Tasmanian School of Business and Economics

BMA415/16
BFA422/423

BACHELOR OF BUSINESS HONOURS DISSERTATION
A AND B

Semester 1, 2019
Unit Outline

Dr Alison Dunn
CONTACT DETAILS

Unit coordinator

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Other teaching staff

This unit is supported by a range of Honours supervisors from TSBE.
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WHAT IS THE UNIT ABOUT?

Unit description

The dissertation is the central part of the Honours year of study, and is likely to be the most demanding part of the year’s work. It is also likely to be the most rewarding, as it brings students to the cutting edge of the discipline and enables them to begin to contribute to the expansion and refinement of knowledge in their chosen career field.

The dissertation will involve an individual piece of research in a selected area of Accounting and Business Management in which information concerning an approved research topic is gathered, organised, analysed and discussed in a critical and evaluative manner. The research project requires advanced knowledge of research methodology. The dissertation requires a written document which will explain the nature of your research. The dissertation is expected to be 12 500 words in length, but can be a minimum of 10000 words or a maximum of 15000 words in length.

The dissertation will report on your critical review of the relevant literature(s), explain and justify your research design and methodology, and report on your research findings and their implications. The dissertation is expected to make an original contribution to the relevant discipline. It must contain no material that has been accepted for a degree or diploma by the University of Tasmania or any other tertiary institution, except by way of background information and duly acknowledged in the dissertation.

The two units, BMA415 and BMA416, or BFA422 and BFA443, combine to constitute your entire dissertation project.

Intended Learning Outcomes

On completion of this unit, you will be able to:

1. Design and conduct a research project in Accounting and Business Management.
2. Develop research skills using knowledge of research processes and methodology.
3. Develop in-depth theoretical knowledge in a specific Accounting and Business Management area:
4. Communicate research findings and their implications.
HOW WILL I BE ASSESSED?

Assessment schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment task</th>
<th>Date due</th>
<th>Percent weighting</th>
<th>Links to Intended Learning Outcomes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assessment Task 1:</td>
<td>Friday, 1st November 2019</td>
<td>100% (50% of entire Honours program)</td>
<td>1 - 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written Dissertation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
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Assessment details

The dissertation contributes 50% of your total Honours year assessment result.

The dissertation will be assessed by two (2) examiners appointed by the Head of School in consultation with the Honours Coordinator. These examiners may be internal or external to the TSBE. Once examiners reports are received, the Honours Coordinator will determine a final mark for the dissertation. In cases of substantial disagreement between the two examiners, a third may be appointed to arbitrate.

The report will be assessed as it is presented, not in terms of any hypothetical intention of the author. Thus, it is the student’s responsibility to allow plenty of time to complete the write up of their dissertation with time for proof reading. Students are strongly advised to submit drafts of the dissertation to their supervisor for comment within sufficient before the final submission date. Be sure to allow time for this to be read and corrections made (e.g. it is recommended that you provide your supervisor(s) with a complete draft of your dissertation by October 1st).

Assessment Criteria

The dissertation will be assessed with reference to the following standards:

- Demonstrated comprehension of the chosen disciplinary area of interest;
- Demonstrated ability to formulate research questions and propose a methodology suitable to address those questions;
- Demonstrated ability to assemble, review and make a well-integrated use of relevant literature;
- Demonstrated skills of selecting a research design to collect and analyse data to answer your research question;
- Demonstrated ability to interpret and discuss results and their implications, and conclusions drawn from the study;
- Ability to write a dissertation which displays originality of thought and strength of argument;
• The literary standard of the dissertation and its manner of presentation; and
• The overall standard of scholarship, and changes that may need to be made to the dissertation prior to it being hardbound for public access.

In essence, this means that the examiners will be looking at four issues: (1) Command of the problem/issue(s); (2) Research competence; (3) Quality of the dissertation, and (4) Contribution to the field.

The mark for your dissertation will be added to that of your coursework units to provide a score out of 100, and will reflect one of the grades listed below.

### Honours Grades

The awardable grades for Honours are:

- **HF Honours First Class** 80-100%
- **HU Honours Second Class (Upper Division)** 70-79%
- **HL Honours Second Class (Lower Division)** 60-69%
- **HT Honours Third Class** 50-59%
- **HN Fail** <50%

### Description of Dissertations at Various Grades

**Standard of a First-Class Honours Dissertation**

Excellent command of the problem. A high level of research competency. Any flaws in the work are minor. The quality of the writing and presentation is impressive. Contribution to the field is significant through innovation and extension of previous findings (NB: a failure to achieve statistical significance does not preclude the award of first class honours). Work at this level could be expected to be publishable in a reputable journal with a minimal amount of editing or as part of a larger research program.

**Standard of an Upper Second Class Honours Dissertation**

Good command of the problem. May have some flaws or omissions but the rationale and conclusions are sound. Sound research competency. Any significant problems are appropriately addressed in the discussion. Quality of writing and presentation is good. Contribution to the field is identifiable but less substantial than for First Class Honours.

**Standard of a Lower Second Class Honours Dissertation**

A reasonable command of the problem, but there are one or significant problems in the treatment of the literature, conceptualisation of the problem or interpretation of the findings. Quality of the research is generally reasonable, but there are one or more significant problems in the design and execution of the study (not adequately
addressed in the discussion), or in the data or case analysis, or presentation of the results. Quality of writing is reasonable, but there are significant flaws in the detail or reporting. Findings lack Accounting and Business Management significance and are negated by the flaws in the conceptualisation, execution or reporting of the study, but the report would still be of value to another student picking up the topic.

*Standard of a Third-Class Honours Dissertation*

The study reveals some base knowledge of the relevant literature, though there are serious misunderstandings or other major deficiencies. The study may involve a reasonable project but there are serious flaws in the design, execution or analysis. The quality of writing and presentation is less than expected at the honours level. The report is of doubtful value.

**Assessment Item Details – Writing the Dissertation**

The report must be typed, double spaced on one side of the paper only, using good quality (Bond) white A4 paper, and with wide margins of 2.5 cm on the top, bottom, and right margins. The left margin should be 3.5 cm to allow for binding. The typeface should be clear and readable. It should conform to the TSBE style guide, which is based upon that used by the Academy of Management. Consistency of style is essential in the presentation and failure to do so will result in marks being lost.

Copies of previous dissertations are available for your perusal from the Honours Coordinator. Supervisors may also be willing to lend copies of past dissertations. Please note, however, that you are only seeing the submitted versions of other students’ work and do not have the benefit of reading their markers’ reports. Therefore, if you see discrepancies in style, format, or content compared with the instructions you have been given, follow the guidelines given here.

The length of the dissertation will be between 10,000 and 15,000 words. The word count includes such items as headings, in-text references and quotes. It does not include the abstract, the reference list at the end of the dissertation, nor any appendices.

**Page Numbering and Front Folio**

Number the pages (including blanks, if any) up to but not including the first page of the actual text (referred to technically as the “front matter folio”) in small Roman numerals at the bottom of the page in the middle, but do not actually print a number on the title page. Number thereafter in Arabic at the top right of the page. Number the pages of references and any appendices straight on from the text.

In the front folio, include a separate page for each of the following:

(i) Title Page
Contains: Title (and sub-title, if any); author’s name (and their degrees); an entry reading: “Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Business (Honours) / Bachelor of Tourism (Honours) (delete where appropriate) School of Management, University of Tasmania”; and the month and year of submission.

(ii) Certification

An entry reading: “I certify that this dissertation contains no material that has been accepted for a degree or diploma by the University of Tasmania or any other institution, except by way of background information and duly acknowledged in the dissertation, and to the best of my knowledge and belief no material previously published or written by another person except where due acknowledgement is made in the text of the dissertation”. This page must be signed and dated by the student.

(iii) Acknowledgements

Any assistance provided in the completion of the dissertation should be noted and individuals duly thanked. Your supervisor would always be acknowledged here.

(iv) Abstract

An abstract of approximately 200 words that summarises the research question(s) and major hypotheses, methodology, results and conclusions. Although it appears first in the dissertation, you should actually write it last. Please check that your abstract accurately reflects the content of your dissertation. Since the abstract is written last, some students tend to write it at the last minute. However, you should take the same care with your abstract as you would with the other sections of your dissertation. Remember that it is usually the first thing that your markers will read, so it is important to create a good impression.

(v) Contents

Show contents in the most informative fashion possible. Show chapter (section or division or part) numbers and titles and the initial page numbers. Show sub-sections with title if these seem to be helpful. The contents page, if properly prepared, gives the reader (or markers) a comprehensive view of the structure of the report and facilitates subsequent reading. Indicate the titles and initial page numbers of the Appendices, if any.

A contents list of tables and figures may follow on a separate page. This list should be included only when the presentation leans heavily on tables to which the reader may need to refer. This would probably occur when there are more than, say, 10 tables, or when tables act as reference tabulations such as for norms or population characteristics.
The Main Body of the Dissertation

The format of the main part of the dissertation will usually follow the standard form of Introduction, Literature Review, Methodology, Results and Discussion sections. These may be divided into separate Chapters. You may adapt this structure according to the form of research carried out (e.g. case study versus survey). Results and Discussion chapters, for example, are often combined and a Conclusions chapter added. Discuss any issues regarding structure with your supervisor. More detail on each of these sections of the dissertation follows:

(i) Introduction

This is a brief overview of the dissertation that should be approximately 4-6 pages in length. The aim is to introduce the main purpose of the dissertation. As such, it should canvass the background to the topic; the main theoretical or practical issues that have informed the choice of topic, that is, the research opportunity; the main research question(s), and the organisation of the dissertation. In essence this chapter introduces the “argument” of the dissertation: why the research project is being conducted. It sets the scene for the rest of the dissertation. Remember that your supervisor is not one of the markers. You should write in such a way that an academic who has not been involved in your study can easily understand what you’re doing and why.

(ii) Literature Review

This should provide a comprehensive and relevant review of existing literature in the discipline area and establish a basis for the research question(s) and any hypotheses or research propositions. It should include a synthesis of relevant material; a critique of the strengths and weaknesses of certain literatures, including methodological weaknesses; development of conceptually and empirically defensible argument(s) leading to the (re-) presentation of the research question(s), and the presentation of any hypotheses or research propositions.

The literature would normally be about 20 pages (typed and double-spaced). It doesn't take long to use up that many words once you get into your topic. Avoid the pitfall of trying to explain everything. For example, if you're looking at organisational learning, you couldn't possibly review this literature in that many words. Just focus on the salient points for your dissertation. You may begin with general information (e.g. theories and studies relevant to your field), but then narrow it down to the particular variables, and issues of interest in your study. Strike a balance between too much and too little detail. For example, you may like to discuss some studies that you have read in detail, and then briefly mention others. You also need to take a critical approach rather than just describing the material. Are there theoretical inconsistencies in the literature? Are there methodological flaws in previous research? Are there controversial issues in the area? Do you need to argue why you have taken a certain approach?
The literature review should end with a clear (re-)statement of the research question(s). There may also be one or more hypotheses or research propositions. This will depend on the actual research project that you are conducting. Some projects may be more exploratory in nature. If you cannot make a specific prediction due to a lack of research in the area, you could make a tentative proposition, on the basis of logic or simply state that some aspects are exploratory.

The markers want to see that you know what you are talking about. Have you adequately conceptualised the main issues and variables? Have you reviewed the key articles in the area? Have you included sufficient recent journal articles (as well as older material)? Secondary citations should be avoided unless, absolutely necessary. Have you taken a critical approach rather than just describing? Is the review well written (clear, easy to follow, correct grammar, no spelling mistakes or typos)? Is the review well organised (with adequate use of appropriate sub-headings, linking sentences, and summary statements throughout)? Is there a clear link between the literature review and the research questions(s) and hypotheses? This last point is one of the main pitfalls in many reviews. Markers will certainly be looking to see whether any hypotheses you state follow logically from the argument you have developed in your literature review. If you do not have any theoretical, empirical, or logical reasons for predicting a certain outcome, leave it as an exploratory question.

(iii) Research Method

This chapter should provide a clear description of the design and method used in the research project; the participants/sample/case organisation(s) (how many and how selected), instruments used, procedures for data collection, justification of techniques as is appropriate, and specific information about the validity and reliability of any questionnaires or scales used.

This chapter may be broken into subsections, for example, participants, materials or instruments, procedure, and data analysis. This will need to be adapted according to the nature of the research being conducted. If, for example, you are using a case study approach, you will need a section explaining the selection of the case and how the analysis of the case will be approached, triangulation and so forth. If you are using secondary data, you will need a section explaining its selection and source. Your supervisor will be able to advise you as to the most appropriate structure for your dissertation. Some general comments follow regarding the most commonly found sub-sections.

In the participants section, include all relevant detail about your participants. Age, gender, or type of participants would generally be included. Other information may be of relevance depending on the nature of your study. If you are, for example, comparing different community groups and then drawing conclusions about how these groups differ, it would usually be appropriate to note how well these were matched on key variables. You should be aware of any difficulties in your sample that would limit your ability to generalise your findings (these limitations would need to be addressed in the discussion chapter). You should note how participants were
recruited and whether any incentives were offered for participation. If the actual recruitment process was complicated, or there were set criteria for participant selection, you might want to give more detail in the procedure section. If you are conducting a questionnaire study, you should also note the response rate (i.e. the percentage of questionnaires that were returned). Therefore, keep good records as you collect your data.

In the materials or instruments section you generally explain the form in which the data is collected. This might involve, for example, a questionnaire or survey, interview format, or focus group questions. If you used questionnaires, you would usually describe them (e.g. number of items, type of rating scale, perhaps a sample item from each subscale, potential score ranges and what is indicated by high scores). You would also include reliability and validity data and note whether any items had been reverse-scored. You would normally include non-copyright questionnaires in the Appendices. For the dissertation, you would usually put a bit more detail here than you would in a journal article. The main question you should ask yourself is: “Would someone who is not familiar with my study understand what was involved by reading my measures and procedures sections?” If the answer is “no”, you need more detail. On the other hand, don’t go overboard and explain every tiny detail (e.g. you don’t need to say that pens were used to fill out questionnaires!).

In the procedure section you explain the actual process that was used to collect data. This may not be necessary in some types of studies, for example those using secondary data, as this would be covered in a sub-section dedicated to this topic. Interview-based studies might have had this issue addressed in the participants section. If you conducted a questionnaire study, the procedure would probably be quite straightforward. Note any particular instructions that were given and how you went about collecting data. Also, be sure to mention any debriefing that was done. Also, note how participants could receive feedback about the results of the study (this question should have been addressed on your ethics form). If you used other methods apart from questionnaires, describe the procedure in enough detail so that someone else would be able to replicate your study. If you had any other written materials (e.g. set instructions for participants, scenarios, consent forms, letters of introduction, etc), these should be included in the Appendices.

In the data analysis section, you explain procedures or techniques that were used to analyse the data collected, as is appropriate to the research question(s). This is not as common, as some material on data analysis may be included in the results chapter. If you have used a specific analysis technique that you or your supervisor feels requires special explanation, then include a dedicated sub-section here, for example, the use of NVivo for qualitative data. You may include here information on data screening, where you briefly outline any checks that were done for missing values, outliers, mortality, etc. While this is an important topic and needs to be included, it can also be a complex process and your supervisor will advise you regarding the actual extent of data screening you need to undertake. Again, the aim is to provide enough
explanation that someone who is not familiar with your study would understand what was involved and be able to replicate what you have done.

The method chapter should discuss the limitations of the Method rather than of the study as a whole eg time constraints.

Results

This chapter should provide a clear description and presentation of the findings of your research. This should be done concisely with relevant tables and/or figures. The structure of the results chapter will of course depend on the type of study you have done. Depending on the type of study, it may be appropriate to include some descriptive statistics, if relevant (e.g. means, SDs, ranges of key variables). This may be especially helpful in questionnaire studies where a reader may wish to see how your data are similar or different to previous studies. Check with your supervisor to see whether this is relevant for your study. If you don’t wish to include descriptive statistics here, you could include them in an Appendix.

When presenting the results, do not over-do the data. Stick to the main analyses that relate to your research question(s) and research propositions. If you have other analyses that are exploratory and have yielded some useful results, these can also be included. However, always ask yourself whether it relates to the overall aims and contributes to the dissertation. If the markers have to plough through 30 pages of results in which the student has done every imaginable analysis on every piece of data, it’s easy to lose track and does not aid in getting a high mark. Further analyses that are not essential to your aims and hypotheses, but are of general interest, could always be included in Appendices. If you have done anything a little out of the ordinary in your results section, be sure to include the rationale. For example, if your participants-to-variables ratio is a little small for a multiple regression, be sure to include a comment such as, “In view of the relatively small participants-to-variables ratio, results of the following multiple regressions should be viewed with caution”. Then in your discussion section, pick up on that limitation and suggest improvements.

If you are not sure how to present particular analyses or tables, go through the articles you reviewed in your literature review, and pull out the ones that use similar analyses to the ones you’ll be using. You can then use these as a guide. Alternatively, your supervisor can guide you.

Generally, you do not interpret the results in this section, though again, this might vary depending upon the final structure that is adopted for the dissertation. Explanations and interpretations are usually left until the discussion chapter, as are any statements about confirmation of research propositions or hypotheses.
Discussion

This chapter should provide a brief summary of the main findings and an assessment of the results in terms of the research question(s) and research propositions or hypotheses. Results should be integrated with literature canvassed in the literature review. There should be a clear discussion of the implications (both theoretical and practical) of the findings, and a discussion of how the findings contribute to the discipline area. Implications and suggestions for future research or workplace practice should be offered. There should also be discussion of the limitations of the research project, in terms of methodology, sample or data analysis. There should also be a conclusion that draws the dissertation together. To explain these points in more detail, you should consider:

a) Statement/s of support, non-support or partial support for your research propositions or hypotheses. If you had posed exploratory questions, results pertaining to these could also be noted. Don’t include any results here that you have not already noted in the results section. There is no need to repeat actual means or statistics here that have already been reported in the results section. Just summarise the main points.

b) Tie your results back to the literature reviewed in your introduction. Are your findings consistent or inconsistent with previous work? In general, you would not include any new literature here that has not already been cited in the literature review.

c) Provide explanations of, or interpretations for, your findings. These may tie in with theory or could be made on logical grounds. Remember that it is often difficult to make definitive cause and effect statements; be sure to consider any alternative explanations of your data if relevant.

d) Discuss limitations or shortcomings of the study. Hopefully there won’t be any flaws that invalidate the whole study. However, given restrictions of time, resources, convenience samples etc, there may be some shortcomings that limit the generalisability of your results. Don’t list every minor thing but be aware of the limitations of your work. In general, markers don’t mind if there are limitations (within reason), as long as the student is aware of these and can suggest improvements for future research. If an obvious problem is not mentioned, the marker will assume you are unaware of the limitations of your work.

e) Discuss possible applications and/or implications of the findings, both theoretical and practical. While this may be more relevant to some research projects than others, all projects hopefully have some wider significance.

f) Discuss suggestions for future research. This would include (1) suggesting ways in which the limitations noted earlier could be overcome in future research, and (2) suggesting ways in which this area of research could be extended further.

g) Have a final conclusion of the dissertation that briefly restates your major finding(s) and/or contributions and ties the dissertation together.
You should not leave the writing of the discussion until it is too late. It’s not uncommon for students to complete three or four drafts of their introduction and literature review prior to submission, but to then try to write their discussion in the last few days before the thesis is due. This is a waste of the effort put into the first part of the dissertation.

Overall, it takes longer to complete all the finishing touches (e.g. contents page, appendices, references, proofreading etc) than students usually think. So do not leave it to the last minute. Most supervisors are happy to read drafts of different sections, but this depends on when these drafts arrive. It will save you and your supervisor a lot of stress if you can try to complete drafts as early as possible. Also, take great care in proofreading the final version. If your dissertation is full of spelling and grammatical mistakes and style errors, it can create a bad impression and detract from the overall impression of the work. Since you are extremely familiar with your work, it is easy to miss little mistakes when you are reading. One trick that can help you detect errors is to place a ruler under each line as you read it. This has the effect of slowing down your reading, and you are therefore more likely to spot typos. Also check that each copy of your thesis is collated properly before submitting. **Remember that the onus is on you to present an accurate thesis.** The markers can only evaluate what they see, not what you intended them to see.

**References and Appendices**

The references are listed, beginning on a separate page prior to any appendices, and continue in page numbering from the main body of the dissertation. Ensure that all references conform to the School of Management style; any errors will detract from the overall presentation of the dissertation and may lose you valuable marks. It is your responsibility to ensure that the correct format is followed.

Appendices should include information that supplements the dissertation. For example, information about organisations studied, questionnaires used, interview format, set instructions for participants, scenarios, consent forms, letters of introduction, information sheets for participants, etc. Any results or findings that are additional to the main aim of the research can also be included.
WHAT LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES ARE THERE?

MyLO

MyLO is the online learning environment at the University of Tasmania. This is the system that will host the online learning materials and activities for this unit.

Getting help with MyLO

It is important that you are able to access and use MyLO as part of your study in this unit. To find out more about the features and functions of MyLO, and to practice using them, visit the Getting Started in MyLO unit.

For access to information about MyLO and a range of step-by-step guides in pdf, word and video format, visit the MyLO Student Support page on the University website.

If something is not working as it should, contact the Service Desk (Service.Desk@utas.edu.au, phone 6226 1818), or Request IT Help Online.

Resources

Reading Lists

The taught unit reading lists will also prove helpful as you prepare your Dissertation as will the resources you uncover in your research.

Details of teaching arrangements

BMA415/BFA442 is designed to initiate your year-long research project. The unit sets out the requirements of a dissertation and should be read in conjunction with the Bachelor of Business Honours Handbook. BMA415/BFA442 provides a framework for you to start working with your supervisor to progress your research project. This unit is supported by the four taught units to provide you with a foundation on which to build your research project. BMA415/BFA443 provides a framework for the completion and submission of your Dissertation. There are no formal classes, you will arrange how often you meet with your supervisor to make progress in this unit.
ACCREDITATION

AACSB Accreditation

The Tasmanian School of Business and Economics (TSBE) is currently in the process of applying for business accreditation with the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) – the lead program for accrediting business schools globally. AACSB seeks to connect educators, students, and business to achieve a common goal – to create the next generation of business leaders.

By joining AACSB and going through the accreditation process, TSBE is joining a global alliance committed to improve the quality of business education around the world, and to share the latest innovations in business education. Gaining Business Accreditation with AACSB is a multi-year process involving TSBE demonstrating our performance against the 15 accreditation standards.

Once complete, TSBE will join a select community of accredited business schools, with only 7% of all business schools globally having completed the AACSB process. This will further enhance the reputation of TSBE, and further enhance the global recognition of your qualifications. To find out more about AACSB click here.