Unit Outline

MGMT8795

DBA Proposal and Defence

F5 2010 Crawley and D9A-Off Singapore

Winthrop Professor Tim Mazzarol

Business School

www.business.uwa.edu.au
UNIT DESCRIPTION

Introduction

Welcome to the DBA Proposal and Defence unit MGMT8795. The objective of this unit is to prepare students to define research topics, develop appropriate research designs and determine the most effective research methodologies to be employed in the development of the DBA thesis research.

This unit is the final in a suite of courses for the Master of Business Research (MBR) program. It is designed to enable students to prepare and defend their thesis proposal. They should be able to define their research topic, determine the most appropriate research methodology to be employed and show an understanding of the relevant literature underpinning the thesis.

Your Lecturer – Professor Tim Mazzarol

Tim Mazzarol is a Winthrop Professor within the UWA Business School where he specialises in entrepreneurship, innovation, small business management, strategy and marketing. He is also an affiliate professor at the Burgundy School of Business, Groupe ESC Dijon Bourgogne, France. Tim joined UWA in 2001 and was the founder Director of the Centre for Entrepreneurial Management and Innovation (CEMI) from 2003 to 2007, then Director of Doctoral Programs at the Business School from 2008 to 2009. Prior to joining UWA he was at Curtin University from 1994 to 2000 where he was a Research Fellow with the Institute for Research into International Competitiveness (IRIC) and Executive Director of the Small Business Unit.

He has published widely in the field of entrepreneurship, innovation and small business management including several books such as The Strategy of Small Firms: Strategic Management and Innovation in the Small Firm, Entrepreneurship and Innovation: A Manager’s Perspective; and Small Business Management: an Applied Approach. He has worked with small entrepreneurial firms as well as large corporations and government agencies. This has included strategic management, marketing and support to commercialization. Tim has also designed several innovative courses in strategic management, marketing, entrepreneurship, innovation and small business management for both MBA level programs and industry professional development.

He has undertaken over 100 projects in the areas of market research and economic or community studies for government and industry clients including the Government of Canada, RAC, Bank of Western Australia, LandCorp, City of Belmont, Australian Education International, State West Credit Society, WA Potato Marketing Board, TimberCorp Ltd, CSIRO, Department of Land Administration, LandCorp, Agriculture Department of Western Australia, Eastern Metropolitan Regional Council, Small Business Development Corporation, WA Department of Industry and Resources, WA Department of Education and Training, Wesfarmers Ltd, Water Corporation, WA Football League, WA Trotting Association, Racing and Wagering WA and Nokia.

Prior to taking up an academic career Tim served with the Australian diplomatic service including a posting to Bangkok during the late 1980s, and as a sales manager with National Mutual Ltd. He is a shareholder and non-executive director for two small companies and consults widely to both industry and government. Tim has authored two text books on small business and entrepreneurship and innovation. He holds a PhD in Management and an MBA with distinction from Curtin University of Technology, and a Bachelor of Arts with Honours from Murdoch University, Western Australia.
**Unit content**

This unit will require you to prepare a research proposal and to defend that proposal before a panel of academic staff selected from the UWA Business School. In order to pass the unit you must satisfy the Panel that:

- your proposed study is researchable (the “doable” test);
- your thesis makes a significant and original contribution to scholarship;
- your proposed research has practical significance;
- you have a solid grasp of the relevant academic literature;
- you can link your research to the relevant theoretical background;
- you have a sufficient understanding of the research methods necessary to address the topic;
- you have access to sufficient resources to complete the thesis.

Your supervisor(s) will provide guidance on your topic and proposal. Much of your work will be directed towards becoming familiar with the relevant theory and appropriate methodology. It is expected that you are familiar with the relevant research literature through the previous unit. While your supervisor will provide some guidance, successful completion of this work within the set time is ultimately your responsibility.

To develop sufficient expertise in this topic and to make a significant and original contribution to scholarship, you will need to know more about its literature and other aspects of the research than your supervisor. It is therefore essential that you take responsibility for your work (while accepting the advice of your supervisor when it is offered!). During this process, you will be learning how to work with your supervisor(s). A critical aspect of this process is obtaining a balance between taking responsibility for your own research and accepting the guidance of your supervisor(s). Supervisors are experienced researchers who have a good understanding of the scope and methods required for successful completion of doctoral research; you should listen to their advice when it is offered. On the other hand, you should not sit back and wait for the supervisor to tell you how to do the research; it is your research and you must take responsibility for its planning and execution, using your supervisor as a sounding board rather than as the director of your project.

**The Goal of the unit**

The goal of this unit is to enable students to defend their thesis proposal for the DBA. As a result of this unit student should be able to define their research topic, determine the most appropriate research methodology to be employed and show an understanding of the relevant literature underpinning the thesis.

A key objective of this unit is to prepare students to define research topics, develop appropriate research designs, determine the most effective research methodologies to be employed and demonstrate an understanding of the relevant theory and literature underpinning the thesis. A major paper or research proposal embodying these elements is prepared in consultation with an academic staff member or supervisor. This proposal is then presented to an examination panel and the elements of this methodology defended in open debate.
Learning outcomes

On successful completion of this unit, you should be able to:

• define your research topic;

• successfully justify the proposed research in terms of adding new knowledge;

• demonstrate an understanding of the relevant literature underpinning your thesis;

• align your research questions, propositions/hypotheses, variables, measures, and analytic methods, and

• successfully defend your research proposal.

There are two major requirements for the unit:

1. Completion of a written proposal;

2. Delivery of an oral presentation before the DBA Proposal Defence Panel.

Candidates are expected to work with their supervisors in developing their proposals.

This unit also includes a two-day seminar to help students understand the proposal process as well as learn about common pitfalls in proposals, select the most appropriate measures, and design survey instruments for maximum response and minimum response error.

Educational Principles and Graduate Attributes

In this unit, you will be encouraged and facilitated to develop the ability and desire to:

1. Define the contribution of your thesis to academic research and theory.
2. Explain why and how your thesis will make a significant and original contribution.
3. Identify the key underlying theories that will guide and shape your study.
4. Describe and develop the key elements of a solid research plan.
5. Evaluate the different methodologies to be employed in your study and their justification.
6. Explain how you will control for validity and reliability issues within your methodology.
7. Describe how you will collect your data and analyse the results.
8. Provide evidence that you have the resources and time to fulfil this research plan.

Prerequisites

The prerequisites for this unit are:

• MGMT8791 Business Research: Principles and Processes
• MGMT8792 Qualitative Methods in Business Research
• MGMT8793 Quantitative Methods in Business Research
• MGMT8794 Literature Review and Criticism
TEACHING AND LEARNING RESPONSIBILITIES

Teaching and learning strategies

A doctoral research project is a major investigation of a given phenomenon which requires rigorous inquiry of the existing literature to identify the underlying theories that are essential to understanding the context of the study. It also requires a well designed and appropriately structured research methodology that can generate new knowledge and either create new theory or test existing theory.

This unit is an opportunity for students to demonstrate that they have the ability to draw together all the lessons learnt from their MBR studies in prerequisite units and shape a well considered and effective research project. While some of this unit will involve class room based lectures and workshop activities, the primary learning will take place when the student, with the support of their supervisors, put together a proposal for their thesis.

Teaching and learning evaluation

You may be asked to complete two evaluations during this unit: i) the Student Perception of Teaching (SPOT); and ii) the Students’ Unit Reflective Feedback (SURF). The SPOT is optional and is an evaluation of the lecturer and the unit. The SURF is completed online and is a university wide survey and deals only with the unit. You will receive an email from the SURF office inviting you to complete the SURF when it is activated. We encourage you to complete the forms as your feedback is extremely important and can be used to make changes to the unit or lecturing style when appropriate.

Attendance

Participation in class, whether it is listening to a lecture or getting involved in other activities, is an important part of the learning process. It is therefore important that you attend classes. More formally, the University regulations state that ‘to complete a course or unit students shall attend prescribed classes, lectures, seminars and tutorials’. Students should not expect to obtain approval to miss more than two classes per unit unless there are exceptional circumstances.
CONTACT DETAILS

We strongly advise students to regularly access their student email accounts. Important information regarding the unit is often communicated by email and will not be automatically forwarded to private email addresses.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit coordinator/lecturer</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Name:</strong></td>
<td>Winthrop Professor Tim Mazzarol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Email:</strong></td>
<td><a href="mailto:tim.mazzarol@uwa.edu.au">tim.mazzarol@uwa.edu.au</a></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Phone:</strong></td>
<td>+618 6488-3981</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Consultation hours:</strong></td>
<td>During workshops or via email or appointment.</td>
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**Lecture times:**
- **Perth:**
  - 4-5 September (workshops)
  - 12 December (Workshop for receiving feedback on draft proposals)
  - 12-13 February (Thesis Defence Presentations)

- **Singapore:**
  - 11-12 September (workshops)
  - 18-19 December (Workshop for receiving feedback on draft proposals) – Prof Geoff Soutar
  - 19-20 February 2011 (Thesis Defence Presentations)

**Lecture venue:**
- UWA Perth – BUSN:101
- PSB Academy – A-408
TEXTBOOK(S) & RESOURCES

Unit Website

https://webct.uwa.edu.au/webct/entryPageIns.dowebct

Software requirements

By now you should be familiar with electronic searching and referencing. You will be required to use ENDNOTE in this unit. While you are required to use ENDNOTE to create your bibliography, you will also find it useful as a means of classifying literature into discrete areas relevant to your thesis.

Additional resources & reading material

You will find course materials in WebCT. In addition, the following may prove useful. These readings are intended for your information and guidance in questionnaire design and data collection.


UNIT SCHEDULE

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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>PERTH PROGRAM</th>
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<tr>
<td>4-5 September</td>
<td>DBA Proposal and Defence Workshops (9AM to 5 PM)</td>
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<td>22 November</td>
<td>1st Submission of draft research proposal</td>
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<tr>
<td>24 January 2011</td>
<td>Final submission of DBA research proposal</td>
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<tr>
<td>12-13 February</td>
<td>Defence to Academic Examination Panel</td>
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<tr>
<td>11-12 September</td>
<td>DBA Proposal and Defence Workshops (9AM to 5 PM)</td>
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<tr>
<td>6 December</td>
<td>1st Submission of draft research proposal</td>
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<tr>
<td>7 February 2011</td>
<td>Final submission of DBA research proposal</td>
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<tr>
<td>19-20 February 2011</td>
<td>Defence to Academic Examination Panel</td>
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ASSESSMENT MECHANISM

The purpose of assessment

There are a number of reasons for having assessable tasks as part of an academic program. The assessable tasks are designed to encourage you to explore and understand the subject more fully. The fact that we grade your work provides you an indication of how much you have achieved. Providing feedback on your work also serves as part of the learning process.

The assessment within this unit is focused on the successful completion of a research proposal for your DBA thesis. This will require a written document and a defence presentation that allows you to explain this methodology to a panel of examiners.
Assessment components

Written proposal

The written proposal should be approximately **15-20 pages**, and should communicate the proposed topic with sufficient depth and clarity. This includes an introduction (background, research question(s), and justification), description of the underlying theory and literature to anchor the research question and propositions/hypotheses, overview of proposed methods (including possible measures, proposed sampling, and data analysis), leading scholars on this topic, and resources required to complete the thesis. Proposals that exceed the page limit may be returned for editing. A detailed outline of the thesis proposal elements is presented below.

Defence presentation

The defence presentation should communicate the proposed topic with sufficient depth and clarity. It should briefly identify a knowledge gap, summarise underlying theory and literature, identify proposed methods, and demonstrate the candidate’s ability to complete the proposed research. Your presentation should last **no more than 25 minutes**, and remain focused on the proposed study. As you only have a short time for your presentation, do not waste time detailing work of previous researchers. Expect up to 30 minutes of questions and discussion about the proposed research to follow as experienced researchers seek to understand your proposal (and your level of preparation) better. (Examples of the types of questions that might be asked are included in the appendix ‘Assessing a research proposal’.)

The defence procedure

Ideally, you will successfully defend your proposal at the first presentation. If both your written proposal and defence presentation are satisfactory, you will be advised that you have passed the unit and may commence work on your thesis.

If your first defence presentation does not demonstrate that you are ready to progress to the thesis stage of the DBA, you will be given a second opportunity to defend. In this situation, you will also be asked to revise your written proposal. You will be given detailed feedback, a date by which your response to the Committee's questions and comments or revised proposal is to be presented, and a date for the second defence. If you do not meet the set deadlines, you will be deemed to have failed this unit and will not be permitted to continue as a DBA student.

Following a second defence, you may be asked to respond to additional questions and comments or to make further revisions to your proposal. Again, you will be given detailed feedback and a date by which the response or revisions must be submitted. If you do not submit by the set date, you will be deemed to have failed this unit and will not be permitted to continue as a DBA student.

It is possible to fail the second defence outright (by failing to demonstrate the qualities we have defined earlier). If this is the case, you will be deemed to have failed this unit and will not be permitted to continue as a DBA student.

All students completing this and the other MBR units are eligible for the award of the Master of Business Research, including those who pass all units but not at a level that would permit them to enter the thesis stage of the DBA.
Content of the Research Proposal

The structure of a research proposal may vary somewhat with the discipline base and the purpose of the research, but all DBA proposals are expected to include the following elements. In essence, you are being asked to explain the ‘why, what, how, where, and when’ of your research. Use language that can be understood by people who are not experts in your field.

A research proposal generally includes the following sections (Note: variations of this pattern exist, so speak to your supervisor about the preferred structure for your particular thesis):

1. Introduction and Research Question(s) (approx 1-3 pages):

This section provides a very brief background to the thesis, and identifies a ‘gap’ in existing knowledge, which leads to one or more clearly-stated research questions. Through this introduction, you will:

- present the aims of your study – what you expect to achieve in this research project;
- explain the significance of the study (i.e. an explanation how the results of the study will potentially contribute valuable knowledge)

2. Literature and Hypotheses (or Propositions) (approx 4-6 pages):

This section includes a condensed version of your literature review, which was submitted in the previous MBR unit. This section should explain the relationship of your research to previous work to demonstrate that you are familiar with the underlying literature and theory. The literature review and model/hypotheses are sometimes divided into two sections in the thesis.

Deductive (theory testing) studies will include in this section a description of the model and a brief summary of relevant literature linked to the model and specific hypotheses. All variables in your study should be clearly defined here.

Inductive (theory development and phenomenological) studies should provide a summary of relevant literature perspectives on the proposed topic. Of course, inductive studies would not have a model, propositions, or hypotheses. The literature review sections of many inductive studies include evidence justifying why an inductive rather than deductive approach should be applied to this topic. In doing so, this section would explain why existing theoretical perspectives should be reconsidered or why the topic requires a phenomenological approach. Specific methods would be presented in the next section.

3. Method (approx. 3-6 pages):

In this section, you are expected to describe how you will achieve your aims; in other words, what methodological approach you propose to adopt, and how you plan to test the research hypotheses you have developed earlier.

Empirical, deductive studies typically organise the methods section as follows:

- **Research setting, sample and data collection procedure:** Describe the population, the proposed sampling from that population, and the method used to collect data from that sample. You would also briefly describe the research setting (e.g. company or industry where data will be collected). If an experimental design is planned, this section (typically with headings of “Experimental Design” and “Participants”) would describe the experimental procedure and the participants.
• **Measures:** Provide evidence that all variables in your study have appropriate measures. The research proposal does not need to present actual measures (although this is useful if possible), but it should demonstrate that the variables can be measured satisfactorily. The proposal should also identify variables requiring new measures, and explain how this will be accomplished. It is useful to briefly define your variables again in this section.

• **Data Analysis:** This section describes and justifies the method(s) you intend to use to test your hypotheses or otherwise address your research question(s).

Inductive (usually qualitative) research studies have varied thesis structures, including placement and structure of the methodology section. The thesis proposal would also reflect this varied structure to some extent, so it is important that you work with your supervisor on this structure. The methodology section of inductive study thesis proposals would justify the broad methodological approach (grounded theory, phenomenology, multiple case studies, etc.), and would provide details of the specific data gathering activities related to that broad methodological approach. The proposed sampling method (e.g. snowball, purposive, theoretical) would be discussed as well as the variety of information sources and likely timing of the data collection. Issues of qualitative validity (credibility, authenticity, criticality, etc.) should be addressed.

4. **Ethical Issues**

The thesis proposal should proactively identify and briefly document any ethical issues that may arise, and describe strategies to overcome these dilemmas.

5. **Synthesis**

Summarise how the proposed research design will answer your research questions and thereby help address the applied problem. Overall, you should consider how will this research make 'a significant and original contribution to scholarship' and to your applied field.

6. **Timetable**

Include the proposed timeline for completion of the research.

7. **Bibliography**

Include the relevant major work in the area of the thesis.

8. **Scholars**

Identify 4-5 leading scholars in your field, including (if possible) at least one Australian. These people are likely to be the ‘audience’ (i.e. the examiners) for your thesis.

9. **Resources required**

Please indicate the source of any special funds required for your research. You should also mention any special equipment, laboratory resources, databases, or library resources required, and how you expect to gain access to these resources. Finally, if you anticipate using special techniques for data collection (e.g., administration of psychological tests which require a certified administrator) or analysis (e.g., advanced statistical analysis), tell us what they are and how you expect to learn about or obtain assistance with these techniques. You should note that the GSM has the right to refuse to supervise any topics which may entail it in expenditures beyond its normal allocation to doctoral students.
10. Confidentiality and Intellectual property

If your thesis is likely to contain information of a confidential nature, you will need to draw this to our attention at the outset, or as soon as it becomes apparent. There are special procedures for dealing with confidential information. Similarly, you should draw our attention to any intellectual property issues that may arise, including any intention to develop methods or outputs to which you expect yourself or the University to have intellectual property (other than the intellectual property in publications).

11. Limitations

Outline any limitations to the proposed study.

Submission of Assignments

You should upload your assignments to WebCT for assessment. If you wish to follow up with an email to your lecturer please do so.

The Standard of Assessment

In order to complete the MBR you will be required to pass this unit (i.e. a minimum grade of 50%). In order to be permitted to progress to the DBA you are required to achieve a minimum grade of 65%.

Marking Guide

Questions that students and staff should ask when assessing a proposal for a DBA thesis (from Hattie & Myhill, 1992):

- Is it a thesis (i.e. an argument) or is it only a description?
- Has the thesis a foundation in theory?
- Does the proposal have imagination?
- Is the methodology feasible and within the capabilities of the student?
- Is there an understanding of the relevant literature?
- What might the results look like?
- What are the consequences if
  - the data cannot be obtained?
  - the analyses are inconclusive?
  - the study does not get the expected results?
- What are reasonable time limits for each stage and final completion?
- Given the above, if too much is being attempted, what can be omitted?
- Is the thesis portable - to other supervisors, to-supervisors?
- Do the student and the supervisor share the same answers to these questions?


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### Ethical Scholarship, Academic Literacy and Academic Misconduct

**Ethical Scholarship** is the pursuit of scholarly enquiry marked by honesty and integrity.

**Academic Literacy** is the capacity to undertake study and research, and to communicate findings and knowledge, in a manner appropriate to the particular disciplinary conventions and scholarly standards expected at university level.

**Academic misconduct** is any activity or practice engaged in by a student that breaches explicit guidelines relating to the production of work for assessment, in a manner that compromises or defeats the purpose of that assessment.
**Students must not engage in academic misconduct.** Any such activity undermines an ethos of ethical scholarship. Academic misconduct includes, but is not limited to cheating, or attempting to cheat, through:

- Collusion;
- inappropriate collaboration;
- plagiarism (see more details below);
- misrepresenting or fabricating data or results or other assessable work;
- inappropriate electronic data sourcing/collection and
- Breaching rules specified for the conduct of examinations in a way that may compromise or defeat the purposes of assessment.

Penalties for academic misconduct vary according to seriousness of the case, and may include the requirement to do further work or repeat work; deduction of marks; the award of zero marks for the assessment; failure of one or more units; suspension from a course of study; exclusion from the University; non-conferral of a degree, diploma or other award to which the student would otherwise have been entitled. Refer to the Ethical Scholarship, Academic Literacy and Academic Misconduct and individual Faculty policies. For further information on the rules and procedures in respect of appropriate academic conduct you should visit: [http://www.teachingandlearning.uwa.edu.au/tl/academic/conduct](http://www.teachingandlearning.uwa.edu.au/tl/academic/conduct)

### Acknowledgements of Plagiarism

In the course of your individual and group work assignments, you will encounter ideas from many sources. These will include journal and newspaper articles, commentaries, books, web sites and other electronic sources, original case sources, lecture materials. All MBR assignments that you submit must acknowledge all the different sources you have used. Not to acknowledge your sources is plagiarism, a form of dishonesty. Plagiarism is the misappropriation of the work or ideas of others and presenting them as your own. This is reprehensible from both an ethical and legal viewpoint. Neither the School nor the University accepts ignorance or the fact that a student’s previous acts of plagiarism had been undetected as a defence.

In order to avoid engaging in plagiarism it is your responsibility to acknowledge all of your sources in any work submitted for assessment and it is essential that you reference the work of others correctly. Where you quote directly from a source, you must ensure that any direct quotations are placed in quotation marks and are fully referenced. Even when you do not quote directly and are just referring to or expanding on the work of others, you must still acknowledge the sources of your information and ideas. Close paraphrasing in which you change a few phrases around, leave a clause out of a long sentence or put the original sentences in a different order is still plagiarism. To mark words as a quotation the entire text that has been copied should be enclosed within the quotation marks. If the copied text is four or more lines in length, it may be more appropriate to set it as a separate and indented paragraph. Each time that text is copied, the source must be acknowledged with a reference citation, including the page number.

Advice on proper referencing is given below. If you have any doubts concerning appropriate referencing formats or how to acknowledge the work of others correctly, you should seek the advice of your lecturer.
Referencing

It is important that the referencing of any sources used in your written work is done properly, if only to substantiate the points you are making in your assignment or project. The Harvard style is the preferred and there are some notes for guidance which have been prepared by the library staff: ‘Citing your Sources Harvard Style’ http://libguides.library.uwa.edu.au/harvard

EndNote is a really good system for building up a database of references. Not everyone will want to invest the time in using this system but you should consider it if you intend to build up resource materials or plan to undertake extensive research in a particular area. The library staff have also developed a tutoring package: ‘A Quick Guide to Using EndNote’ which provides the basics for using EndNote with an essay http://libguides.library.uwa.edu.au/content.php?pid=43218&sid=318565

This is linked to the ‘How to Use EndNote’ page http://libguides.library.uwa.edu.au/endnote that provides more comprehensive information.

Taping of Lectures

The Business School does not provide tape recordings of lectures from this unit, however if you do wish to tape record a lecture, then as a matter of courtesy you should obtain the permission of the lecturer first.

Appeals against Academic Assessment

In the first instance, students are strongly advised to talk informally to the lecturer about the grade awarded. The University provides the opportunity for students to lodge an appeal against any mark which he or she feels is unfair. Any student making an appeal is under an obligation to establish a prima facie case by providing particular and substantial reasons for the appeal.

There is a 20 day time limit for making any such appeal. An appeal against academic assessment may result, as appropriate, in an increase or decrease in the mark originally awarded.