

Guidelines and Procedures for a *Research Essay* PADM 5908

A. Overview

A *Research Essay* is a 1.0 credit independent research project that enables students in the M.P.P.A. to develop and demonstrate not only their understanding of a body of academic literature, but also their ability to draw upon that literature in order to conduct a sustained analysis in support of a proposition or argument concerning a particular aspect of public policy. The project is overseen by both a primary supervisor, and an advisor who also serves as a second reader of the final essay. Either the supervisor or the advisor must be a full-time faculty member from the School of Public Policy and Administration; normally, both are. Students may conduct a research essay only after they have completed the first-year core courses of the M.P.P.A. and achieved at least an A- average (a GPA of 10 or higher) in them.

B. Procedures prior to registration

The planning and preparation for a Research Essay are considerable and should be undertaken well before the term in which the student hopes first to register.

1. Determine a topic A *Research Essay* must be feasible. Toward that end, students should avoid topics that are too broad, general or vague, topics that are speculative (say, dealing with events that have not yet occurred), or topics for which the availability of data or information is uncertain. Moreover, a *Research Essay* must be analytical, not merely descriptive. It is important, therefore, that the topic lends itself to analysis. Toward that end, there should be a related body of literature and case studies that provide background understanding; an issue or dilemma or sequence of events that can generate a research question; and a theoretical framework that allow the students to form and support an argument that answers the research question. In order to determine a suitable topic, students may find it helpful both to draw upon their reading and study from previous courses, and to consult several faculty members.
2. Identify supervisor and advisor The second step is to find the two persons to oversee the research. Supervisors take the lead in providing direction for all aspects of the essay. Typically, in consultation with the students, the supervisor identifies potential advisors. Advisors may be more or less involved in the project, their role being agreed upon at the outset with the student and supervisor. In some cases, advisors provide general oversight; in others, they provide direction according to their theoretical, methodological, or policy expertise. The supervisor and advisor are both responsible for reading the final essay and agreeing upon a grade.
3. Write a research proposal The third step is to write a research proposal that will offer a common basis of understanding for the project. The student submits a draft version of the proposal to the supervisor and advisor, and then revises this draft both to address their recommendations and meet their expectations. The proposal must include the following headings and content:

- a. Research Question and Thesis (Describe the aspect of public policy that is to be the object of study, and explain why such study is important. Outline the problem or question that the research will strive to solve or answer. Clearly state the proposition or argument that the essay will support in order to answer this question.)
 - b. Basic Approach (Describe what you plan to do in the research, and how you plan to do it, including: the theoretical framework or set of assumptions you will adopt in order to support your argument; the sources of information or data you will draw upon; and the methods you will use to make inferences from that information.)
 - c. Tentative Essay Structure (List the titles of the chapters or sections that will make up the larger essay.)
 - d. Related Research (Specify some – at least four – principal works related to the research question, summarize their arguments and approach, and explain how these compare with those that will be used in the essay.)
4. Complete and submit Approval Form The fourth step is for the student, supervisor and advisor to complete and sign the attached *Research Essay Approval Form*. This form, along with the final version of the research proposal, is to be given to the Graduate Administrator, who in turn submits it to the Graduate Supervisor, M.P.P.A for approval. Once approval has been granted, a space for the student is reserved under the course number PADM 5908. Only then is the student able to register in the course, via Carleton Central.

C. Essay Format

A *Research Essay* is a substantial scholarly endeavour. Its length must be between 50 and 80 pages (inclusive of appendices and bibliography), double spaced (except for footnotes and bibliography), with one-inch margins, and a size 12 font. There are several style guides for citations and bibliography. Among these is Kate L. Turabian, *A manual for writers of term papers, theses, and dissertations*, 6th edition, rev. by John Grossman and Alice Bennett (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). Whatever guide is used, the student and supervisor should, at an early stage, agree upon the presentation style to be used.

The final essay must have the following components.

- A well-motivated research question This normally deals with an aspect of public policy that is either explanatory (accounting for a particular policy decision) or evaluative (assessing the outcomes of policy decisions).
- A clearly-stated proposition or argument that answers the research question This involves a dependent variable that identifies or measures the phenomenon or outcome the student is interested in, and explanatory variables that are considered the key factors influencing the dependent variable.
- A theoretical framework This involves a set of assumptions – typically used elsewhere in the literature and adopted or adapted for the essay – that enables the student to justify the link between the explanatory and dependent variables.
- A structured and coherent literature review This both introduces the important literature associated with the research question, and identifies the gap or debate in the literature that is being addressed by the essay.
- The body of analysis supporting the argument.

- Conclusions These might include the general implications of the essay's argument for either policy-makers or researchers.

D. Finishing and grading

A *Research Essay* should take no longer than two consecutive terms to complete. By the last day of classes of the first term of registration, the supervisor is to inform the Graduate Supervisor, MPPA by email of whether or not the essay will be completed that term.

If the supervisor reports that the essay will not be completed, then the Graduate Supervisor, MPPA will enter the course status as INP (in progress) and will reserve a space for the student in PADM 5908 for the term immediately following. The student must again register for that term, via Carleton Central.

Once the final essay is complete – whether at the end of the first or second term of registration – the supervisor and advisor are to provide the Graduate Administrator with the attached *Research Essay Grade Form* within two weeks of the last day of classes for the term. The Graduate Supervisor, MPPA will enter the letter grade they have assigned.

Carleton University
School of Public Policy and Administration
Research Essay PADM 5908 Approval Form

This is not a registration form. Students can register in PADM 5908 after this form has been completed by the student, supervisor and advisor, and approved by the Graduate Supervisor, MPPA.

Student: _____ **ID:** _____
(last name) (given name)

Email: _____

Academic Year: _____ **Academic Term:** _____

Supervisor: _____ **Dept:** _____
(last name) (given name)

Academic Position: _____ **Email:** _____

Advisor: _____ **Dept:** _____
(last name) (given name)

Academic Position: _____ **Email:** _____

Title of Research Essay: _____

Student's Proposal: Attached

Approved by: _____ **Date:** _____
(Student's signature)

_____ **Date:** _____
(Supervisor's signature)

_____ **Date:** _____
(Advisor's signature)

_____ **Date:** _____
(M.P.P.A. Supervisor's signature)

Carleton University
School of Public Policy and Administration
Research Essay PADM 5908 Grade Form

The Office of the Graduate Studies Registrar requests that letter grades be submitted within two weeks of the last day of classes. Please ensure that Graduate Supervisor, MPPA (SPPA Office, 5221 River Building) receives this form in time for the School to meet this GSRO deadline.

Student: _____ **ID:** _____
(last name) (given name)

Email: _____

Academic Year: _____ **Academic Term:** _____

Supervisor: _____ **Dept:** _____
(last name) (given name)

Academic Position: _____ **Email:** _____

Advisor: _____ **Dept:** _____
(last name) (given name)

Academic Position: _____ **Email:** _____

Title of Research Essay: _____

This Research Essay is complete and has been awarded a letter grade of: _____

Approved by: _____ **Date:** _____
(Supervisor's signature)

_____ **Date:** _____
(Advisor's signature)