

# MBS Strategic Management and Planning: Research Essay

(Course code: MIS 40250 MBS Research Essay)

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Please note that the SMP research essay is undertaken in the third semester of a full-time student's studies. It is worth 15 ECTS. The MBS is a 12 month degree (full-time). Therefore all full time SMP students are expected to work over the full summer term. This term comprises 30 ECTS, two courses and the research essay, or the dissertation.

For further information on the SMP Research Essay, please email [peter.mcnamara@ucd.ie](mailto:peter.mcnamara@ucd.ie)

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## **SMP MBS Research Essay Overview**

**ECTS: 15** credits. Between 300 and 375 student effort hours.

An important element of the MBS programme is its research dimension. In the summer term the research pathways are either the MBS dissertation (30 ECTS) or the research essay (15 ECTS). The reading material that students use in all other courses is drawn from the wider body of business research as encapsulated in the wisdom of textbooks and articles. The process of research is not straightforward and definitive. Readings that are often presented in a very factual and objective manner are drawn upon research assumptions, techniques, concepts and data that are (and should be) open to debate. What is a reasonable assumption and data set in one context may be inappropriate in another. The decision whether or not to apply a given business concept, tools or techniques should be dependent on the strength and relevance of the assumptions, data set, and arguments upon which it is based. The taught courses can assist in exploration of the relevance and rigor of a series of business tools and concepts within class, however in the long term over a business career students will need to make these judgments on their own. The MBS research essay process seeks to provide students with embryonic skills to make these judgments.

The MBS research essay offers students the opportunity to gain an appreciation of the process of knowledge creation and communication first hand by undertaking a significant element of the process of research from generation of research questions, literature review, research design, implementation, evaluation of data, interpretation of outcomes and written communication of research. The majority of research essays will focus upon the empirical dimension of the research process, developing and exploring a dataset of relevance to strategic management and planning. Some research essays may also encompass a literature review dimension. The written research essay provides students the opportunity to craft their skills in rational exploration of ideas and data and both communication and persuasion of a wider community on the value of their contribution. Through this process students should be equipped to begin a life long learning journey, where they are now equipped to select, dissect and explore relevant ideas, tools and techniques presented in written and verbal formats which purport to be based upon objective research processes.

The content of the research essay may cover the breadth of a dissertation, but in less depth. Alternatively it may involve focusing upon one aspect of the dissertation process in greater depth, for example the literature review or data collection and analysis. The focus of the research essay is at the discretion of the staff advisor. Students need to obtain the agreement of a staff advisor to undertake a research essay/project and also the approval of the SMP coordinator.

### ***Types of Research Essay***

A typical 15 ECTS research essay would be similar to the empirical aspect of a dissertation (300 to 375 hours of effort). A useful approach to the research essay would be to work on a part of a research project that a research active strategy academic is undertaking. The student could, under the guidance of the academic,

undertake a portion of the empirical work. This may involve the collection of data and the analysis thereof. It could also involve writing a teaching case study (with accompanying teaching note) under the direction of the advisor. The teaching case option offer students the exciting opportunity to contribute to the learning of future generations of undergraduate and postgraduate students through the publication of a teaching case study suitable for use on strategy courses. Such a teaching case would ordinarily be expected submitted to *European Case Clearing House* for their publication consideration, with your advisor as a co-author. Alternatively a research essay could involve exploring a strategy problem in the context of a company project. It could also involve undertaking a detailed literature review that feeds into a wider research project. The format and content of the research essay requires the approval of an academic member of staff and it at their discretion.

## **Assessment**

The MBS Research Essay shall be evaluated based upon the submission of a written document in conformity with the guidelines laid out by the MBS programme and its streams.

At the discretion of the individual research essay advisor a component of this assessment may include on-going verbal communications during the research process and/or a formal presentation at the end of the process to provide students the opportunity to elaborate on the inner process of their research activities.

The research essay is ordinarily an individual body of work. It is possible that some or all of the research essay process may take place in a team setting. This should only occur with the prior agreement of the relevant MBS subject area coordinator. Where this occurs it is required that the contribution of each individual must amount to 15 ECTS effort hours (300 to 375 individual effort hours).

## **Timing of the Research Essay**

The research essay should be undertaken after the completion of the two summer research essay pathway courses:

- Managing the Negotiation Process (BMGT 40930) – Stephen Boyle
- Project Management for Strategists (BMGT 40330) – Joe Houghton

These courses are scheduled to be completed by the end of June. The MBS SMP degree is structured as a 90 ECTS **12 month full time masters degree**. It is expected that all full time students be registered for 12 months and work full time on the degree from September 1 to August 31. The research essay is 15 ECTS, or 300 to 375 student effort hours. The work should commence no later than 1 July and be undertaken on a full time basis up to 31 August. Please note that the work may involve daily interaction with the research essay advisor. The number of meetings is at the discretion of the research essay advisor. Thus students should be available to attend UCD Business School every day between 1 July and 31 August.

## **Submission Procedures**

The MBS Research Essay should be submitted no later than 31 August to the MBS programme office. Extensions cannot be granted by either the research essay advisor or the SMP coordinator. In very **exceptional** circumstances an extension may be granted by the MBS Programme Director. It should be noted that in general such extensions are not granted unless the circumstances are very exceptional. All extensions are at the sole discretion of the MBS Programme Director.

### ***SMP Pre-requisites and Exclusions***

Approval to undertake the research essay pathway is required from the SMP course coordinator.

Pre-requisite: Research Methods course

Exclusions: The research essay work activities must occur contemporaneous within the period of a student's registration for this MBS research essay course. It cannot be based upon work previously or simultaneously submitted by the student to any public or private organization or individual.

### **MBS Courses of assistance:**

Prior to undertaking the MBS in SMP research essay all students should have successfully completed the Research Methods course. This course gives a good grounding on the principles of research design. The learning outcomes of this course will have prepared students for the research essay process. Students should refer back to the material from that course in the design and implementation of their research essay.

## **The Research Essay Advisor**

### ***Function of Research Essay Advisor***

An SMP research essay should be situated within the domain of strategic management. An important function of the research essay advisor is to ensure that the research essay does fall within this domain. The research essay advisor should be an academic staff member of the UCD Business School. Their function is to advise the student on the process of undertaking an SMP research essay.

The content of the research essay is at the discretion of the research essay advisor. The advisor may direct the student to undertake a particular topic. Alternatively the research essay advisor may ask the student to identify and select an interesting research topic. Through discussion the advisor may then approve the topic as suitable for a research essay, which is then completed under their general supervision. Specifically, students should seek their advice on the appropriateness of the research question or analytic problem that the project is to address. As noted earlier research essays may consist of a shortened version of a full dissertation, or focus in more depth on one part of a dissertation (for example the empirical aspect), they may also be a

literature review, a teaching case study (and accompanying teaching note), or other analytic problem as approved by your research essay advisor. If the research essay advisor does not approve of the question then dialogue should continue until you have satisfied them of the strategy relevance and feasibility of the research topic, taking into account alterations that would occur in the process of dialogue. If agreement cannot be reached then a new research essay topic should be explored.

The advisor can also guide students on appropriate sources for reading materials, research design, data collection and analysis. Please note that the staff advisor's duty is to offer general advice on guiding students along their personal research journey and may also include the grading thereof. It is not to undertake the work, or to direct students in a detailed step by step matter. Much of the knowledge of how to undertake research will already have been imparted via the Research Methods course.

As a matter of course a student can reasonably expect to meet (or discuss via phone or email) the advisor on at least three occasions during the research essay process. Student need to be able to account to advisors on the quality of the work undertaken and the level of student effort hours (ECTS of 15 translates into an effort of 300 to 375 hours). Students may not undertake a project without a research supervisor.

### ***Finding a Research Essay Advisor***

A key part of the research essay process is gaining approval to undertake the summer term research essay pathway. Approval to undertake the research essay is required from the SMP coordinator. This approval will be granted or not upon the basis of performance in relevant courses on the SMP programme and crucially on whether or not the student has obtained agreement in principle from an academic staff member to act as a research essay advisor. Students may be directed by the coordinator into either the dissertation or the research essay (project) summer pathway.

Obtaining a potential advisor is a search process where the potential student seeks to obtain approval in principle from a member of academic staff with an interest in the strategy domain. You may approach a member of academic staff with a research essay idea, or alternatively request if they have an idea that is suitable for a research essay. Before undertaking the research essay you need to gain the written approval of the academic member of staff. The student and staff member should fill out the form in the appendix of this document and return a copy to the SMP coordinator and the MBS programme manager. Once this document has been filed students may not change advisor. Please note that the primary responsibility of the research essay advisor is to approve the project as suitable and to grade the research essay once submitted.

### ***Selection of Strategy Staff***

New staff members enter the university on an on-going basis, others also depart. Here is a list of a few staff members who were active in the strategy or entrepreneurship domains as at April 2007. Many have published articles in the peer reviewed strategy literature. Others are in the process of doing so. Please note that this table is not an exhaustive list of staff, nor of their research interests. You should undertake further research (as noted above) to determine the past and current research interest of staff.

<b>Sample of Staff Members</b>	<b>Research focus</b>
Andreas Buttimer	Strategic Management.
Dr. Yousef Eiadat	Strategic Management. Natural Environment and Firm Strategy Performance
Professor Pat Gibbons (via email only January to September 2006)	Strategic Management; Organizational Change; International Business; Entrepreneurship
Dr. Donna Marshall	Supply chain relationships
Dr. Brian Mc Grath	Technology Management; Business Ecosystems
Dr. Peter Mc Namara	Knowledge and Resource Based Perspectives of the firm; Firm value creation – R&D and Alliances. Biotechnology and Professional Sports industries. Teaching case studies.
Dr. Camilla Noonan	Technology Strategy; Multinational Corporation Strategy
Dr. Jon O'Brien	Capital Structure; Real Options; Entry & innovation.
Dr. Colm O'Gorman	Entrepreneurship. Teaching case studies.
Dr. Eleanor O'Higgins	Corporate Governance; Ethics in Strategic Management. Teaching case studies.
Dr. Rory O'Shea	Technology Management; University-industry technology strategy interfaces
Dr. Dorota Piaskowska	Firm value creation; Diversification; Organizational Learning; Internationalization
Dr. Amir Sasson	Networks (inter and intra organizational networks); Mediating organizations (e.g. Banking; Telecommunications; Airlines).

If willing other members of staff (e.g. lecturers of courses you took during the year) may at their discretion agree to act as a research essay advisor.

Details of the research interests of research active staff may be found at the Management Subject Area web site:

<http://www.ucd.ie/management/>

## Structure of an SMP MBS Research Essay

Students should discuss both the research essay process and final written structure of their research essay with an academic staff advisor. The maximum length of the research essay should be 8000 words. This word limit excludes the empirical dataset. Please note that your advisor may require you to submit the full empirical dataset as part of the research essay process. In such circumstances this dataset would not be considered to be part of the 8000 word limit.

The research essay can be a shortened version of an MBS dissertation, or focus on one aspect of the dissertation process in greater depth. For general guidelines on the MBS dissertation students are referred to the document issued by the SMP coordinator entitled: “MBS Dissertation Journey: Some Initial Steps”. The formatting of the research essay should follow the principles outlined in the MBS dissertation document.

Broadly the research essay should contain the following:

1. Title page:
  - Full title of the research essay
  - Full name of author, student number
  - Full name of academic research essay advisor
  - The month and year of submission
  - The phrase “a research paper submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Masters of Business Studies Degree in Strategic Management and Planning”
2. Content
  - This depends upon the advice of the research essay advisor. Range of research essay types can include:
    - Literature reviews
    - Teaching case studies
    - Empirical work similar to an MBS dissertation (excluding the literature review), amounting to 300 to 375 hours of effort
  - You should structure the content of your research essay to maximize ease of reading by the research advisor. Please ask your advisor for input on their expectations regarding writing style and general structure.
3. Dataset
  - Where your project involves working with a staff member on a dataset, submission of the research essay may involve submission of both an essay and the associated dataset.
4. Teaching Cases
  - Where your research essay is a teaching case the submission should conform to the criteria of the *European Case Clearing House*. It is expected that subject to approval of the research essay advisor the end product would be submitted

to the ECCH for publication, with the research essay advisor acting as a co-author.

## Useful Background READINGS

### ***Strategy Research Texts, Journals and Library Databases***

#### **Texts**

The below texts offer good introductions to the world of strategy research. They are by no means definitive. Strategy is a broad domain and continues to grow each year. They do, however, offer a good overview of some of the main issues that have been researched in strategy over the last 30 years.

Hitt, M, Freeman, R and Harrison, J. editors. 2005. *The Blackwell Handbook of Strategic Management*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

Pettigrew, A, Thomas, H and Whittington, R. editors 2002. *Handbook of Strategy and Management*. London: Sage Publications.

Mahoney, J. 2005. *Economic Foundations of Strategy*. London: Sage Publications.

Two volumes that also overview the field of Strategic Management from a research perspective, whilst remaining quite accessible are:

Faulkner, D. and Campbell, A. (2003). *The Oxford Handbook of Strategy. Volume 1: Strategy Overview and Competitive Strategy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

Faulkner, D. and Campbell, A. (2003). *The Oxford Handbook of Strategy. Volume 2: Corporate Strategy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

#### **Journals – the engine of a Strategy Research Essay**

The literature review of an SMP research essay should draw primarily from peer reviewed strategy journals. These journals provide a good source of insights into the contemporary and more long lasting research questions in the strategy domain as well as insights into prior literature, research methods, and findings of studies. In considering what journals are appropriate for your study you should be mindful of advice offered by your staff advisor. Below is a list of some of the leading peer reviewed journals in the domain of strategy. These are a good starting point for your reading. All are available from the UCD library web-site.

- *Academy of Management Journal* (AMJ);
- *Academy of Management Review* (AMR);
- *Administrative Science Quarterly* (ASQ);
- *British Journal of Management* (BJM);
- *Industrial and Corporate Change* (ICC);
- *Journal of Business Venturing* (JBV);
- *Journal of Management* (JOM);
- *Journal of Management Studies* (JMS);
- *Long Range Planning* (LRP);
- *Management Science* (MS);
- *Organization Science*;
- *Organization Studies*;

- *Research Policy* (RP), and the
- *Strategic Management Journal* (SMJ).

Unfortunately no one UCD library database contains the full text articles for all these journals. For some journals articles are only available online one year after publication. For newer articles please refer to the physical UCD library stock. The following are links to the major database sources of business journals for the business school:

For a full list of UCD library databases see:

[http://www.ucd.ie/library/electronic\\_resources/library\\_databases/index.html](http://www.ucd.ie/library/electronic_resources/library_databases/index.html)

Please note that some of the library databases use IP authentication and other such mechanisms as part of the log on process. This may mean that you have to be physically on the UCD campus to gain access.

**Business Source Premier:**

<http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/search?hid=14&sid=07dfdcbc-4ba1-4e40-b56d-bab37abf657a%40sessionmgr2>

This is one of the most powerful UCD library databases for a student of strategic management. It is the first source that I use when searching for strategy articles. If the journal is not available in Business Source Premier it often points you to the UCD library database that does contain a full text version of the article.

Full text articles (often on one year delay) are available for leading journals such as: Academy of Management Journal; Academy of Management Review; Administrative Science Quarterly; British Journal of Management; Journal of Management; Journal of Management Studies; and Organization Studies.

**Science Direct:**

<http://www.sciencedirect.com/>

This database contains the full text for most journals published by Elsevier. Important journals include:

- Research Policy
- Long Range Planning

**SwetsWise**

<https://www.swetswise.com/public/login.do>

This database requires login via IP authentication. It includes recent issues of several important journals including:

- Journal of Management Studies
- Organization Studies
- Organization Science

**ABi inform:**

<http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?RQT=301&UserId=ipauto&Password=ipauto&cfc=1>

This database is useful as a backup to Business Source Premier. It contains many of the same journals

**Oxford Journals Online:**

<http://www.oxfordjournals.org/>

This database contains full text articles for most Oxford University Press journals. It houses a number of important economic orientated journals, including:

- Industrial and Corporate Change

**Wiley InterScience**

<http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/cgi-bin/home?CRETRY=1&SRETRY=0>

This database houses one of the most important journals in the domain of strategy:

- Strategic Management Journal

### ***Doing a Literature Review***

Some general readings that can assist in framing the literature review are:

Hart, C. (2001). *Doing a Literature Search*. London: Sage Publications.

Locke, L., Silverman, S. and Spirduso, W. (1998). *Reading and Understanding Research*, Thousand Oaks: Sage, Chapter Three, When to Believe What you Read: The Sources of Credibility.

Saunders et al. (2003), Chapter Three, Critically reviewing the literature.

Saunders, M., Lewis, P. and Thornhill, A. (2003). *Research Methods for Business Students*. Third Edition. Harlow: Financial Times/Prentice Hall.

Particular care should be taken to ensure that all arguments, quotations and sources are carefully referenced. Follow the referencing style of the *Strategic Management Journal*.

When undertaking an MBS research essay students often ask for an exemplar of style of a literature review. An example of an excellently crafted literature review that results in a stream of propositions is the following:

Zahra, S. and George, G. 2002. Absorptive capacity: a review, reconceptualization and extension, *Academy of Management Review*, 27(2): 185-203.

I suggest that students consider using the structure of this paper as a template in the design of the literature review. You should however discuss with your staff advisor their views on the structure of the literature review chapter.

Another question that students often ask is what is the number of readings that should be undertaken for a literature review. There is no hard and fast rule to address this question. You should continue to read ***high quality literature*** relevant to your topic until you are able to write a literature review of the character of the Zahra and George

(2002) paper. As a strategy student I suggest that you initially confine yourself to the highest quality strategy research journals. These will contain excellent conceptual and empirical work upon which you can base your literature review.

The following is a list of 14, which are some of the top journals in the strategy domain:

*Academy of Management Journal (AMJ), Academy of Management Review (AMR), Administrative Science Quarterly (ASQ), British Journal of Management (BJM), Industrial and Corporate Change (ICC); Journal of Business Venturing (JBV), Journal of Management (JOM), Journal of Management Studies, Long Range Planning (LRP), Management Science, Organization Science, Organizational Studies, Research Policy (RP), and the Strategic Management Journal (SMJ).*

All of these journals are listed in the top 40 in the social sciences citation index of management journals. All regularly publish high quality papers of interest to strategists. All are double blind refereed journals (see Locke et al 1998).

I recommend that initially students, in consultation with a staff advisor, consider limiting their reading to these high quality sources of literature. References within articles in these journals may lead you to other high quality and relevant readings. As an initial suggestion I recommend that students pursue leads in these journals (and the reference lists from articles from these journals) to find 40 relevant articles upon which the core of the literature review can be based. Clearly that will involve reading considerably more than 40 articles to arrive at the final relevant articles. Other staff advisors may believe that a larger number of articles and more diverse range of journal sources is necessary. Again you should carefully consult with your advisor on these points.

### **Research Methods:**

#### **General Research Methods texts:**

Bryman, A. and Bell, E. (2003). *Business Research Methods*. Oxford University Press.

Saunders, M., Lewis, P. and Thornhill, A. (2003). *Research Methods for Business Students*. Third Edition. Harlow: Financial Times/Prentice Hall.

#### **Specialist Methods in Strategic Management**

Ketchen, D. and Bergh, D. 2004. *Research Methodology in Strategy and Management. Volume 1*. Oxford: Elsevier JAI.

Ketchen, D. and Bergh, D. 2005. *Research Methodology in Strategy and Management. Volume 2*. Oxford: Elsevier JAI.

## **Readings on Specific Research Designs**

### **The Case Method**

- Eisenhardt, K. (1989). Building Theories from Case Study Research, *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 14 (4), pp. 532-550.
- Yin, R. (1994/2003). *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, Newbury Park, California, Sage.
- Stake, R. (1994). Case Studies. In Denzin, and Lincoln, Y. (eds.) (1994). *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, London, Sage, Chapter Fourteen.

#### Two excellent exemplars of the case method in action are:

- Denis, J, Lamothe, L and Langley, A. 2001. The dynamics of collective leadership and strategic change in pluralistic organizations, *Academy of Management Journal*, 444, 809-837.
- Doz, Y. 1996. The evolution of cooperation in strategic alliances: initial conditions or learning outcomes? *Strategic Management Journal*, 17 summer special issue: 5-83.

### **Survey Designs**

See research methods course outline.

### **Experiments**

- Bailey, K. (1994). *Methods of Social Research*. Fourth Edition, New York, Free Press.
- Bailey, K. (1994). Chapter Nine, Experiments

### **Qualitative Research Designs**

- Denzin, and Lincoln, Y. (eds.) (1994). *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, London, Sage
- Silverman, D. (2000). *Doing Qualitative Research: A Practical Guide*, London: Sage.

### **Data Collection – Qualitative Approaches**

Frequently students use interviews as a source of data. I recommend that students read and apply the following resources prior to undertaking interviews.

- Arksey, H. and Knight, P. (1999). *Interviewing for Social Scientists*, London: Sage.
- Kvale, S. (1996). *InterViews: An Introduction to Qualitative Research Interviewing*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

## ***Data Analysis***

### **Qualitative Data Analysis**

Miles, M. and Huberman, A. (1994), *Qualitative Data Analysis: An Expanded Sourcebook*, Second Edition, Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Silverman, D. (1993). *Interpreting Qualitative Data. Methods for Analyzing Talk, Text and Interaction*. London: Sage Publications

### **Quantitative Data Analysis**

Field, A. (2003). *Discovering Statistics using SPSS for Window*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

Salkind, N. (2000). *Statistics for people who think they hate statistics*, Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

# SMP Research Essay Advisor Approval Form<sup>1</sup>

This form should be completed by both the SMP student and the academic advisor. Please note that once this form has been submitted the student may not change academic advisor. Students are required to follow the guidance of the academic advisor and be available to work on the research essay full time from 1 July to 31 August.

**Student Name:**

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**Student Number:**

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**Research Essay topic:**

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**Academic Advisor:**

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**Academic advisor signature:**

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Student should please return a copy of the completed form to

- Felicity McGovern, MBS Programme Manager
- Peter Mc Namara, SMP coordinator

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<sup>1</sup> The research essay (project) pathway consists of a 15 ECTS research essay and two core summer courses: Project Management for Strategists (BMGT 40330) and Managing the Negotiation Process (BMGT 40930). The research essay/project is undertaken in consultation with a staff advisor. The advisor does not need to be a research active member of staff. The research essay can be best thought of as half a dissertation. The expected student effort for a research essay is 300 to 375 hours. The content of the research essay may cover the breadth of a dissertation, but in less depth. Alternatively it may involve focusing upon one aspect of the dissertation process in greater depth, for example the literature review or data collection and analysis. The focus of the research essay is at the discretion of the staff advisor. Students need to obtain the agreement of a staff advisor to undertake a research essay/project and also the approval of the SMP coordinator.