

Academic Year: 2014-2015

MODULE TITLE: BUSINESS DISSERTATION

ASSESSMENT DETAILS

100% Coursework

INTRODUCTION

This module is open to students following any Business programme. The dissertation can serve as tangible evidence to potential employers of aptitude in applying your academic studies to the world of work.

MODULE RATIONALE

The module provides you with an opportunity to undertake a significant piece of independent research, where you can extend and apply your knowledge in a chosen research area, develop your capacity for creative and innovative thinking and further enhance your analytical skills.

In addition the module consolidates skills of time management and report writing. As a tutored (not taught) module it reinforces autonomous learning.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Students who successfully complete this module will be able to:

1. construct a research question or hypothesis;
2. compose a relevant review of the literature;
3. appreciate the problems of applying business concepts and theories to organizational issues;
4. consider and select suitable research methods;
5. design and apply appropriate methodology that includes both secondary and primary research;
6. present data and information in a clear and logical way;
7. select and evaluate research material;
8. determine alternatives to organizational issues;
9. select, evaluate and substantiate conclusions;
10. offer recommendations where the terms of reference call for them;
11. summarise the dissertation and
12. offer a written and oral critique of their performance on this assignment

SYLLABUS

The dissertation has to have empirical research in a real organization. This must be addressed by critically examining existing material and carrying out a relevant literature review which informs the research questions/hypotheses of the primary research. The primary research methodology may involve surveys, face-to-face, in-depth interviews, semi-structured interviews, focus groups or any combination.

THE PROPOSAL

An individual research proposal, maximum 2,500-3,000 words. This is intended to form the foundation for the business research project or dissertation. The proposal is expected to address a research problem of practical and/or academic interest, normally in an organization to which the student has access through a part-time job, family links etc. The proposal will include research objectives, a literature review, research methods, project plan, bibliography and appendices.

Students will also be asked to write a short Personal Learning Statement on the process of developing the research proposal.

THE DISSERTATION

The dissertation will be a piece of academic work that will draw on existing theory and practice but it should also be intelligible to a business practitioner. It will have academic references like a good essay or journal article and may make recommendations as to how to solve a business problem.

This could be, for example, price elasticity in a student bar, service training in a shop branch or the effect of re-branding Roehampton University on teaching staff. In general, the broader the focus, the harder the investigation will be. Give careful thought to your choice of topic. It is often helpful to choose an area that you will find interesting but one that is related to the modules you have studied before. You also need to have access to the organisation you are researching, perhaps through your part-time job or through a family business. Let the time and resources available to you guide your dissertation topic.

It is important to define your research problem clearly through a headline objective and thereafter to state specific objectives or hypotheses that lend themselves to empirical research. For example, your headline objective may be to explore the effect of re-branding Roehampton University on teaching staff. Specific objectives may be to examine those effects on staff knowledge, staff attitudes and staff behaviour. If you are continuing with the same research topic as the one featured in your Business Research coursework, it would be sensible to expand the literature review to extend your knowledge of the area. This will help you determine whether you wish to re-examine the research objectives and methodology of your Business Research proposal or whether you are happy to continue with the research design already proposed.

THE ROLE OF THE TUTOR

You will be allocated a tutor and allowed 4 hours of booked tutorial help spread over both teaching blocs. Tutors have many calls on their time, as you do. Use their time and yours efficiently. You should use a supervisory meeting record form to keep track of the meetings with your tutor and of what decisions are agreed. The form is available in the Appendices to this module booklet.

Your tutor will consider your proposal created for the Business Research coursework but you are not necessarily 'stuck' with this and can change. Your tutor will plan with you a scheme of work and regular tutorials. You may find it helpful to create a simple Gantt planning chart to schedule your activities in the many weeks before the handing-in date

Guided reading and advice on balancing secondary and primary research effort and comments on research design, layout, style of writing, final report title, etc. will be given. Please don't expect a tutor to read through and edit the whole work and give a suggested mark. Do give your tutor any material to discuss in the tutorial before the tutorial takes place. The Dissertation is your work. It provides you with an opportunity to choose an area from your study programme to research in greater depth and to demonstrate your ability to investigate something that is of particular interest to you.

COLLECTING MATERIAL

The Library has access to many electronic databases. Students may also seek the help of the specialist Business Studies librarian or you may wish to use libraries outside Schiller's.

When contacting outside people or organisations remember that you are representing the University and therefore it is a good idea to show a draft letter or to discuss your line of contact with your tutor. Many organisations will simply not bother to reply to a telephone or letter request. If they do, always try to identify clearly what information you need and ask specific questions.

If you arrange an interview that takes place in the organisation's working hours, the interviewee might appreciate being sent a typed outline of the question areas, in advance of the interview. Assurances about confidentiality of data must be given and you should abide by the ethical guidelines of the University. There is an ethics form to complete in the Appendices to this module booklet. A letter of thanks for any help received is always appreciated and is good business practice. A copy of your report or a summary might be appreciated and indeed may facilitate access to the organisation in the first place.

RECORDING MATERIAL FOR QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

In-depth interviews and focus groups should be recorded. You need to gain permission from your interviewee. Taped interviews are best transcribed, word for word. This can be a slow process but it helps familiarise you with the detail of the content. The transcripts will provide you with the basis of your content analysis.

You may also take handwritten notes but this is not an efficient method of recording material and should only be used to supplement your tape recordings – e.g. notes on body language, particular observations/views you may be forming about the data.

QUESTIONNAIRES FOR QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

Always pilot questionnaires on a small sample of around 10 people before you go out into the field. Data collection using questionnaires is best administered face-to-face. Postal questionnaires usually result in low response rates, as low as 3% in some cases. Think about the best location or locations for your target sample and think about the best times of day/evening of reaching them. Use either Excel or SPSS data analysis packages to input and analyse your data; the choice of which is up to you. Excel is easier and may be more familiar, but is more limited in its analytical scope. If you want to become familiar with SPSS the Dissertation Convenor will assist if you need help.

REFERENCING

For citing references in the text of your report, please use the Harvard method. This is where references are cited in the text using the author's surname followed by the date of publication, (Smith, 1998). If you include a quotation you must also add the page numbers too, (Smith, 1998: 22-23).

Other peoples' views, evidence, findings, material and data should be used to set the scene and evaluate your own findings and to support your argument etc. but they must be clearly referenced and distinguishable from your own views and interpretation or evaluation of this material.

PLAGIARISM

The use of other people's material without acknowledgement constitutes plagiarism and is considered a very serious offence. If you plagiarise other people's work, your report will, at best, be rejected. Plagiarism is considered at least as serious as other forms of cheating in examinations. The Business Programmes Exam Board has programme terminated several students for gross plagiarism. It is important therefore, that you understand the need to reference.

STRUCTURE, DESIGN AND LAYOUT

The final report should be typed or word-processed in double or one and a half spacing. Use Times New Roman font size 12. Well-written reports have plenty of white space in page design. Pages should be numbered. There should be a margin of at least 1" at the top bottom and right side margin, with at least one and a half on the left margin to allow for spiral binding.

The report length is **10,000 words**, maximum. **Please state the word count at the end.** There will be a mark penalty for exceeding the word limit. This word count excludes the bibliography and appendices. An additional 500 to 800 words are allowed for your Personal Learning Statement.

An important transferable skill, which is part of the assessment, is the ability to select and process material and to write good English. You should adopt the impersonal pronoun as for any academic research report e.g. 'it is reported....' or 'the data suggest. ...'. Any acronym must be translated in full the first time it is used. In most cases jargon should not be used but if inevitable, then it must be explained. Use a mix of tables and graphs to present numerical data and give each a title. The report should flow in a logical and structured way.

Main sections should be numbered using Arabic numbering with each new aspect of a section having a paragraphed sub-section e.g. 1, 1.1, 1.2, 1.3. Underline each new section and use indents for sub-sections. Each main section should start with a brief introduction and end with a summarising paragraph. This should ensure coherence. Appendices, if used, should be coded with either Roman numbering or capital letters e.g. 1,11, 111, 1V or A, B, C. Some students use a single page coloured sheet to separate the main body from the appendices.

THE PARTS OF THE DISSERTATION

The dissertation report will normally have the following parts:

Cover Page

Title Page

Acknowledgements

Abstract

Contents Page

Introduction

Literature Review

Research objectives/hypotheses

Methodology and data collection

Results/Findings

Evaluation of Results

Conclusions

Recommendations

References

Appendices

[This order is generally agreed but the terminology varies by report style.]

Personal Learning Statement

NOTES ON EACH PART

Cover Page

You will need 2 sets for submission of which one may be returned to you after the official results from Registry. You will need to use the spiral binding.

Title Page

This should be centred on the page with the main title in upper case. Any longer sub-title should be in lower case. Put your student number to the bottom right. [The reports should be anonymous].

Acknowledgements

These are not essential but can be useful for recording organisational help.

Abstract

This is a brief statement of what the dissertation contains. It should have a statement of what you set out to do, what you did, what you concluded and what you recommended. Busy managers often only read the title and abstract of a report so it is a key part of your work. You cannot write the abstract until all the work is finished.

Contents page

This should be your table of contents showing the section titles and the subsections (indented) against page numbers. As in the text, the former can be underlined and in bold.

Introduction

Briefly give a background to your dissertation, why the topic is of importance and why it is of interest to you. Make a clear statement of your headline research question or hypothesis or argument and the type of research methodology you propose to carry out.

Allow approximately 300-500 words for this section.

Literature review

Write a review of the main body of published work. This acts to set out your project in the context of existing knowledge. It is therefore your main evidence of secondary research effort. It should show how much theory you go into and from where your research questions or hypotheses were developed.

Look for gaps in the knowledge which your research may fill, or you may wish to replicate or amend someone else's research for the purposes of comparison. The Literature review provides a critical insight, especially to a new reader, into current thinking around your topic of interest. You need to demonstrate a broad range of references majoring on academic articles (journals). These sources may also be supported by textbooks, web references, newspapers and professional magazines.

Allow approximately 3000 words for this section.

Research objectives or hypotheses

First indicate your overall or headline research objective. Then indicate a series of (perhaps 5/6) specific objectives. These objectives or hypotheses will focus on the detail behind the headline question. They will also constitute the conceptual focus for a questionnaire or interview guide.

Allow approximately 500 words for this section.

Methodology

This section should provide sufficient detail about the methodology or methodologies you employed for an outsider to replicate the study exactly. You need to justify the methodology you use by demonstrating the particular benefits of qualitative or quantitative approaches in the context of your research objectives or hypotheses. If you used triangulation, report it and state the rationale for using it. You should also report on the characteristics of the research respondents in the case of qualitative research e.g. job position, years in service for example, also stating why these are important to providing information which address your research questions/hypotheses. If you use

quantitative research, state the type of sampling you used e.g. convenience, cluster quota for example and again provide your rationale. Remember random sampling means statistically defined sampling which may be beyond your resources. Also provide detail on which data analysis package you used.

Allow approximately 500 words.

Findings

For qualitative research, you need to report on the content analysis of your transcripts, pulling out the key themes and sometimes including quotations from your interviewees. However, ensure the quotations don't rule the roost! Your findings will address your research objectives and perhaps also include some emerging areas that developed out of your interviews.

For quantitative research, ensure your findings reflect the objectives/hypotheses also. The data needs to be presented clearly with a title to each table/chart and then a small amount of commentary for non-numerical readers!

If you use comparative statistics e.g. chi-square, t-tests or ANOVA, ensure you state the level of significance, normally 0.05.

Allow approximately 2500 words for this section.

Evaluation of results

Interpret the data critically. Link your findings to the literature review and also to the research objectives/hypotheses you set yourself at the beginning of the study. To what extent have you provided some answers to your questions, how generalizable are the answers to other organisations and what are the implications for business practice? Be self-critical about any shortcomings you may have about your chosen methodology e.g. sampling, breadth and depth of findings, validity and reliability issues.

Allow 1500 words for this section.

Conclusion

What do your findings lead you to conclude? Summarise the key points of your research and demonstrate how they addressed the research objectives/hypotheses. If appropriate, suggest further research in the area but avoid introducing new material as this would be a new finding.

Allow 500 words for this section.

Recommendations

Try to keep recommendations separate from conclusions. Whilst the conclusions are driven by your findings, the recommendations may reflect your own opinions on for instance what the organisation should do next or how the findings should be embedded in organisational practice.

Allow 500 words for this section.

References

References provide details of the reading materials you used and noted in the text of your dissertation. A quick guide to tutors for the potential quality of a dissertation is to look first at the references to see how extensive the list is. The list needs to be in alphabetical order and follow the Harvard system of referencing, see below:

Books

Fisher, C (2004) Researching and Writing a Dissertation, Harlow, FT Prentice Hall

White, B. (2000) Dissertation Skills for Business and Management Students, London: Cassell

Articles/chapters in books

Gingers, J. and T. Rodgers (1997) 'Ten steps to environmental excellence', in McDonagh, P. and A. Prothero (Eds) Green Marketing, a reader, London: Dryden

Articles in academic journals

Ross, M. (2003) 'Coping with the Atkins Diet: how chips can be dangerous', Quarterly Review of Eating Studies 1, no 3. 315-350

Press articles

Hankinson, P. Semiotics in sports car branding: is blue the new red? Campaign, 14.9.03. p. 4

Internet

Conditions of Service, Internet WWW page at URL:

<http://www.roehampton.ac.uk/support/hr/internal/conditions> (accessed 08/03/05)

No word limitation for this section!

Appendices

Appendices are not always necessary. If used they should contain any material too bulky or detailed to go into the main text, for instance a copy of the questionnaire. (But keep all the completed questionnaires as evidence in case you are asked to substantiate claims of conducting the survey). Also use an appendix for your interview guide, transcripts, visual material used in interviews as well as copies of any correspondence to the organisation where your research investigation took place.

Personal Learning Statement

This is the postscript statement where you reflect on the process of your dissertation and the transferable skills you used and developed. You could also offer comments on the changes you would make if you did the dissertation again! Try not to be too self-congratulatory (nor too critical) but link the skills to specific modules you have done on the degree programme. Transferable, generic, skills are part of the student profiling and writing a cv that you came across in your first year. Finally, let the focus of the PLS emphasise the positives you got out of the dissertation rather than the problems you faced!

Ethical Statement

You should include a copy of the ethical statement given in the appendices to this booklet.

VIVA

This will take place in the week following the hand-in. You will be asked to provide an overview of your dissertation and to answer questions on any aspect of it, for example, sources of material for your literature review, choice of methodology, managerial implications from the results, what you might do 'next time'. Two members of staff will participate in the viva.

Assignment Submissions

SUBMISSION OF PRINTED AND DIGITAL COPIES

- Unless otherwise stated on the assignment documentation, Schiller requires both a printed and digital version of all assignment submissions. The printed version must be delivered to the Head of Studies. The digital copy must be submitted to the Head of Studies through the Blackboard platform Dissertation module. BOTH must be submitted by 2pm on the given date. The electronic submission is to ensure that a record can be kept of submissions and lessens the possibility of work being lost or misplaced. The copies of assignments submitted in print and on-line must be IDENTICAL. Students should expect that the tutor might choose to mark either copy.
- Never hand assignments to tutors, or put in staff mailboxes, or submit by email or fax.
- If you do not meet this 2pm deadline you should tick the late box on the coursework coversheet and complete the late work form. If you have mitigating circumstances you will need to follow the Mitigating Circumstances procedures and provide the necessary documentary evidence. If the mitigating circumstances are accepted, the mark will be entered on to the grade sheet without penalty. If the mitigating circumstances are rejected, the mark will be capped. If the mark is less than 40% then it is a fail whether or not it is late and whatever the mitigating circumstances are. No work will be considered if it is handed in after the lecturer has marked and returned the feedback to students.
- Computer/printer failure will not be accepted as a reason for late submission.
- You should keep a copy of your submitted work. You are advised to keep notes and a back-up disk when working on any assignment.
- Marks / feedback will be supplied by tutors on the agreed date.

The university subscribes to Turnitin Software. This is an online plagiarism detection service that enables electronic comparison of students' work against Internet sources and other students' work held on the Turnitin database. It is available to both staff and students in Blackboard.

Please be aware that **every submission will be scanned for plagiarism** using this software, so ensure that you are aware of what constitutes plagiarism and how to avoid it. If you are in any doubt about submission requirements or whether your work could be considered as plagiarised, please contact your module tutor before the hand-in date for clarification.

WORD COUNT

Students need to state the word count at the end of the assignment and on the assignment coversheet. 10% over the stated word count is permitted without penalty. If students go beyond this, then there is a penalty of 5 marks for every additional 10% beyond the word count. The word count includes the Abstract or Executive Summary and all in-text citations. The word count excludes the Bibliography and Appendices. Please note that Appendices should only include supplementary information. There is no specific penalty for submitting a piece which is below the word count, but please note that shorter submissions are likely to attract poorer grades, particularly where they lack the necessary depth of analysis.

FEEDBACK SHEET FOR BUSINESS RESEARCH PROPOSAL

<i>Explanation of the research problem and detail of the research questions</i>
<i>Literature review</i>
<i>Research philosophy/ strategy</i>
<i>Method</i>
<i>General presentation</i>
<i>Personal Learning Statement 15%</i>
Approved: Yes No

Ethical Issues

Many of you will be conducting research that goes beyond reading literature and there will therefore be important ethical issues to consider.

What are the ethical issues relating to the work you propose to carry out for your project? How do you propose to address them and deal with them? If you conducting research using published sources we still require you to make a statement about whether or not there are any ethical considerations.

Short statement concerning ethics:

I have discussed with my supervisor all ethical issues arising out of my project. If my dissertation changes in any way I will re-discuss any ethical issues with my supervisor.

Name of student:.....

Student number.....

Signed (student).....Date

Signed (supervisor)..... Date.....

BUS040X631Y	BUSINESS DISSERTATION	MARK					
Student Name and number Title of dissertation			Excellent 70% +	Good 60-69%	Satisfactory 50-	Weak 40-49%	Very poor – 39%
INTRODUCTION & OBJECTIVES (10%) *is the topic clearly stated and defined with a clear purpose? *are the aims and objectives (or research questions) clear, relevant and coherent? *if a hypothesis is identified, is it a proper testable hypothesis? *are the aims and objectives achievable?	COMMENTS						
LITERATURE REVIEW (20%) *has a comprehensive range of relevant literature been used? *are the sources up to date and of sufficient academic weight? *does the dissertation give evidence of a critical attitude towards source material? *have the sources been acknowledged and referenced properly? Is the bibliography complete and in the Harvard style?	COMMENTS						
METHODOLOGY (15%) *is there a clear rationale for methodology? *have the advantages and disadvantages of the chosen methods been discussed? *is the research methodology described fully? Could it be replicated? *are relevant research instruments eg blank and completed questionnaires *are the sampling methods described in detail i.e. *who are the respondents, how many and how selected? *are data analysis methods discussed eg content analysis, descriptive statistics, correlation, tests of significance	COMMENTS						
RESULTS, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION (25%) *is the analysis appropriate to the data collected? *FOR QUESTIONNAIRES *how clearly presented are the data? Are details of the statistical analyses provided? Does the chosen statistical analysis make the most of the data? *FOR DEPTH INTERVIEWS *are the interview transcripts included in the appendices? Is there evidence that the data have been systematically analysed? Is	COMMENTS						

<p>there a summary of key points? *are the key themes and issues discussed *are links drawn with both the research objectives and the literature review</p>							
<p>CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS (10%) *do the conclusions follow on from the findings? *are the conclusions well grounded in the evidence? *are the recommendations plausible given the research findings?</p>	COMMENTS*						
<p>OVERALL STRUCTURE AND PRESENTATION (10%) *is the overall style and presentation in accordance with that specified in the Module Handbook e.g. word count, spacing, section headings, Harvard style of references, font size *is the abstract a concise summary of the main aims, methodology, findings and conclusions? *does the dissertation read as an academic piece of work?</p>	COMMENTS*						
<p>VIVA (10%) Did the student authenticate and substantiate the submitted work? Was the student on top of the material presented?</p>	COMMENTS*						

1st MARKERS MARK:

2nd MARKERS MARK:

FINAL MARK:

BUSINESS SCHOOL

*Business Dissertation
Supervision Record*

*This form should be completed at **each** supervisory meeting. Supervisor and the student should retain a copy.*

Student's Name:

Supervisor:

Date of Meeting:

Time: From

to

Written work submitted or other purpose of meeting:

Main topics/issues discussed and action points agreed:

Time, date and location of next meeting:

Actions and agenda topics for next meeting:

Student's signature

Date:

Supervisor's signature:

Date: