



BRIEF RESEARCH PROPOSAL & DISSERTATION PROCEDURES (B.PSY/HDIP STUDENTS)

DR CATANIA
SECOND YEAR DISSERTATIONS
COORDINATOR

WHAT IS THE DISSERTATION?

All B.Psy students are required to submit a **dissertation** with the work value of **12 ECTS**

- significantly more than any other course in the undergraduate psychology programme

The dissertation is an empirical study of a psychological nature (10,000 words)

Dissertations are submitted in the **third year of studies**, normally in the first week of May

Dissertations are coordinated and regulated by a Committee appointed by and responsible to the Department of Psychology

THE DISSERTATION: AIMS & OBJECTIVES

- ← The aim of the undergraduate psychology dissertation is to provide students **“with a learning experience in undertaking empirical research in a psychological area of inquiry”**

- ← The principal objective of the dissertation is to *teach students the skills and competencies required to negotiate the entire research process;*
 - ← From the study of literature
 - ← To formulating a research proposal and satisfying ethical requirements
 - ← To the gathering and analysis of data, and
 - ← Finally, the writing up and submission of a research report
- ← Students are expected to be active learners and to find ways to sustain their own learning throughout this project.

THE DISSERTATION: BASIC STRUCTURE

Dissertations are divided into chapters that:

- ▶ Review the literature in which the study and the research question are located
- ▶ The methodology that the student has adopted to furnish an answer to the research question
- ▶ A result/findings section that presents the findings
- ▶ A discussion of the findings in light of the research question and the literature reviewed
- ▶ An introductory and concluding section (don't forget the abstract!)



THE DISSERTATION PROCESS: 3 BASIC STEPS

▶ **The Research Proposal**

- ▶ to be completed and submitted in the first semester of second year **Deadline: Monday, 11th November 2024 (HDIP) & Monday 18th November 2024 (BPsy)**

▶ **The FREC/UREC ethics form**

- ▶ to be completed and submitted once the Research Proposal has been assessed and accepted by the Dissertations Committee

▶ **Submitting your dissertation**

- ▶ to be submitted in the ***second semester of the third year***



STAGE 1: RESEARCH PROPOSAL 7

- ▶ Brief description of the area you are interested in researching
- ▶ Your preferred methodology
- ▶ Area of psychology in which you would like to further your interest
 - ▶ Social psychology
 - ▶ Clinical psychology
 - ▶ Health Psychology
 - ▶ Counselling psychology
 - ▶ Educational psychology
 - ▶ Neuropsychology
 - ▶ Forensic psychology
- ▶ Then identify a topic of research that you would like to study in your preferred area

STAGE 1: RESEARCH PROPOSAL

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Familiarise yourself with key literature that will enable you to ask good empirical questions for psychological research



You would need to access articles on HyDi and other relevant journals and textbooks in order to inform your understanding and knowledge

STAGE 1: RESEARCH PROPOSAL

– FINDING A SUPERVISOR

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- ▶ You need to have solicited the services of a research supervisor
- ▶ Ideally, try and find a supervisor whose experience and background is related to your topic of study
- ▶ You are advised to approach supervisors mentioned in the document provided
- ▶ Then you may approach part-timers or academics in other Departments within the Faculty

STAGE 1: RESEARCH PROPOSAL – FINDING A SUPERVISOR

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- ▶ If the individual who you wish to supervise your dissertation is not on the list of approved supervisors and is not a member of staff within the Faculty of Social Wellbeing, you are required to discuss this in the first instance with the Dissertations Coordinator

STAGE 1: RESEARCH PROPOSAL – FINDING A SUPERVISOR

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- ▶ Refer to the document 'List of Dissertation Supervisors and Procedure'
- ▶ It is important to secure a research supervisor as soon as possible
 - ▶ Leaving it to the last minute might mean that you will have difficulties securing a research supervisor of your choice, as s/he may have taken on other students

THE RESEARCH SUPERVISORY RELATIONSHIP

- ← Supervision is aimed towards assisting students to learn about the process of undertaking research
- ← Your relationship with your supervisor will undoubtedly prove an important part of your learning experience
- ← Your supervisor should be able to guide you into learning more about your area as well as how to conduct research into your area of interest



STAGE 1: RESEARCH PROPOSAL – COMPLETING THE BPSY DISSERTATION PROPOSAL FORM

- ▶ It is worth making sure that your supervisor is in a position to supervise your project, both in terms of expertise and in terms of resources
 - ▶ You should not expect your supervisor to provide any resources
 - ▶ Supervisors' expertise is not a substitute for reading and conducting a thorough literature review, although supervisors may well guide students as to what literature is noteworthy in their chosen area

- ▶ The undertaking of a dissertation remains the student's sole responsibility
- ▶ Once you have found a supervisor, you will proceed to writing your research proposal
- ▶ Your supervisor's guidance is crucial at this stage and therefore you should meet regularly

STAGE 1: RESEARCH PROPOSAL – COMPLETING THE BPSY DISSERTATION PROPOSAL FORM

- Proposals need to be reviewed by supervisors, who will provide students with relevant feedback. **Give supervisors ample time to review your research proposal and do not send drafts at the last minute**
- Upon submission, research proposals require the **signed endorsement of supervisors**, which indicates to the Dissertations Committee that the supervisor has reviewed the proposed study and approved the procedure outlined for its execution in the proposal

GUIDELINES FOR WRITING A GOOD PROPOSAL

- ▶ Ideas need to follow a logical and clear sequence
- ▶ Tone should display an impartial scientific attitude
 - ▶ Be aware of your own preconceived notions about an issue and be mindful of your biases
 - ▶ Clearly defined aims of the study

GUIDELINES FOR WRITING A GOOD PROPOSAL

- ◀ A clear research question
- ◀ A clear rationale for this study – why is this study important and why are you undertaking it?
- **Mention of knowledge of previous literature in the area (this is why you need to access relevant literature in order to inform your understanding of your chosen area)**



GUIDELINES FOR WRITING A GOOD PROPOSAL

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State the methodology
you are using

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graph LR; A[State the methodology you are using] --> B[The methodology needs to complement the research question  
• (e.g. avoid trying to apply a qualitative methodology to a research question that requires a quantitative methodology)]; B --> C[Rationale for the chosen methodology];
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The methodology needs to complement the research question

- (e.g. avoid trying to apply a qualitative methodology to a research question that requires a quantitative methodology)

Rationale for the chosen methodology

GUIDELINES FOR WRITING A GOOD PROPOSAL

- ← State how you will recruit participants and if you intend recruiting them from an institution then which one
- ← State number of participants, their age range, gender, characteristics
- ← State how you will elicit your data (e.g. questionnaires, interview guides)
- ← State how you will analyse the data
- ← Attention to grammar and spelling
- ← References taken from academic sources need to be interwoven throughout the research proposal

BE REALISTIC...

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- ▶ You essentially have only two years to plan a project
- ▶ Therefore, be mindful of time limitations
 - ▶ e.g. qualitative research interviewing 50 participants is not feasible
 - ▶ e.g. Collecting 1000 questionnaires
- ▶ Your research should be feasible and manageable

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

- ▶ As undergraduate students, you should not engage in research that is highly sensitive or that requires the recruitment of vulnerable participants
 - ▶ e.g. Exploring the impact of sexual abuse: Survivors perspectives
 - ▶ e.g. Mothers' experiences of child suicide
 - ▶ e.g. Prisoners' perspectives of incarceration

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

- ← At undergraduate level, the Psychology Department does not teach students the skills and competencies of psychotherapy
 - ← Therefore, research with vulnerable populations (such as individuals in therapy, or research concerning past abuse) is strongly discouraged
- ← Research must be ethical and not violate ethical standards of good practice in psychological research.

ETHICS

Any queries regarding ethics need to be addressed to the Chairperson of the Faculty Research Ethics Committee



<https://www.um.edu.mt/research/ethics/>

THEREFORE...

1. Decide on an area of study and attempt to formulate a research agenda and research approach
2. Identify a potential supervisor from the supervisors on the list
3. Make an appointment and meet with that supervisor
4. Secure a commitment of supervision and together with the supervisor, complete the Research Proposal Form
5. Submit this form to the Psychology Office Room (email: elena.mallia@um.edu.mt) . We will inform you if there are any changes in the method of submission.
6. Deadline: Monday, 11th November 2024 (HDIP) & Monday 18th November 2024 (BPsy)

PROPOSAL SUBMISSION

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Submitting your proposal

- ▶ Your supervisor's signature must be present on the research Proposal Form in order to ensure that the supervisor is aware of and in agreement with what you have stated in your proposal
- ▶ Incomplete forms will not be accepted
- ▶ Please ensure that you have photocopied these forms(including your supervisor's signature) for your records prior to submission

THE DISSERTATIONS COMMITTEE

- ← The Research Proposal Forms will be reviewed by the members of the Dissertations Committee
- ← They will be reviewed accordingly and returned to students
- ← The Committee will advise on the subsequent course of action
- ← The Committee will provide reasons for its decisions at all times and will instruct on further action that needs to be taken by the student

THE DISSERTATIONS COMMITTEE: OUTCOME

- ▶ Students whose Research Proposal Forms have been marked
- ▶ (1) Accepted but resubmit with amendments or
(2) Rejected need to resubmit their proposals with the required changes

THE DISSERTATIONS COMMITTEE: OUTCOME

- ▶ In this case, your supervisor will guide you to make the advised changes and needs to sign the revised proposal to show that s/he is in agreement with and aware of the changes made
- ▶ Then you must resubmit your original proposal, **together with the revised proposal, clearly highlighting the changes made (use track changes)**
- ▶ Your re-submitted proposal will be reviewed by the Committee and you will be informed of the outcome
- ▶ PLEASE ENSURE THAT YOU HAVE COPIES OF EVERYTHING BEFORE RESUBMISSION



PLEASE NOTE THAT...

- ▶ If you decide to make any changes **after your proposal has been accepted**, please inform the Coordinator of the Dissertation committee for the **second years** (chantal.avellino@um.edu.mt) as soon as possible.
- ▶ You might be required to re-submit your proposal if changes made are significant.

ONCE YOUR
RESEARCH
PROPOSAL
HAS
BEEN
ACCEPTED...



All students have to apply for ethical clearance from the Faculty Research Ethics Committee/University Research Ethics Committee (UREC)



Please familiarise yourselves with the UREC guidelines



YOU CAN ONLY APPLY FOR FREC/UREC CLEARANCE ONCE YOUR RESEARCH PROPOSAL HAS BEEN ACCEPTED AND NOT BEFORE



However, you can prepare the UREC documentation whilst your research proposal is being reviewed so as not to waste time

ETHICAL CLEARANCE FOR RESEARCH FROM THE UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE

- ▶ Completed FREC/UREC Proposal Forms must be submitted to the Faculty Research Ethics Committee in the first instance and then FREC forwards it to UREC
- ▶ FREC is an independent committee and not related to the Dissertations Board
- ▶ **Please note that the Dissertations Coordinator is not in a position to respond to any queries regarding FREC/UREC**

IMPORTANT:

- ⚡ You must not collect any data until you have received UNCONDITIONAL ETHICAL APPROVAL from FREC/UREC
- ⚡ You are required to provide your supervisor with written evidence from FREC/UREC confirming that you have received unconditional ethical approval prior to collecting any data



DOCUMENTATION

- ← All relevant documentation can be found on the Department of Psychology's homepage, by clicking on 'Documents Related to the Dissertation'
- ← <https://www.um.edu.mt/socialwellbeing/psychology/students/undergraduate>
- It is your responsibility to access the documents and read them carefully

Plagiarism

- ▶ Please note that cases of suspected plagiarism and other intellectual dishonesty will be immediately referred to the Rector's office as dictated by regulations governed by disciplinary action.



IMPORTANT POINTS

- ▶ Failure to respect the research proposal deadline can lead to significant delays in your research progress, hence the November deadline must be respected. **The Research Proposal is an important feature of your work and should not be left until the last minute. Rather, students have the months of July, August, September and October to work carefully on their research proposal and secure supervision.**
- ◀ It is the student's sole responsibility to secure research supervision from a research supervisor who has been approved by the Dissertations Committee.
- ◀ Any queries regarding the FREC procedures, ethics and forms must be addressed to the Chairperson of FREC. The Dissertations Coordinator is not in a position to answer questions pertaining to FREC, ethical clearance etc.

IMPORTANT POINTS

- ✦ Please note that supervisors should only be contacted via the work email available on the UoM website or the email provided by the Dissertations Coordinator.
 - ✦ Supervisors should not be contacted via Facebook, LinkedIn, Messenger, WhatsApp, text message etc.
 - ✦ Students are not to share their supervisors' email addresses with one another or on social media.
 - ✦ They should not telephone or text their supervisors unless their supervisors have given them explicit permission to do so.
- ✦ You are expected to submit drafts within the deadlines
 - ✦ Discussed and agreed in supervision and to be respectful and courteous towards your supervisor
 - ✦ Therefore, draft chapters and dissertation-related queries should not be left to the last minute

FINALLY...

- Any information or queries regarding the dissertation procedures can be addressed to Dr Chantal Avellino (via email)
- Queries regarding the research question, topic and methodology, content and format need to be addressed to your supervisors
- Please always include and use your UNIVERSITY email address when completing any dissertation-related documentation and when you are liaising with supervisors or other members of staff

Please note that
your Third Year
Dissertation Co-
Ordinator is

Dr Anna Grech
anna.m.grech@um.edu.mt

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