Dissertation Guidelines

Department of International Relations
University of Malta
2012-2014

*The following details outline the expected standards by the Department of International Relations, University of Malta regarding the completion of dissertations for the **Masters by Research in International Relations**. Assigned supervisors need to be consulted at all staged*

PART 1: DISSERTATION, Masters in International Relations.

1.1 General Framework of the Dissertation

The following outline is indicative of the overall structure of a dissertation. Clearly it will have to be adapted to the particular study you have carried out.

SECTION	*PAGE*

SECTION   *PAGE*

Title Page
Abstract
Acknowledgements
Table of Contents
List of Tables
List of Figures
List of Appendices

Recommended Chapter List

CHAPTER 1	Introduction
CHAPTER 2	Literature Review
CHAPTER 3	Theoretical Discussion
CHAPTER 4	Methodology
CHAPTER 5	Empirical or theoretical research findings
CHAPTER 6	Analysis
Chapter 7	Conclusions and Recommendations

References
Appendices

1.2 Timetable

Semester I   **(1 October 2012 – 6 February 2013)**
1st Semester   Research Methodology Course
 End of term: 7 February 2013. Identify proposed Area of Research,

Semester II   **(7 February 2013 – 22 June 2013)**
Feb 2013   Present a short essay for IRL 4000 – title to be decided by supervisor
Feb 2013   Hold meeting with supervisor and establish a **Master Plan** as in **Appendix 1.**
April 2013   Present the final essay for IRL 4000 – title established in agreement with supervisor

Semester III   **(October 2013 – June 2014)**
         Work on the dissertation as per Master Plan.
         Finalization.
         Hand in three soft bound copies of the dissertation to the administration together with a digitalized version of dissertation for Library Services. This is a strict deadline. No concessions will be given.

1.3 Wordage and format

   a. *LENGTH (exclusive of Notes, Bibliography, and Appendices.) 50,000 words*
   b. *TYPESCRIPT.*

(a) Font Size & Font: 12 pt Arial for body of the script and Cambria for titles

(b) Spacing: Indent all paragraphs 0.5cm. Double Space the Text. Single spacing for footnotes.

(c) Quotations: Quotations of more than thirty words should be single-spaced and form a distinct paragraph without indentation. Do not use quotation marks in such cases.

(d) Margins: Left-hand margin of 3.5 cm. Top and right-hand margin of 1.5 cm. A top margin of 5 cm to be left on the first page of every division, ie. Chapters, bibliography, etc. Footnote/s should appear at the bottom of the relevant page or after every chapter.

(e) Quotation Marks. Use single quotation marks throughout, but doubles for a quote within quote.

(f) Dates. Use day, month, year without commas: e.g.: 25 December 1930. For decades, use 1650s or fifties.

(g) Textual Reference Numbers. Continuous for each chapter. Use superscript, without brackets, and following punctuation.

(h) Alignment: Script should be left aligned and not justified.

(i) Spelling. Follow the Oxford English Dictionary.

(j) Abbreviations. Consult supervisor. Acronyms should not be overused.

(k) Pagination: The main text, including the introduction (if any), the bibliography and any appendices of the dissertation shall have Arabic numerals (1,2,3,4,5); the title page, dedication (if any), preface, acknowledgements, table of contents, etc. preceding the main text, shall have Roman numerals (i,ii,iii,iv,v).

(l) Maps, diagrams, graphs, printed material, etc. should be bound with the dissertation, but if this is not possible they should be presented separately in special folders or volumes and numbered.

(m) Binding: Three spiral-bound copies of the dissertation shall be submitted.

(n) Digitalization: A soft copy shall be handed in to be stored by Library services. *"Step by Step Guide to Create a User-Friendly Digitized Disseration"* prepared by the Library Sub-Committee Digitization of Dissertations. This can easily be found via internet as follows : University of Malta → Library → Help & Support → Library Guides & Tour → Guidelines For Digitized Dissertations. All the information that you need is in there. However, should you require further guidance, a special help desk has been created at the library that can be reached either by phoning 2340 2315 or via email *dissertations@lib.um.edu.mt*.

(o) Bibliography: The **Harvard System** should be used consistently.
Some examples:
- o *Full- book reference:* Barnes, R. (1995). *Successful studying for degrees* (2nd ed.). London: Routledge.
- o *A full journal reference:* Brinckerhoff, L. (1996). Making the transition to higher education: opportunities for student empowerment. *Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 29(2), 118–136.
- o *Chapter in book:* Millar, R. and Gallagher, M. (1995). The selection interview. In O.D.W Hargie (Ed.), *The handbook of*

communication skills (2nd ed., pp. 385–409). London: Routledge.

- o *Source signed as Anonymous:* Anonymous. (1995). What students think of head teachers. *Journal of Secondary Education*, 3(10), 55.
- o *No identifiable author*: *Across the barricades*. (1999). London: Routledge.
- o *Electronic sources*: Author/editor surname, Initial. (Year) *Title* [online].Edition. Place of publication, Publisher. Available from: URL[Accessed date].
  EX: University of Sheffield. (2010) *Citing online and audio visual sources of information HSL-DVC2* [online]. Available from: http://www.shef.ac.uk/library/libdocs/hsl-dvc2.pdf [Accessed 23 November 2010].
  For a full details on Harvard System consult this link: http://libweb.anglia.ac.uk/referencing/harvard.htm

1.3 Plagiarism

Plagiarism is the representation of another person's work, without the acknowledgement of the sources, as one's own or the deliberate and unacknowledged incorporation in a student's work of material derived from the work (published or otherwise) of another, is **UNACCEPTABLE.** Such practice will incur the penalty of failure. For guidance on how to avoid plagiarism consult: **http://www.um.edu.mt/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/95568/how_to_avoid_plagiarism.pdf**

1.5 Failure

A student can fail a dissertation if the standards set out in Annex 2 are not met. In this eventuality, the student will have to resubmit his/ her work and will be penalised according to the work required on the re-submitted work. The dissertation will have to be resubmitted in the first week of September.

PART 2: STRUCTURE OF THE RESEARCH PROPOSAL

The Research Proposal should include"

2.1 Introduction

An outline of the research that will be undertaken. The research proposal should cover the following areas:

1.   The research question / problem / topic / hypothesis
   - Identify area of research keeping it broad enough to embrace existing literature, but
   - Is sufficiently narrow to allow a detailed investigation
   - The area identified could form a working title

2.   Introduction and rationale for research
   - Explain why you think this is a valid research topic

3.   Research Objectives
   - The aim of the dissertation should indicate what you wish to achieve
   - Suggested methods of research
   - The objectives are a list of goals which must be completed in order to satisfy the aim (usually about 6)

PART 3: NOTES ON SPECIFIC ASPECTS OF THE DISSERTATION

3.1 The Abstract

An abstract should provide an overview of your study in all its aspects. It should be around 250-300 in words and should answer the following questions.

- What does this research set out to do and why?
- How did it seek to do it?
- What are the general findings?
- What do these suggest?
- What conclusions are reached?
- What are the implications of these?

Note: A soft copy of the abstract as …

3.2 Acknowledgements

In this section you should express thanks to those who assisted you in your research. These should be kept to a minimum and include only academic supervisors and people who participated in the fieldwork also most people like to thank family as well.

3.3 Introduction

In the introduction you should introduce the reader to the background of the study and the nature of the problem being considered. It should therefore set the study in context explaining why this study is important, highlighting significant issues, problems and ideas. The aim and objectives should be stated clearly in this chapter.

3.4 Literature Review

In a dissertation a student is expected to provide a critical review of the existing literature (published and unpublished) on the research topic being studied. This does not mean that you have to indicate every book and article that has been written on the subject but any you do read should be referenced appropriately. Nevertheless your review should indicate that you have studied existing and recent work in the field. The Harvard System (author/date) of referencing should be used. The literature review should be:

- Relevant : Literature used should support your arguments relating to your research question and aim and objectives of the study
- Up-to-Date: Recent literature (most literature used has to be published in the past five years), however it is important that seminal and important work is also included in the literature review.
- You may opt to use a Mind- (or Concept-) Mapping technique to put your ideas and all material around that particular idea in good order. See Appendix 3.

3.5 METHODOLOGY

The purpose of the methods chapter is to give a well documented outline of the methods used so that any other researcher can understand and maybe even replicate the research and assess its validity. This makes the Methods Chapter one of the most important in a research project,

The following elements may be considered with your supervisor's advice:

- A discussion on the chosen methodology relevant to your area of research and a discussion why other methodologies where refuted / not applicable to your research).
- Secondary Data (analysis of the supporting data to be used in research such as published studies etc.)
- Primary Data (where an in-depth description is given of the tools - such as fieldwork, document analysis, surveys carried out, when it was conducted, duration)
- Criteria for Sample Selection (detailed description of how the sample for your study was chosen. This applies for both qualitative as well as quantitative research)
- Pilot Study (prior to actually collecting the data on which you are going to base your research you need to test the tool for clarity, use of terminology – this is the pilot study any changes conducted to the original tool need to be documented)
- Methods of Analysis (discussion of the methods of analysis used, such as SPSS, Content analysis, deconstruction, textual analysis, semiotics, historical analysis etc)
- Limitations (of the methods used, for example access to informants). You should also show how you have tried to overcome such limitations.

3.6 Analysis and Results

The findings are analysed and the results are presented and discussed with reference to theories and ideas outlined in the literature review.

3.7 Discussion of Results, Conclusions and Recommendations

1. This chapter should draw together all the issues of the research and link back to the aim and objectives which were outlined in the Introduction. Have the aims set at the beginning been met ? If not, why not ?
2. What are the implications arising from the findings. Be careful with your generalisations and your interpretations. ALL recommendations should be based on evidence.
3. Do you have suggestions for future research in this area?

3.8 References

Full details of all the books and journal articles cited or referenced throughout the dissertation should be included in this chapter. A reader should be able to identify the exact source and refer to it directly. The Harvard method of referencing is the recommended system.

3.9 Appendices

The Appendices should include selective, supplementary material which is distracting when placed in the main body of text. Only material which is necessary for a full understanding of your study should be included. These include important forms, questionnaires or interview schedules, description of equipment or settings, tables and lists of data supportive of the study. The appendices are not part of the dissertation wordage.

Part 4: RESEARCH ETHICS GUIDELINES

The University Senate set up a Research Ethics Committee (REC) which drew up a set of guidelines that would govern research within the University of Malta. The guidelines envisage a simple structure that can safeguard both ethical standards and efficiency while ensuring proper accountability. These guidelines were drawn up in close consultation with the Data Protection Commissioner's Office, to ensure that they are in accordance with the Data Protection Act.

Senate has now approved the guidelines that will regulate all research involving human subjects carried out at the University. The Faculty of Arts has constituted a Research Ethics Committee that is responsible for performing reviews of research projects that involve human subjects.

Every person (staff and students) who plans to carry out research projects that involve interactions with human subjects must submit an Ethics Proposal Form (available online at UoM website) http://www.um.edu.mt/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/108670/proposalformlatest.pdf.

Part 5. Typing and Proof Reading

The dissertation is to be written in English. Very good grammar and syntax is expected. It is recommended that dissertation is proof read. Tutors will NOT act as your proof readers. It is your responsibility to ensure that a good piece of work is presented to the Examiners' Board.

Always proof read your copies for good grammar and presentation before handing your work to your tutor. Special attention should be made to the final version of your dissertation.

Be prepared for the unexpected such as hard disk failure, loss or corruption of diskettes and printer failure. Use back-up disks and always keep (updated) hard copies of your work in case of an emergency. Send copies of your finalized work to yourself via email … this is a good way to store your work safely

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APPENDIX 1 – The Master Plan

Research Question:

Chapter	Description	Wordage	Deadline
Introduction			
Chapter 1			
Chapter 2			
Chapter 3			
Chapter 4			
Chapter 5			
Chapter 6			
Conclusion			

APPENDIX 2 – Award Criteria

Assessment: Marking and Grading

Descriptor	Mark Range	Grade
Work of exceptional quality. Exceptional performance showing comprehensive understanding and application of the subject matter. Evidence of extensive additional reading/research/work.	95%- 100%	A+
Work of excellent quality. Superior performance showing a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. Evidence of considerable additional reading/research/work.	80%- 94%	A
Work of very good quality. Performance is typified by a very good working knowledge of subject matter. Evidence of a fair amount of reading/research/work.	75%- 79%	B+
Work of good quality. Above average performance, with a working knowledge of subject matter. Evidence of some reading/research/work.	70%- 74%	B
Work of average quality. Considerable but incomplete understanding of the matter. Evidence of little reading/research/work.	65%- 69%	C+
Work of fair quality. Basic understanding of the subject matter. No evidence of additional reading/research/work.	55%- 64%	C
Work of rather low quality. Minimal understanding of the subject matter, with no evidence of additional reading/research/work.	50%- 54%	D+
Marginal Pass. Marginal performance, barely sufficient preparation for subsequent courses in the same area.	45%- 49%	D
Pass - when assessment is based on a Pass/Fail basis only for study-units that are used for establishing eligibility to progress or for the award but are not taken in consideration for calculating the student's progress and for award classification purposes.	Not Applicable	P
Compensated Pass. Performance in the assessment of a study-unit, except a non-compensatable unit, that is deemed to be just below marginal pass but is deemed to be compensatable by good performance in other units. (vide regulation 50.)	35%- 44%	CP
Narrow failure that however is not compensated by good	35%- 44%	F

performance in other units.		
Unsatisfactory, failing work in any study-unit.	0%- 34%	F
Unsatisfactory, failing work in a non-compensatable study-unit.	0%- 44%	F
Unjustified absence for an assessment, or failure to hand in assigned work in time, or ineligibility to take assessment due to unapproved absence from lectures. Shall be considered as F with 0 marks in the calculation of the average mark.	0%	F