extensive critical analysis of material.
	Purpose	Aims and relevance of research to psychology omitted. Specific hypotheses or research goals not mentioned.	Poor linkage between research and psychology; no mention of hypotheses or research goals.	Poor linkage between research and psychology; poor description of research hypotheses or goals.	Research presented in context of psychological theories; research hypotheses and goals clearly described.	Research presented well within context of psychology ; specific research hypotheses and goals presented and justified.	Justification of research indicates creative thought; novel research hypotheses or goals justified clearly in terms of advancing psychology.
Methods		Missing; evidence of plagiarism; or research conducted without ethical approval.	Inappropriate methodology or poor description that would not allow replication. Errors or	Major aspects of the method are missing or ambiguous such that replication would be	Appropriate, methodology and generally clear, but some details of method may be missing or ambiguous.	Appropriate methodology chosen and clearly described, sufficient for replication.	Careful and clear reasoning for selection of methodology as well as clear precise description of procedure and materials.

			contradictions.	difficult without further information.			
	Results	Missing.	Mostly inaccurate, incomplete or unclear presentation of results; analysis virtually indefensible.	Considerably inaccurate, incomplete or unclear presentation of results; poorly justified analysis.	Mostly accurate and clear presentation of results; analysis well justified but indicating a lack of knowledge or creativity.	Accurate and clear presentation of results; analysis well justified and indicating depth of knowledge.	Publication quality presentation of results; particularly innovative and well justified analytical approach.
Discussion	Organisation	Chaotic or incomplete structure that obscures the flow of argumentation.	Badly flawed structure in which the flow of argumentation is barely discernible.	Flawed structure that detracts from the flow of argumentation by abrupt transitions; poor use of headings and subheadings and poorly developed argument structure.	Adequate structure that allows the argument to be developed, but with some abrupt transitions, poor use of headings or other flaws in organisation.	Good structure that enhances the clarity and development of the argument to be developed.	Excellent structure that enhances the clarity and development of the argument to the extent that the Discussion would be publishable.
	Content	Random facts. No argument or thesis made.	Listing or disjoint sequence of results. Evidence of 'borrowing' of ideas or over-reliance on other sources.	Mechanical reiteration of list of findings without links to any argument	Good choice of findings used to support arguments, but with some instances of omission of relevant findings or inclusion of irrelevant findings.	Good choice of findings used to support arguments.	Excellent choice of findings used to support arguments that indicates a high degree of analytical thought.
	Critical evaluation	Virtually no evidence of critical evaluation of the research design or the impact of	Little, or wholly flawed, critical evaluation of the research	Trivial, or substantially flawed, critical evaluation of the research	Superficial or somewhat flawed critical evaluation of the research design; the	Thoughtful critical evaluation of the research design; the impact of	Outstanding critical evaluation of the research design; the impact of the findings; or the

		the findings; any evidence of plagiarism.	design; the impact of the findings; or the useful directions of future research.	design; the impact of the findings; or the useful directions of future research.	impact of the findings; or the useful directions of future research.	the findings; or the useful directions of future research.	useful directions of future research.
References		Sloppy scholarship, with many missing, inaccurate and extraneous references; any evidence of plagiarism; considerable style errors.	Poor scholarship, with many missing, inaccurate or extraneous references; considerable style errors.	Competent scholarship, but with some missing, inaccurate or extraneous references; many style errors.	Competent scholarship with few missing, inaccurate or extraneous references but some style errors.	Good scholarship with few missing, inaccurate, extraneous references, presentation errors or style errors.	Thorough scholarship with correct information and style.
Appendices		Missing and irrelevant material.	Major omissions and inclusion of irrelevant material; indexing in Table of Contents absent.	Some important material provided but also widespread omissions; indexing in Table of Contents absent.	Most relevant materials provided but badly presented; indexing in Table of Contents absent.	Generally thorough but with some weaknesses of presentation; appendices appropriately listed in Table of Contents.	Thorough, precise and correct use of style; appendices appropriately listed in Table of Contents.

Comments: