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MBA BUSINESS RESEARCH PROJECT GUIDELINES
MBSA 2923

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1. INTRODUCTION

MBA Business Research Project (which is known as a mini-thesis) is a compulsory project for the students to complete at the end of their semester. As such, students should regard their research projects as an ideal opportunity and vehicle for integrating what they have learnt during the MBA program and applying those concepts and skills to a real problem at work.

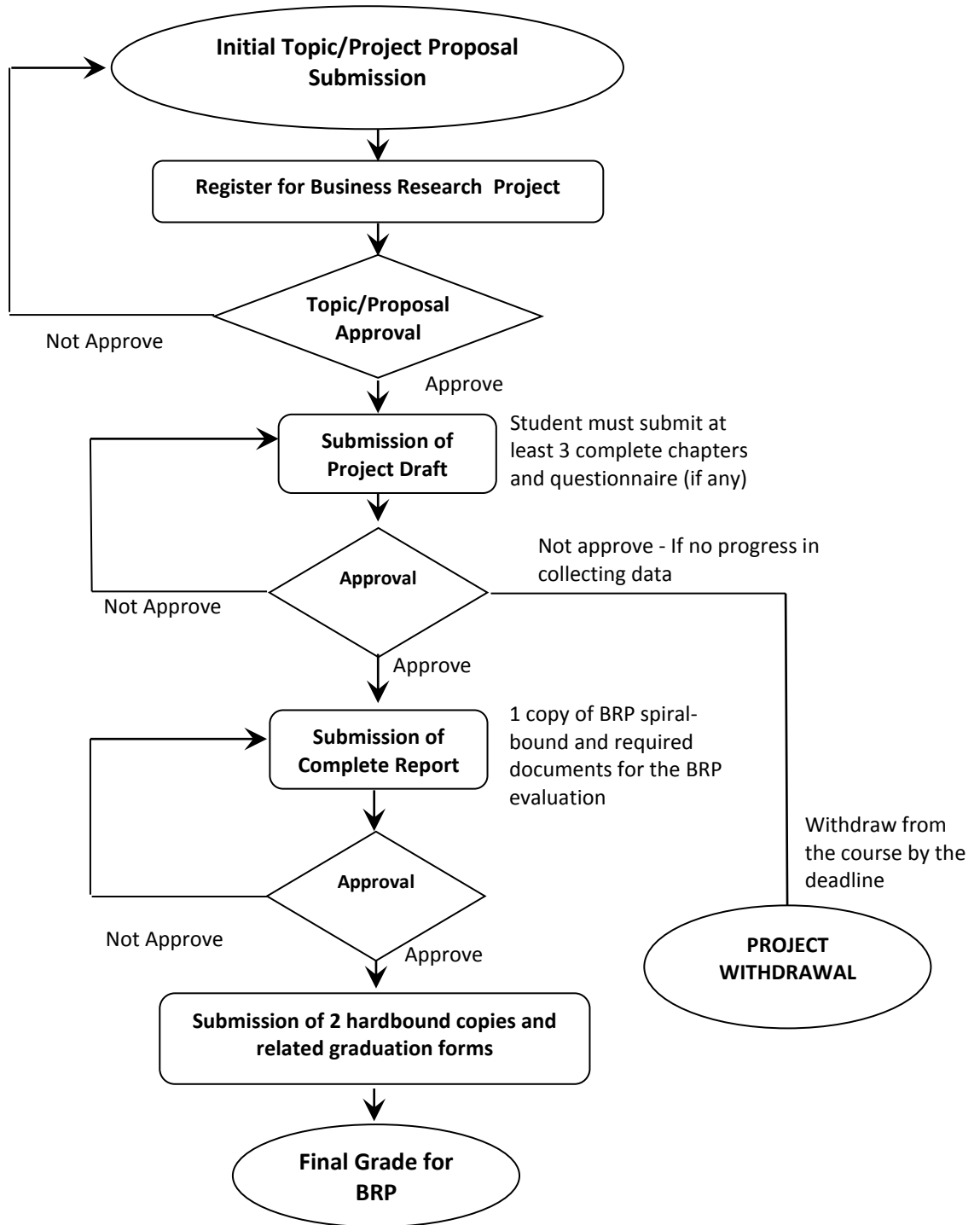
This note aims to provide students with a guide on how to go about the various stages of doing the project and also include information on the formal system devised by the University to supervise and assess projects.

2. OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of the business research project are as follows:

- a. To provide students with an opportunity to draw together and integrate the knowledge gained and the skills developed from the MBA Program;
- b. To provide students with an opportunity for independent study and to develop an ability to organize work with a view to achieve a specific goal;
- c. To develop students with skills in business strategy, operations or in similar integrated activities appropriate and relevant to their organizations and their personal development needs and goals; and
- d. To undertake an academic project based on sound management principles and intellectual reasoning.

3. MODUS OPERANDI



a. Initial Project Proposal

You must register according to your program as follows:

MBSA 2923 – for general MBA

To give a good foundation and in-depth knowledge on how to conduct an effective business research, students are required to take Business Research (BR) course prior to undertaking the Business Research Project (BRP). In this course, students are advised to prepare their initial project proposals. When considering the initial project proposal, students should look for a critical and analytical approach to the following:

- i. Specification of the goals of the project
- ii. Outline of strategy and methodology for achieving goals
- iii. Literature references with comments as to their relevance
- iv. Identification of specific project topic and its relation to existing similar work
- v. Their understanding of the basic principles underlying the project
- vi. Foreseeable problems and strategies for resolving them.

The initial project proposal comprises of three sections:

1. Project definition
2. Investigation of Project Background
3. Project Plan

The project plan is very important, of which students are assured to achieve the final project objective within a given timeframe. The initial project proposal could be submitted directly to AHIBS office.

A student who intends to do case writing will have to get a provisional letter of approval from the selected case company prior to registering for the Business Research Project (See Appendix B). The students must inform the selected case company about the data and information needed for the report and request permission to do the case study.

b. Registration for Business Research Project

Students who have submitted a complete Initial project proposal or a provisional approval letter from the case company (for those who opt for case writing/corporate plan) may then register for the case study.

c. Project Approval

The submitted initial project proposal will then be reviewed and approved by the Academic Committee at AHIBS. The committee will assign appropriate supervisors for students upon the approval of Board of Management. Students are then expected to work closely with the assigned supervisors.

d. Appointment and Change of Supervisor

AHIBS has the right to replace or re-appoint BRP supervisors. However, a student may request a change of supervisor provided that the request is done officially in writing to the BRP coordinator.

A student who has been given a confirmation on a project and supervisor should proceed by meeting and discussing with the supervisor on the first draft report. It is highly recommended that students maintain a project diary or a log book throughout the project. At the very least, this should be checked against his or her weekly objectives and should contain details of what have learnt and the time taken. A supervisor may ask a student to submit a weekly summary based on the diary or log book since these will provide the supervisor and the student progress of the project. Students will find it useful when it comes to writing the Final Project Report.

Supervisors are responsible for:

- a. 70% evaluation of the Final Project Report; 30% will be assessed by the examiner. However, final grades will be subjected to Academic Committee review on the students' Final Project Report.
- b. Advising and guiding the students on the overall direction of the project. Areas to be agreed include:
 - i. Aims of the project
 - ii. Topic area
 - iii. How it will be tackled/broad strategy
 - iv. Project plan
 - v. Resources/facilities required
 - vi. Student's strengths and weaknesses in the project area
 - vii. Feasibility of project aims being achieved
 - viii. Preliminary outline, literature/background research
 - ix. Advice on style and format
 - x. Required academic standards
 - xi. Foreseeable problems

e. First Draft Report

This draft is submitted to the supervisor based on the earlier comments or feedback received on the initial project proposal. The content and format of the report are as follows:

(1) RESEARCH

i. CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

- Background of the study
- Problem statement
- Research questions/Research Objectives
- Research scope
- Significance of the study
- Definitions of the study variables and important terminologies
- Organization of the report

ii. CHAPTER 2: BUSINESS ISSUE EXPLORATION

- Discussion on the issue/variables/concepts
- Discussion on the study context/business situation
- Discussion on the prior and updated studies relevant to the topic
- Conceptual framework of the research

III. CHAPTER 3: SOLUTION OF THE PROBLEM

- Discussion on relevant framework/model/concepts pertaining to the main research issue/agenda
- Choice of method is appropriate to address research questions/objectives
- Choice of instrument (survey questionnaire/protocol) is appropriate
- Data collection procedure
- Sampling design is relevant
- Reliability issue is addressed
- Proposed data analysis plan (basically what you want to do)

(2) CASE WRITING

i. Main issue or problem of the case

What is the central issue of the case/ what is the key problem that is revolved around the whole case text

ii. Introduction of the company

Founding year, founding father, company history, key people, branches, products/services that are offered by the company

iii. Industry information

Description of the industry, competitors etc

iv. Case story

The main case facts central to the key problem

v. Case closure

Highlighting the problem once again to through the challenge for the reader

NOTE: The first draft of the project should be of reasonable length in total, EXCLUDING appendices, tables and charts. Students should be aware of the level of academic standard required in the research project. Students should also avoid from having too widespread scope of the area. To some extent, students should adjust the specific aim within the context of the level to work expected and the time available. It is preferable to constrain the scope so that the project can be completed without a large number of unanswered questions.

f. Feedback/Comments from the Supervisor

On receipt of feedback from supervisor(s), students will continue to proceed with revising the draft report. Students are expected to proceed and prepare their report in details by adding the following chapters to the first draft:

(1) RESEARCH

i. CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS

- Statistical tests or qualitative data analysis, the results of the research, discussion on the findings

ii. CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS & CONCLUSIONS

- Discussion provides explanations to research questions/research objectives
- Implementation plan
- Implications to management practice
- Suggestions are made for future studies
- Conclusion

(2) CASE WRITING

Detail report on all points above (I – v) together with the teaching notes

g. Teaching Guide

Case Synopsis, Target audience, Subject and topics, Learning objectives, Case leading strategy, Case assignment questions and answers

h. Submission of the Final Project Report

After revisions on the project report, students will then submit the final and completed report which is to be submitted directly to the respective supervisor for a final evaluation. In any case, if there are minor corrections, students are instructed to revise and then resubmit the report for the evaluation by the examiner.

Students should submit **1 spiral bound copy** to AHIBS office along with the submission checklist for the evaluation of the BRP by the respective examiner. Checklist can be downloaded from BRP website: <http://business.utm.my/brp/>. Upon completion of the BRP evaluation and presentation, students must make corrections recommended by the examiner.

Students may then printout **2 hardbound copies** of BRP report, get signatures from the supervisors on BRP (wherever required) and **submit BRP reports** within one-week after the BRP presentation. **The hardbound cover details can be seen in Appendix A.**

Distribution of the final hardbound BRP reports are as follows:

- Supervisor (1 hardbound copy)
- AHIBS Office (1 hardbound copy)

Supervisors are advised to submit final grade to AHIBS office upon signing the hardbound copies of the report. Without the hardbound copies, the highest grade a supervisor can give to the student is C+.

C+ should also be given to those students who submit only their proposal (chapter 1, 2 & 3) as spiral bound copy to their respective supervisors. Supervisor has to pass that spiral bound chapters along with the grade sheet to the AHIBS administration. If the student fails to show any progress, they will get less than C+ based on their work progress, even supervisors are allowed to give E grade.

A student, with an approval from his or her supervisor, may publish a paper extracted from the BRP project, provided acknowledgement is given to the University.

The content of the project report (including references and appendices) **should be between 18,000 – 22,000 words (Research; Case Writing)**. Students intending to submit a business BRP project exceeding the stipulated length must apply to AHIBS at least 2 months **BEFORE** the date of submission.

Students must provide the Turnitin similarity index report and word-count report as attachment to their project report. The similarity index should not exceed 20%. If any student fails to comply with these norms, they will receive the grade C+ regardless of the marks given by the supervisor. This rule is applicable for late submission as well.

The business research project (BRP) must be written in **English**. The final BRP report must be permanently bound. Formatting of the BRP should follow **UTM Thesis Guidelines-Fifth Edition** for the Master thesis.

The thesis manual can be downloaded from UTM-SPS website:
<http://sps.utm.my/thesis-formatting-2018/>

i. Project Evaluation

Students need to ensure that their completed project report meets the requirements as follows:

- Similarity index is below 20%
- The content of the project report (including references and appendices) should be between 18,000 – 22,000 words
- On time submission – examiner's copy and office copies are submitted on due dates.

The grade will be determined based on supervisor as well as examiner's marks. The percentage of the mark allocation is as follows:

- Supervisor: 70%
- Examiner: 30%
- Total Marks: 100%

At the end of the semester, the students are required to present their BRP in front of the examiner. The presentation will be held after submission of the BRP spiral-bound for the evaluation. The presentation time is maximum 10 minutes, followed by 5-10 minutes of the Q&A session.

Students will be given a grade of C+ if they fail to meet these requirements. The evaluation criteria for research and case study are shown as follows.

RESEARCH MODE

Scoring scale 0 = no evidence 1 = little evidence or major flaws 2 = adequate minimum standards 3 = Research well done, few minor omissions, met standards 4 = Research well done, exceeded minimum standards	(a) Weightage (%)	(b) Score (0-4)	(a)x(b)/4 Total	Comments
1. Chapter 1 - Introduction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Background of the study • Problem statement is stated clearly; explains causes or events leading to problem or need • Research questions, research objectives – stated clearly • Research Scope • Research Significance • Definitions of important terminologies • Organization of the study 	15			
2. Chapter 2 – Business Issue Exploration <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion on the issues/variables/concepts • Discussion of the study context • Discusses prior and updated studies relevant to the topic • Arguments is well-written, synthesized and evaluated • Conceptual framework of the research 	20			
3. Chapter 3 – Solution of the Problem <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion on relevant framework/model/concepts pertaining to the research issue/problem • Method has a clear research design • Choice of method is consistent with research questions/research objectives • Choice of instrument is appropriate (survey questionnaire/interview protocol) • Sampling design is relevant • Data collection procedure is clearly explained • Analysis techniques are clearly explained 	15			
4. Chapter 4 – Data Analysis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistent with methodology section • Well-organized & well-interpreted • Analysis is supported with evidences • Tables/chart/graphs/diagrams are provided in accordance with analysis 	15			
5. Chapter 5 – Discussion of Findings & Conclusions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion provides explanations to research questions/ research objectives • The study generates implications to managerial practice • Suggestions are made for future studies 	15			
6. Writing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuity/ transitions – includes continuity between topics; includes transitions from topic to topic • Sentences – includes complete sentences; uses parallel construction; uses subject-verb agreement • Writing mechanics – errors in spelling, grammar and punctuation • List of Reference 	10			
7. Adherence to the Norm <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Similarity index is maximum 20% • On time submission (examiner’s copy and office copies) • Total words meet the requirement (between 18,000 to 22,000) 	10			
Total	100			

CASE WRITING				
Scoring scale 0 = no evidence 1 = little evidence or major flaws 2 = adequate minimum standards 3 = Research well done, few minor omissions, met standards 4 = Research well done, exceeded minimum standards	(a) Weightage (%)	(b) Score (0-4)	(a)x(b)/4 Total	Comments
A. Teaching Case				
1. Introduction <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduced the case well, where problem of the case implied and interesting. The central issue is relevant and interesting. The problem of the case is interesting and important. Relevance of the case problem(s) to 'solve' the issue(s). 	10			
2. Industry Background <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is industry background relevant to the central issues? Sufficient information is provided related to the industry. 	5			
3. Company Background <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is company background relevant to the central issues? Sufficient information is provided related to the company (its operation, industry and competitors). 	5			
4. Case Story <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The case story provides sufficient information to highlight the case problem. The whole case story is properly linked with the central issues and case problem. Appropriate data collection technique is employed. 	10			
5. Case Closure <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The case is properly concluded. 	5			
B. Teaching Notes				
1. Case Summary <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Write a concise summary of the case. 	5			
2. Learning objectives <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The case learning objectives are clearly stated & relevant to the audience. 	5			
3. Specific theory(s)/ model(s)/ concept(s) addressed in the case <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Addressing any particular theory/model/topic within a specific field. 	10			
4. Instructed Teaching Approach/ Plan	5			
5. Suggested Case Questions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> At least five (5) questions. 	5			
6. Suggested Case Answer(s)	10			
7. Supports & Clarity on Argument <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supports on arguments given through date, charts, tables or diagrams Not long winded but straight to the point 	5			
8. Writing style, grammar, sources of information & list of reference is given <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Interesting, structured and coherent No glaring grammar mistakes and proper use of punctuations List of Reference 	10			
10. Adherence to the Norm <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Similarity index is maximum 20% On time submission – examiner's copy and office copies are submitted on due time Total words meet the requirement (between 18,000 to 22,000) 	10			
Total:	100			

j. MBA Award

Students who have successfully completed their project reports are entitled to get an award of MBA. However, students should first fill-up all the related graduation forms such as application for an award and transcript request form.

4. STANDARD MARKING SYSTEM

The normal basis of marking applied at AHIBS is as follows:

MARKS	GRADE	POINTS	STATUS
90 – 100	A+	4.00	Excellent pass
80 – 89	A	4.00	
75 – 79	A-	3.67	
70 – 74	B+	3.33	Good Pass
65 – 69	B	3.00	
60 – 64	B-	2.67	Pass
55 – 59	C+	2.33	Fail
50 – 54	C	2.00	
45 – 49	C-	1.67	
40 – 44	D+	1.33	
35 – 39	D	1.00	
30 – 34	D-	0.67	
00 – 29	E	0.00	

5. LIST OF SUPERVISORS

Students need to discuss their proposals with the prospective lecturers. The list of academic staffs can be found in AHIBS website: <https://business.utm.my/all-staff/>. Students can find information on lecturers' area and research interests.

However, the Academic/BRP Committee has the right to assign a different supervisor based on the workload of the lectures. Students can also suggest a supervisor other than the listed but assignment of the supervisor will be at the Committee discretion.

APPENDIX A: BUSINESS RESEARCH PROJECT COVER DETAILS



Size: B5 (paper type: 80gsm)	Printing: Double Side
Color Code # 01073d	RGB Code: R1G7B61
Front & Back Cover Weight: 1400gsm	Color: Royal Blue

APPENDIX B: PROVISIONAL LETTER OF APPROVAL FROM THE SELECTED CASE COMPANY

Date:

Consent to Provide Information

Title:	
Name of the student:	
Matric Number:	

I hereby confirm that I have reviewed the above entitled case study. I have no objection to provide my consent to use the given information in order to complete the business research project by abovementioned student.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

Name:

Position:

Address:

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Phone: Email: