

Local Government Program • Department of Political Science

**GUIDELINES FOR THE
MASTER OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION RESEARCH REPORT**
Public Administration (PA) 9917 Issues in Local Government

Revised September 2023

*Local Government Program
Department of Political Science, University of Western Ontario*

The Research Report is a requirement for graduation from the MPA Program. Students working on their reports enroll in PA 9917 Issues in Local Government, which is taught by the Program Director, and is usually taken in the final term of the program after completing all other course requirements. The Research Report is the main deliverable for PA9917 and is worth 80% of the course grade. However, preparatory work for the Research Report begins in PA9914 Research Design and Methods, where students develop the Research Proposal for their report. Students are encouraged to start thinking about a possible subject for their Research Report early in the program, to maximize alignment with their own interests and learning goals.

This document provides guidelines for students with a view to making the Research Report requirements and process as clear as possible. Any questions about the Research Report should be directed to the Director of the Local Government Program.

A. Objectives of the Research Report

The Research Report is intended to fulfill both academic and professional objectives and is considered an integral part of the student's learning process. The Research Report process requires the student, supported by the instructors of PA9914 and PA9917, to design and complete an original piece of social science research. The Research Report is viewed as a capstone to the MPA in the sense that it should demonstrate the student's mastery of the theoretical and methodological understandings that have been acquired in the program.

Its main objective is to apply what has been learned in the MPA courses to:

- (1) an analysis of some aspect(s) of political and/or administrative processes within the local government sector, or
- (2) an analysis of a policy problem at the local level, or
- (3) a critical conceptual, theoretical, or normative analysis of one of the contemporary debates in public administration at the local level.

Academic Objectives

1. **Demonstrate conceptual skills and mastery of relevant academic literature**

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The Research Report should demonstrate the student's ability to conceptualize at an abstract level by providing a brief review of literature relevant to the chosen topic and using this to help frame investigation into a concrete analytical research question.

Students graduating from an academic master's program should be able to develop a theoretical or conceptual framework to guide original investigation of a research question. Developing this framework requires abstract conceptualization skills, including the ability to analyze academic and practitioner-oriented literature in relevant fields, and the ability to synthesize what the student has learned from this literature in order to guide investigation of the question under study. These abilities are developed in several MPA courses, including Research Design and Methods, Theories of Public Administration, Advanced Local Government, the Policy Process in Local Government, Organizational Behaviour, and Local Government Management.

2. Demonstrate research skills

The Research Report should demonstrate the student's ability to conduct independent, original research by collecting and analyzing relevant information from appropriate sources. The information should permit the student to critically examine or test a concrete research question that he or she has developed.

Students graduating from an academic master's program should be able to approach the question "How do you know?" in a rigorous, objective manner. The report should demonstrate the student's grasp of research methodology, as addressed in PA 9914 Research Design and Methods. This includes the ability to frame a clear question, develop an appropriate research design, and select and implement approaches to the collection, analysis, and interpretation of information that is appropriate to the question under study.

Various research approaches are acceptable for acquiring information. Research designs may involve large-N statistical analysis or in-depth qualitative analysis of carefully selected case studies. Data sources (beyond previously published research) can include government documents such as reports, backgrounders and meeting records, statistical datasets, reports produced by other organizations, media documentation, and quantitative or qualitative data from other reliable sources. Triangulation of data from multiple kinds of sources is encouraged. Research involving human subjects, including interviews, surveys, focus groups, or participant-observation research, is not permitted. It is expected that the Research Report will do more than provide a review and analysis of previously published work: it will demonstrate the student's research abilities and capacity for critical analysis.

3. Demonstrate communication and reporting skills

The Research Report should demonstrate the student's ability to communicate clearly and effectively, in a manner that is free of errors of grammar, spelling and style, and that meets academic standards.

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The report should be logically and coherently organized and should be focused on systematically addressing the question the student has chosen to address. There should be an introduction to the report that sets out the issue under study, and a conclusion summarizing what has been learned or accomplished.

All sources consulted must be listed in a list of references at the conclusion of the report, and sources must be cited in accordance with accepted academic practice.

See the style guides referenced later in this document for guidelines.

Professional Objectives

1. Be relevant to local government

The Research Report should demonstrate the student's ability to address an issue having some connection to local government, local government administration, and/or local communities. The issue under study should be important to local government, and in some cases the research may result in recommendations or options for the stakeholders who have an interest in the subject of the research.

Students graduating from a master's program specializing in local government should be able to identify and examine issues important to local communities or to the local level of government. A student may wish to select a topic that is related to a current issue or case in their local government workplace. This is encouraged; however, *it is important to remember that the Research Report is an academic project, not a consulting exercise or work assignment whose purpose is to meet an employer's requirements or expectations.* The student, with guidance from the Program Director, must ensure that the report meets the academic objectives set out above, while at the same time contributing to the student's career-related objectives. It may be necessary to consider how to manage the organizational politics surrounding the topic under study, if the research is concerned with the student's workplace.

2. Be concise and focused

The text of the Research Report should be about 25 to 30 double-spaced typewritten pages in length – a maximum of about 7,500 words.

It should focus on a specific topic, develop a well-considered research question on this topic, provide a review and analysis of literature relevant to the topic, develop a conceptual framework and research strategy to answer the research question, and discuss the collection and analysis of information that tests or demonstrates the framework's utility for its specific purpose.

The Research Report is not intended to be a master's thesis or a broad review of a topic. Its purpose is to demonstrate that the student can apply theory to empirical situations, problems, or cases. The report should focus on a specific question or set of questions,

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select the most relevant literature and theory for the analysis of the question(s), and collect and analyze data to answer the question.

B. The Process and Schedule for Developing the MPA Research Project

MPA students should begin to consider various possibilities for their research project soon after they enter the program. Students are encouraged to take the opportunities presented by course-related essay requirements to become more familiar with specific topics and to test out their feasibility as research topics. Students are also encouraged to discuss their initial ideas about a potential research focus for the Research Report with the Program Director and/or with course instructors.

The preliminary task towards finishing the Research Report is completion of the Research Proposal. This process takes place as part of the evaluation requirements of PA 9914 Research Design and Methods. The Research Proposal includes a research question and description of a research design. The due date for the Research Proposal will be determined by the instructor of PA 9914. The proposal and the feedback received on it, are intended to serve as the basis for the writing of the final Research Report. The Research Proposal is deemed approved on successful completion of PA 9914.

Following the completion of PA 9914 Research Design and Methods, each student will meet one-on-one with the Program Director to discuss their research design and get guidance on next steps. This meeting will take place **no later than four weeks before the start of the in-class component of PA9917 Issues in Local Government**. During PA 9917's in-class component in June, students will present the work they have completed thus far on their Research Reports and receive peer and instructor feedback. Following the completion of the in-class component of PA9917, each student can expect to have at least one more consultation session with the Program Director to receive guidance on their work.

The Research Report is due on July 15th. The student bears final responsibility for completing the Research Report by the deadline, and for meeting the academic and professional objectives.

C. The Research Proposal

Proposals are developed in PA 9914 Research Design and Methods. At a minimum, the final proposal should include the following elements:

1. Cover sheet showing the student's name, whether a full-time or part-time student, and a working title for the project.
2. A statement that presents the specific research question and a justification of why it is relevant and important.
3. A review of the literature that outlines what is already known about the topic to lay the groundwork for the proposed research project.

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4. An outline of the proposed research design, including:
 - a. a description and justification of the choice of units or cases,
 - b. whether the research is cross-sectional or longitudinal,
 - c. a description and justification of necessary information sources and strategy for collecting them, and
 - d. a plan for analyzing the information that is collected.

Please refer to the more detailed proposal requirements distributed in PA 9914 Research Design and Methods.

Support and Feedback

Building on the proposal developed in PA 9914, students will develop the MPA Research Report on their own but are encouraged to draw on their instructors' expertise. The Program Director will meet with and provide feedback to all students prior to, during, and after the in-class component of PA 9917.

D. Final Submission of the Research Report

DEADLINES

Proposal Due Date: During PA 9914 Research Design and Methods
Research Report Due Date: July 15th

Extensions beyond these deadlines will be granted only in extenuating circumstances, and requests must be made in writing to the Program Director.

The student is responsible for submitting one digital copy of the completed report to Program Administrative Staff. No hard copy is required. The format of the Report must conform to the MPA Research Report Style Guide (attached). The digital copy is to be e-mailed to the Program Administration at: localgov@uwo.ca by 11:59 p.m. on the due date.

Since MPA Research Reports are academic projects (see discussion of Objectives above) that may deal with politically sensitive matters, students may want to ensure that access to their report remains restricted after it is handed in. Thus, when submitting their final report, students should indicate the level of confidentiality with which they would like the report to be treated. The choices are:

1. Public: The report will be electronically distributed to anyone who asks.
2. Limited Circulation: The report is available only to current MPA students. Students are asked not to quote from the report and to delete it once they have reviewed it.
3. Confidential: The report will not be distributed to anyone.

If students do not indicate a confidentiality status, the default is "Public". In other words, unless students specifically request otherwise, copies of the completed Research

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Reports will be available to all who request them through the Local Government Program Office.

The submission deadline is firm. Late submission is likely to jeopardize graduation and lead to the necessity of registering for another academic term. Special circumstances, such as illness or other compassionate reasons, should be brought to the attention of the Program Director as soon as they are known so that appropriate accommodation can be arranged.

F. Evaluation of the Research Report

Submitted Research Reports will be divided among a panel of graders comprised of full-time faculty members and established part-time instructors. Each report will be evaluated by one grader from the panel. The panel does not include the Program Director. Students may include a rank-ordered list of up to three preferred graders in their submission email. The Program Director will take students' preferences into account when assigning graders. The Program Director will share their feedback on the student's presentation in PA 9917 with the assigned grader.

The grade and comments will be returned to the student no later than two weeks after their submission due date, along with the overall course grade for PA9917. In their assessment, graders will consider the degree to which the Research Report fulfills the academic and professional objectives set out in this document. They will also take into account efforts to incorporate feedback received on the PA9917 presentation. Graders are encouraged to include written comments in a separate document. They may also choose to make comments within the text of the report.

Research Reports are evaluated by graders based on the following guidelines. A grade of 59% or less is considered "Unsatisfactory"; a grade of 60-69% is considered "Marginal"; a grade of 70-79% is considered "Satisfactory"; a grade of 80-89% is considered "Good"; a grade of 90% or more is considered "Excellent". An Assessment of Excellent is expected to be unusual and is awarded only to the very best papers. As in all other courses, students must achieve a final course grade of 60% or higher to pass PA 9917 and maintain an overall average of at least 70%.

After receiving a grade and feedback from their assigned grader, students *may* (if they choose) request a second reading by another grader. This request must be made within a maximum of three business days. The second grader will be chosen by the Program Director from among the panel of graders. The grade assigned by the second grader will be averaged with the grade assigned by the initial grader to produce the student's final grade.

G. MPA Research Report Style Guide

All MPA Research Reports are expected to conform to the following guidelines.

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Length: about 25 to 30 double-spaced typewritten pages of text (maximum of about 7,500 words), not including reference list and any appendices.

Title page: should conform to the attached model

Abstract: should be no longer than 250 words, and state (a) the research question, (b) methods used, and (c) findings or recommendations

Subject keywords: include up to six subject keywords from the prescribed list.

Geographical keywords: list all municipalities, provinces (if outside of Ontario), and countries (if outside of Canada) analyzed in the paper

Page numbering: each page of text must be numbered.

Order of sections is as follows:

- Title page
- Page showing report title, abstract, and subject and geographical keywords
- Acknowledgements (if used)
- Table of Contents, including chapters or sections, and appendices
- List of tables and charts (if applicable)
- Text of the report, divided into chapters or sections
- References: listed in alphabetical order using an academically accepted format (see below)
- Appendices (if any)

Style guide for footnotes, citation of sources, and references

Students should adopt a consistent and accepted style for handling citations and references. Detailed guidelines for several styles, including APA and Chicago (preferred), are available at: <http://www.lib.uwo.ca/essayhelp>

Plagiarism is a serious academic offense and is not acceptable. For a definition of what is meant by plagiarism, please consult the Department of Political Science's statement on plagiarism, available at:

http://politicalscience.uwo.ca/undergraduate/frequently_asked_questions.html

Invitation to members of the Local Government Program at Western University:

Municipal World magazine would be pleased to consider submissions from students or graduates of the Local Government Program at Western. Highlighting research undertaken as part of the program and/or issues of interest to Canadian municipalities, article submissions should be approximately 1200-1500 words in length. Please note that Municipal World does not accept articles that have been previously published or accepted for publication elsewhere. Editorial guidelines are available online at <https://www.municipalworld.com/editorial-guidelines/>.

MODEL TITLE PAGE

Organizational Structures in the New City of Toronto:

An Analysis of Post-Amalgamation Organizational Structures
and Matrix Management in the City of Toronto and its
Urban Planning and Development Services Department

Subject keywords: Planning, Public administration

Geographical keywords: Toronto

MPA Research Report

Submitted to

The Local Government Program
Department of Political Science
The University of Western Ontario

David Oikawa
July 2010