

# Project Guidelines

16 April 2010

## 1. Supervision and deadline

Students who are required to complete an independent study project or any other major project (such as CUL402 Project where the project is the only assessment instrument for a course) are allocated a supervisor who provides guidance throughout the execution of the project. Supervisors act as a point of reference throughout the project period, advise on content aspects and generally give you feedback on your progress. **The responsibility for keeping contact with your supervisor is yours not the supervisor's.** In addition, it is not the job of the supervisor to write the project for you – IT IS YOUR PIECE OF WORK.

Experience suggests that students who ignore their supervisor until the last minute are often unsuccessful. The very first meeting with your supervisor concerns agreeing on the project's subject matter, content, structure and the planned activity through to conclusion. All further meetings with your supervisor should, if possible, be planned in advance. You must make sure that you arrange regular meetings with your supervisor. Once the project is under way, try to send written material for discussion at meetings to your supervisor in advance so that the meetings can be as useful as possible to you. When you go to see your supervisor you should have prepared a written list of points you wish to discuss. Take notes during the meeting so that you do not forget the advice you were given or the conclusions that were reached.

All projects will have a deadline for submission. Only exceptional circumstances, agreed with the supervisor in advance, will prevent a failure for non-submission by this deadline. In such circumstances, appropriate approval, that needs to be obtained before the submission date, will be required. In order for you to meet the deadline for submission of your project you must schedule your work through a series of self-imposed targets, which you must ensure that you will achieve.

## 2. Project's word length

The word length of a project (excluding the word length of any parts before the first chapter and any parts after the last chapter) is as follows:

Type of publication	Word length
Independent study project	7,000 – 9,000
CUL402 Project	at least 6000

Projects often suffer from too much volume and the advice to you is to see the lower word limit, excluding appendices, as a target rather than the higher limit. Excessive length of the project is often a symptom of vague focus and of attempt to disguise inadequate content. This will frequently be penalized by supervisors. Try to adhere to the recommended word length, ensuring your work is relevant and focused on the issues being investigated.

### **3. Common causes of failure**

Some of the most useful things to know about projects are the common pitfalls. Why do some projects go horribly wrong? Here are some of the common causes of failure:

- Choosing/starting the project too late. Start the project as soon as you can. The longer you leave it the harder it is to get motivated, especially when other students seem to be flying ahead.
- Failing to meet your supervisor regularly. If you arrange a meeting with your supervisor, turn up at the agreed time. If you are stuck for any reason and you have no meeting arranged, contact him/her immediately. You gain no sympathy from anyone if you lose contact with your supervisor and produce a poor project as a result. Your supervisor will be happy to help you but he/she can do nothing if he/she is unaware that you are having trouble.
- Allowing too little time for the report. You should try to produce as much of your report as you can as you go along, even though you may not know in advance its exact structure. The last two weeks of the project should be dedicated to pulling together the material you have accumulated and producing a polished final product.
- Failing to plan a fall-back position if the planned work is not completed on time. Try to plan your project in stages so that if things go wrong at a later stage you have a completed stage to fall back on.
- Trying to satisfy an external customer at the expense of your grades. Do not let any outside interests interfere with your work. The guidance for your project should come from your supervisor and only.
- Over/under ambition. Try to be realistic about what you can achieve in the time available. A good project requires a lot of input from you and should prove to be technically challenging throughout. At the same time, however, it is better to do a small job well than to fail to do a big job at all. Your supervisor will advise you on his/her expectations of the project and this will help you to set your sights accordingly.

### **4. Project's structure**

There are many ways to present the results of your project and the advice is that the structure of the project is one that makes most sense of the work you have done. These guidelines are for guidance only as there is no single best structure for all the projects. There is also no suggested intention that creative approaches would be penalized just because they did not follow some of the advice given here.

All projects require reading from various sources, such as books, journal articles and websites. Students who do primary research (i.e. use questionnaires, interviews, observations to get primary data) are advised to follow Main Text - Structure 1 and students who do not do primary research (they only base their project on secondary data found in material they read) are advised to follow Main Text - Structure 2. The difference in the structures lies in the main text (chapters) of the project.

## Main Text - Structure 1

1. Introduction
2. Literature Review
3. Methodology
4. Findings
5. Conclusions and recommendations

## Main Text - Structure 2

1. Introduction
2. A number of chapters analyzing the literature  
(literature review chapter is presented in a number of chapters)
3. Conclusions and recommendations

### **4.1. Title page**

In **Appendix 1** (Project Title Page) you may find a sample of a title page.

### **4.2. Table of contents page**

Include a table of contents so that readers are able to find their way around the document. This is a complete list of headings, subheading, appendices etc. and their respective page numbers. You need to ensure that there is consistency between the table of contents and the headings and subheadings used in the document. All headings in the table of contents should correspond exactly in wording, arrangement, punctuation and capitalization with the headings as they appear in the body of the text. In **Appendix 2** you may find an Example of a Project's Table of Contents Page.

The layout in the table of contents should indicate clearly whether a heading is primary, secondary or tertiary. Any suitable settings (indented headings, bold type, italics and different font sizes) can provide clarity. Another useful way of structuring the chapters and sections of the document is to use a hierarchical decimal system, e.g. 1, 1.1, 1.1.1, 1.1.2 etc. The general advice is to present the document in a format that you are happy with and one that indicates a clear logical ordering of chapters and section headings.

### **4.3. Acknowledgements**

If you wish to make a brief reference to persons or organizations who have assisted in your project, use a separate page to do so.

### **4.4. Abstract**

An important question for any reader is: "in a few words, what is the whole thing about?" This means that at the beginning of your project you need to provide an abstract (summary). This tells the whole story, including the principal findings, in about a page and a half (200-500 words). This should contain a statement of the aims and objectives, the problem or hypothesis, an indication of the methodology used and the main findings and conclusions. You may feel that this "gives the game away" leaving nothing to develop in the paper. Your job is not to keep your reader guessing until the final page. A project is not a detective novel!

#### **4.5. List of Abbreviations**

You may conveniently use abbreviations for organizations or phrases referred to frequently in the text, provided that they are included in the List of Abbreviations. It is customary and helpful to name the organization/phrase in full the first time it is referred to, and indicate the abbreviation to be used (see example). This is applicable for an organization/phrase of at least two words.

Example: “The Shanghai Municipal Council (SMC) had a police force since 1854. Over the years the SMC had arrogated to itself more powers and more land, and became a more and more important instrument of control.”

#### **4.6. Introduction**

The introduction chapter of the project needs to answer three questions:

- What is the issue/problem? In more than two or three words, but probably not more than two or three pages, you need to define the subject of your project and draw some boundaries around it; what it is and what it isn't. The message needs to be clear to your reader, but probably even more crucial it needs to demonstrate that you fully understand the nature and parameters of what you are about.
- Why is the issue/problem important? Basically, “why bother?” Is it just a way of filling your time, or is your project about something that really matters to someone, and, if so, in what way? “Someone” might be your client organization, you, the wider academic/management community, or some combination of all three.
- What is the context in which the research is set? You need to provide enough information about contextual features to give the reader a feeling for the setting of the work. Normally, this will mean a little about the size and business of your research organization(s).

In addition, this chapter should also give the reader some indication of the structure of the project, and the way you set about researching the issues.

#### **4.7. Literature Review**

The second chapter would normally consist of your analysis of the literature. Any research project whatever its scale will necessitate reading what has been written on the subject and gathering it together in the form of a critical review. It is necessary to demonstrate some awareness of the current state of knowledge on the subject, its limitations and the way in which the proposed research aims will add to what is known. Remember you are writing a project and so you need to show the breadth and depth of the literature search that has informed your research and the academic debate surrounding the issues considered. One of the criteria for any research project is to demonstrate a critical awareness of background studies and matters relating to the project. In effect you are trying to answer the question: “what is already known about this issue/problem?”. There

needs to be enough of a literature review to show that useful data already in existence has informed your efforts.

The critical review of the literature should provide the reader with a statement of the accepted wisdom and major questions and issues in the field under consideration. Frequently, literature reviews simply seem to be uncritical catalogues of all that has been found which vaguely relates to the research topic regardless of the merits of the work. What is required is an insightful and critical evaluation of what is known which leads naturally to a clarification of the gaps in the field and the way in which the proposed research is intended to fill them. Hence, you need to develop an organizing framework or model to enable you to select, order and evaluate the relevant literature.

One feature of literature review might be to show how your understanding of this secondary data has helped you to formulate questions you have used in your primary data collection. Another, not necessarily competing, approach might be to use some "model" as a way of organizing the data. Models may already be in existence as expressions of a particular theory you are using to underpin your work, or they may be created by you as a way of helping the reader to understand what you have done better.

The stage of the literature search needs to be kept under close review in consultation with the learning set so that becoming overly concerned with other researchers' work at the expense of creativity can be avoided. Whilst literature searches and reviews take place early in the research sequence, keeping up to date with the literature on the topic, of course continues throughout the period of the research.

Having set out a theoretical framework through a discussion of the relevant literature, the next logical question is "how might this problem be researched?"

#### **4.8. Research Methodology**

The third chapter is a critical evaluation of research methodologies and methods. The discussion should also consider those methodologies and methods rejected as well as those adopted. The aim is to persuade the reader that your approach and the methods chosen are appropriate for the task. You should also be aware of the weaknesses of the methods chosen and be able to comment upon the limitations this may cause.

Normally, you will be concerned with two main types of data. "Secondary data" is already in existence (often in books and journals) and your analysis of this will show that you understand what is already known about the issue. It is not the concern of this chapter to present the secondary data, but rather to explain your rationale for making the selection that you do from the literature available. "Primary data" is gathered by you "live" during the execution of the fieldwork. Again it is not appropriate to set out this data at this stage, but you do need to argue a case for the approach you have selected.

Remember no one methodology is best in all circumstances. You need to briefly review the options which might be used and provide a convincing case for the approach you selected. Most methods of research are grounded in particular views of what organizations are about. You will strengthen your argument by showing that you understand the dominant paradigm underpinning your approach. You also need to discuss the limitations of your methods. All methods are flawed to some extent and you need to show that you are aware of the degree to which the conclusions you reach using your chosen method(s) can be relied upon.

You will also need to discuss the method of data collection including the sample or respondents used and how you intend to analyze and make sense of the data. For example, what statistical techniques will you employ to make sense of quantitative survey data, and/or how do you intend to analyze qualitative data from interviews or observations in order to demonstrate rigor and validity in your analyses?

Having established what contribution the literature has to make to the solution of the problem/issue and which research methodologies to use to enable you to answer your specific research questions, the next question is: "what have you uniquely discovered?"

#### **4.9. Findings**

In this chapter you present the findings of your research and you discuss them. You present the data that forms the basis of your investigation, shaped by the way you have thought about it. In other words, you tell your readers the story that has emerged from your findings. Begin this chapter with what you have discovered that is new and then relate your results to what others have found. Evaluate the meaning of your results and explain unexpected results. You should not only describe the data. You need to make connections, and make your reasons apparent for saying that data should be interpreted in one way rather than another.

When discussing your findings try to answer the following questions: What do they mean? How do they fit into the existing body of knowledge? Are they consistent with current theories? Do they give new insights? Do they suggest new theories or mechanisms? Try to distance yourself from your usual perspective and look at your work. Do not just ask yourself what it means in terms of your perspective, but also how other people in the field might see it. Does it have any implications that do not relate to the questions that you set out to answer?

#### **4.10. Conclusions and Recommendations**

This chapter deals with conclusions and recommendations and needs to show what can be legitimately deduced from the work you have done, what confidence we can have in those conclusions and what action (if any is appropriate) should be taken as a consequence.

Towards the end of this chapter you may have, in a few paragraphs, some form of review and perhaps a look to the future. This is optional but sometimes a very appropriate thing to do. You may wish to show that you are able to reflect on the progress you have been through and consider

aspects that you would change if you were to repeat the exercise. Suggest avenues for future research. Even if you do not present it as such it is good practice to discuss the problems within your study and suggestions for how things could have been differently, etc. Finally, you may spend one or more paragraphs on explaining what the contribution of your project has been to literature (if there is such a contribution).

#### **4.11. References**

Read and apply the College referencing guidelines.

#### **4.12. Bibliography**

An optional and last section before the appendices is a bibliography - this is distinct from the references section. It is worth noting the difference between the terms references and bibliography. References are a detailed list of the sources, which have been cited in the text of the document. A bibliography is a list of publications which have been consulted read or reviewed, but which have not been cited in the text. You need to stick to the same method for giving publication details as used in the references section.

#### **4.13. Appendices**

The last part of the document is the appendices. Each appendix requires a title and each should start on a new page (details to appear in the table of contents). Appendices are not included in the overall word length, but should be kept to a reasonable amount. Appendices should contain material that is relevant to the development of the arguments featured in the body of the text, but would dislocate the flow if included in earlier chapters. Examples of material suitable for inclusion are questionnaires with covering letters, the data on which the findings derived from the field work are based. Reference to appendices should always be made in the body of the project. Appendices should not be used to pad out the project with extraneous material with little relevance to the work as a whole.

### **5. Assessment Criteria for projects**

Assessors of a project need to provide a weighted average mark which is then translated to a letter grade according to the college weighted mark to letter grade conversation table. The pass mark for the project is 60%. For the assessment of a project, supervisors follow the Marking Students' Written Work Guidelines.

### **6. Project's presentation**

The following requirements must be adhered to in the format of the bound project:

- The font size used in the main text (including displayed matters and notes) must be 12 pt.
- The project should be typed/word processed on A4 paper (one side only).

- 1.5 line spacing must be used in the typescript except for indented quotations or footnotes where single spacing must be used.
- The paper must be white and within the range of 70 g/m to 100 g/m.
- The left hand margin should be 3 cm and all other margins must be 2.5 cm.
- Pages must be numbered consecutively throughout the main text including photographs and/or diagrams included as whole pages. The table of contents and pages before the first chapter, which might include, Acknowledgements, Abstract, etc., should be numbered in lower case Roman numerals (i, ii, iii, etc.). Chapter pages and pages following the chapters (such as References, Bibliography and Appendices) should be numbered using normal numerals. Numbering must be centered at the bottom of the document.

Two copies of the project must be bound and must remain the property of the College but the copyright of the project must be vested in the student. The copies should be bound using simple binding.

- The binding must be of a fixed type so that leaves cannot be removed or replaced; the front and rear covers must be sufficiently rigid to support the weight of the work when standing upright; and
- The title page must use at least 16 pt fonts and be shown on top.



## **Project title**

A project submitted to Americanos College

for the course of

MGT302 Organizational Behavior

under the supervision of

Name of supervisor

by

Student's name

Student's Number: 20053124

Americanos College

Semester

Month Year (when you submit the project)

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