Dissertation Handbook for
The Master’s Degree Programme
in Business Administration (MBA)

Academic Year 2017-2018

Patras, 2017
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1. INTRODUCTION

A dissertation is a necessary requirement in the successful completion of a Master’s degree in Business Administration. Writing a dissertation is one of the most creative challenges of this post-graduate programme. It offers students the opportunity to prove that they have the ability to implement the knowledge they have acquired throughout their studies in Business Administration and to carry out in-depth research into a topic of their choice related to the aims of the programme, under the guidance of a supervisor.

The purpose of a dissertation must be clear and provide answers to the following:

1. Why the chosen topic is important from an academic point of view?
2. Why the topic is of interest from a practical point of view?
3. What are the corresponding benefits?

The dissertations for the Master’s degree programme in Business Administration (MBA) must be written in English.

2. PREPARING AND SUBMITTING A DISSERTATION PROPOSAL

2.1. Preparing a dissertation proposal

Students who successfully complete at least three modules of the programme and who are registered and enrolled in their final one are eligible to submit a dissertation proposal, by completing the ‘Master's Dissertation Proposal Form’.

The dissertation proposal includes the following:

1. Title of the dissertation.
2. Brief description of the topic.
3. Explanation of the importance of the topic and statement of the reason(s) for undertaking the specific research project.
5. Description of the methodology.
6. Statement of the relevance of the topic with the modules of the MBA programme.
The dissertation counts as 20% of the degree in terms of marks. Students’ financial obligations are the same as those of the normal modules.

2.2. Proposal submission

The ‘Master's Dissertation Proposal Form’ must be submitted electronically according the guidelines of the HOU for approval by the Academic Director. Each student undertaking a dissertation is supervised by a qualified academic instructor, who is assigned by the Academic Director. Subsequently, students with the assistance of their supervisors may improve the dissertation proposal and must submit electronically the ‘Master's Dissertation Final Proposal Form’ according the guidelines of the HOU for approval by the Academic Director. Please note that this form must bear the approval of the supervisor.

2.3. Topic Selection - Basic characteristics and assumptions

The research for the elaboration of the dissertation must have certain basic characteristics and must fulfil a number of prerequisites. A dissertation should have scientific originality and/or contributing new knowledge to the topic examined. The dissertation content must create the ability to positively affect future research within that particular research area and may enrich the knowledge of the author to enable the attainment of professional goals.

The dissertation topic must be accomplishable and precise. Students should select topics that allow them to make maximum use of their knowledge and analytical skills. The choice of topic may arise either from ideas inspired from discussions during Tutorial Meetings or from their own interests. The dissertation is an academic endeavour and therefore it may not be too general or simply a skills’ exercise. A dissertation that combines academic rigor with practical application(s) is the ideal case for the MBA programme.

Students should be aware that a dissertation topic usually combines four interacting factors, namely the research area, the business sector in which the dissertation is positioned, the
dissertation classification and the most common methodology/tools employed (see Figures 1 and 2).

Figure 1: The four interacting factors combined in a dissertation topic
Figure 2: Decomposition of the four interacting factors
2.3.1. Research area

An area of research that interests the student must be selected. The definition of a research problem guides the entire scientific process and is the foundation of any research method.

2.3.2. Business sector

All dissertations are expected to refer to one or more subsets of the economy, as presented in Figure 2.

2.3.3. Dissertation classification

- **Algorithm implementation:** Is a step-by-step procedure for calculations. More precisely, it is an effective method expressed as a finite list of well-defined instructions for calculating and solving a specific problem. Algorithms are used for dealing with calculation, data processing and automated reasoning.

- **Business data analysis:** Focuses on a particular business issue and then interprets data gathered to suggest implementation of solutions. Again a number of tools can be used such as statistics, mathematics, computing etc.

- **Case study:** A case study uses a specific example to illustrate a theoretical approach, a general trend or a variety of management problems. It can refer to general problems and trends as well as to specific ones.

- **Comparative study:** Comparative analysis can clarify the behaviour or distinguishing characteristics of some phenomenon. It can be applied in a variety of contexts (e.g. comparing models or methods or trends at a national or corporate level etc.)

- **Literature-based survey:** This is likely to be the methodology of selection and discussion of theoretical material and descriptive material, in context, and detailed comparison of theories in terms of their applicability. The focus is not on discovering something but on reaching a judgment about the value of key concepts or theories.

- **The Quantitative application/study:** The quantitative approach is also known as the traditional, positivist, empiricist approach to research. Quantitative studies are typically experiments that test a theory composed of “variables” (constructs or phenomena), measured with numbers, and analysed using statistical procedures. They take the perspective that events can be understood in terms of cause and effect.
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- **Sectoral study:** A review and assessment of the current condition and future prospects of a given sector of the economy. It may include a statistical analysis of the size, demographic, pricing, competition and other economic dimensions of a sector of the economy. The analysis can be conducted by industry or by customer designation.

- **Theoretical framework development:** The theoretical framework is not something that is found readily available in literature. Theoretical frameworks are a type of intermediate theory that attempt to connect all aspects of inquiry (e.g. problem definition, purpose, literature review, analysis etc.). A theoretical framework can act like a map that gives coherence to empirical inquiry.

2.3.4. Methodology/Tools:

Typically a dissertation will employ data. Data should originate from primary or secondary sources and should be validated. Primary data comes mainly from questionnaires, interviews etc. Secondary data is usually sourced from books, articles, published reports and electronic databases. The supervisor may assist the student regarding the type of data or information that is most suitable to the dissertation topic. The supervisor is also able to advise the student on appropriate methods, practices or tools for data collection. The methodology must be based on generally accepted principles that can be easily and precisely assessed.

Typically the tools that may be utilised in a dissertation are one or more of the following:

- **Comparative analysis:** The item-by-item comparison of two or more comparable alternatives, processes, products, qualifications, sets of data, systems, etc.

- **Critical review of the literature:** A critical and in-depth evaluation of previous research. It is a summary and synopsis of a particular area of research.

- **Descriptive Statistics:** The discipline of quantitatively describing the main features of a collection of data.

- **Econometric analysis:** the application of mathematics and statistical methods to economic data.

- **Inferential Statistics:** Provide ways of testing the reliability of the findings of a study and "inferring" characteristics from a small group (sample) onto much larger groups (the population).
Mathematical modelling: The process of developing a mathematical model, i.e. a description of a system using mathematical concepts and language.

Operational Research/Management Science (OR/MS) tools: Mathematical programming, heuristic algorithms, Monte Carlo simulation, discrete event simulation, decision trees, Bayesian decision making, analytic hierarchy process, etc.

Time series analysis: Time series analysis accounts for the fact that data points taken over time may have an internal structure (such as autocorrelation, trend or seasonal variation) that should be accounted for.

3. IMPLEMENTATION AND COMPLETION OF THE DISSERTATION

3.1. General Considerations

Dissertations are expected to be of high scholarly competence and of high academic standards. Hence, a completed dissertation must convey the message of the research succinctly and clearly. Attention must be paid to the structure, syntax and grammar of the dissertation. Poor syntax, poor grammar, spelling and syntax errors, lack of structure, or inaccuracies in the tools, data or references are important dissertation flaws and may lead to major revisions or even rejection of the dissertation. The content and arguments must flow logically and consistently throughout the dissertation and must be relevant to the topic. The use of tabulations and illustrations such as figures and tables is encouraged, as visual means that support and reinforce the linguistic arguments. A dissertation should be solely the outcome of work carried out by the student. Student collaboration in the context of preparing a dissertation is not allowed.
3.2. Document and formatting conventions

Dissertations should be prepared according to the specifications of the HOU library and the Educational Content, Methodology and Technology Laboratory. Additional considerations are presented in the sequel:

- The length of a dissertation should be between 15,000 and 20,000 words. These word limits do not include appendices, the glossary which gives explanations of the abbreviations used, symbols and technical terms (if included) and the references.
- Tables and figures must be titled and explicitly commented and referred to in the text. They should be numbered consecutively within each chapter (chapter number first; e.g. Table 2.1 and Figure 2.1 are the first table and the first figure in Chapter 2, respectively).
- Sources to original or derived tables and figures from other authors must always be cited [e.g. Source: Boddy, 2008 (p.227, Table 7.2)].
- Mathematical equations must be written clearly and numbered in parentheses. They should be numbered consecutively within each chapter (chapter number first; e.g. (3.1) is the first equation presented in Chapter 3).
- Appendices should be explicitly cited in the text (e.g. “..., which is presented analytically on Appendix B.”).
- If the topic of the dissertation is law-related, there must be the necessary documentation, corresponding to the academic legal texts (publications, articles etc.).

3.3. Structure of the dissertation

The main part of the dissertation should be divided into chapters. Typically the first chapter will be the Introduction, followed by a number of chapters and ending with the final chapter which is the Conclusion(s).

The introductory chapter contains a description of the topic being investigated and a brief outline of the remainder of the dissertation. An illustrative structure for the introductory chapter is as follows:

- Define the ‘problem’ the dissertation deals with or the topic of interest (1 paragraph).
• Describe the purpose of the dissertation in relation to the ‘problem’ (1 paragraph).
• Describe the general methodology and the approach to the dissertation (2 paragraphs).
• Discuss the status of this work (i.e. the most fundamental, the most important, the most interesting conclusion of this work) (1 paragraph).
• Outline the main limitations of the dissertation (in methodology, data and theory) (1 paragraph).
• Present an outline of the remainder of the dissertation chapters (maximum 1 paragraph per chapter).

Overall the Introduction should not be longer than 2–3 pages.

The remaining chapters should cover the following aspects of the dissertation:

**Literature Review and International Experience**

This part contains the literature review, or the equivalent overview of previous work relevant to the topic of the dissertation. For example, the relevant theory, international literature, results of previous research, comparisons, criticism, alternative approaches by other researchers etc. The review of the relevant work should be structured so that the reader is able to comprehend the scope of the topic under consideration, and its importance to the scientific or other communities.

In summarising their literature review and presenting their topic, students are encouraged to use tabulations or descriptive statistics in order to present the topic and any previous relevant work.

In preparing this part, students must take into account the following:
• Consider the essence of the problem that the dissertation deals with.
• Use only the relevant references, theory, sources and methodology. Use only established, verifiable and well documented theories, practical aspects, models, etc. from other parties.
• Avoid presenting trivial information related to the topic. i.e. information that can be easily found, or is easily implied, or is well known.
• Use theoretical or practical examples as a means to illustrate different concepts or to strengthen arguments.
• Avoid repetition.
• Develop ideas coherently and consistently. For instance, make forward references to the chapters and subchapters following this chapter.

**Methodology**

This part includes the method(s), patterns, tools etc. through which the dissertation has been carried out and completed. In this part a number of issues must be taken into account:

• A brief reference to the method used along with the type of data collected, and the way in which data was collected and manipulated.

• The set of data (where and how it was found, source of acquired data, type of data, covered time interval, weakness of data, as well as if this data was used in previous research projects, possibly in other countries, cases and/or time periods).

• The software that was used.

• The results of this implementation (charts or any other form of presentation considered necessary). The results may be commented on at different levels:
  a) using statistics/econometrics,
  b) financial analysis,
  c) comparisons of other researchers’ results.

• The presentation and commentary must be directly associated to the problem in question, as well as the discussion and comparison with other studies. The empirical analysis, presentation, discussion of results etc. must also correspond to the conclusions.

The last chapter includes the **conclusions** where the whole work is summarised putting emphasis on the results that the student has reached and the proposals the student makes for further research. This section includes the most important results and conclusions regarding this piece of research. In the last paragraph(s) students are expected to refer to possible continuation of their work (“future research”): what else could be done as far as methodology and theory are concerned, what would be a future extension of the research work, data collection and elaboration, practical implications etc.
3.4. References and citation

References are recorded in English and should follow the Harvard Referencing System. Sources written in languages other than English should be translated into English and students should indicate the language in which this reference is originally written in parentheses.

References should be listed in alphabetical order starting with the surname of the (first) author or the (first) editor, or with the name of the corporate author (e.g. European Commission) or periodical if there is no individual author or editor. Several publications by an identical author (or group of authors) should be ordered by ascending year of publication. If the years of publication are also the same, differentiate entries by adding small letters ("a", "b", etc.) after the years (e.g. 2011a). The phrase “et al.” is used when citing a reference of three or more authors.

The way the references should be written is presented below:

For articles published in academic journals/periodicals:

  
  Citation: …(Liu et al., 2012) or According to Liu et al. (2012)…

  
  Citation: …(Tsortanidis, 2011) or According to Tsortanidis (2011)…


  Citation: …(Vachon and Klassen, 2006a) or According to Vachon and Klassen (2006a)…

Citation: ... (Vachon and Klassen, 2006b) or According to Vachon and Klassen (2006b)...

For books:

  Citation: ... (Brealey and Myers, 2006) or According to Brealey and Myers (2006)...

  Citation: ... (Schlicht, 2012) or According to Schlicht (2012)...

For book chapters (in edited volumes):

  Citation: ... (Decker and Sale, 2010) or According to Decker and Sale (2010)...

For papers in conference proceedings:

  Citation: ... (Moussiopoulos et al., 2006) or According to Moussiopoulos et al. (2006)...

For Master/PhD Theses:

  Citation: ... (Torabkhani, 2008) or According to Torabkhani (2008)...

3.5. The role of the Supervisor and Second Examiner

The role of the supervisor is to help and guide the student in choosing the right topic and also to provide guidance and advice during the writing of the dissertation. The supervisor should timely comment, correct and improve the dissertation text submitted by the student, and provide guidance and advice regarding elaboration on the dissertation. The role of the second examiner is to comment on the structure of the final dissertation and to suggest improvements. The supervisor and the second examiner are both responsible for impartially grading the dissertation, once the presentation and examination process has been successfully completed.

3.6. Dissertation assessment procedure and examination

A dissertation may be completed in no less than 5 months and in no more than 8 months. In exceptional circumstances the Academic Director, after discussion with the supervisor, may allow for an extension on the dissertation submission deadlines. The timetable presented in Table 1 applies.
Students submit their dissertations as .doc, .docx or .rtf files on the MBA Dissertation microsite and then supervisors use this microsite to upload their comments and to indicate if the dissertation is approved for oral examination.

Students whose dissertations have been approved and meet the MBA standards are scheduled for oral examination in the two examination periods, depending on the date when the submission of dissertation for oral presentation took place. **Students have the right to an oral exam only once per academic year.** In the cases that the Dissertation fails to be approved or the oral exam is failed, then the student repeats the procedure the following academic year (as long as the student does not use their right for deferment), either with the same topic or a new one. Failure a second time results in dismissal from the programme.

The committee responsible for the oral exam consists of the supervisor and the second examiner, who are either faculty members or Associate Teaching Staff members of the MBA programme. The committee has the right for the purposes of the oral presentation to include other members of Associate Teaching Staff or special scientists as outside experts, whose role is only to express an opinion. The Academic Director has the right to take an active role in the evaluation process as a third examiner.

The dissertation is submitted in two hard copies. The examination is divided into two parts. In the first part, the student presents their work to the committee (usually supported by audio-visual material). In the second part of the procedure the members of the committee pose questions to the students.

After the oral examination the members of the committee may ask a student to make corrections or amendments. In such a case, the student must then submit the final version of the dissertation to all members of the committee within 15 days. The final grade of the
dissertation is the average grade of the marks from all the examiners. The supervisor is responsible to send the signed evaluation sheet to the Registration Department.

In October 2015 the Board of Studies decided the establishment of:

a) two criteria regarding the final evaluation of the MBA dissertations: the final submitted text of the dissertation to have a 80% weight of the final mark of the dissertation and the oral presentation of the dissertation to have a 20% weight.

b) an indicative set of expectations/criteria per assessment type and grade level (Grading scale description). The following assessment criteria regarding the written as well as the oral component of the Dissertation evaluation were introduced:

**Written component / Submitted document**

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<th>65-70-75</th>
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<th>95-100</th>
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<tr>
<td>The dissertation is inadequate for a Master’s dissertation; it doesn’t demonstrate the appropriate structure and methodology.</td>
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<td>It requires significant improvement in order to be accepted.</td>
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<td>The written language is poor and with many mistakes.</td>
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<td>The dissertation is adequate for a Master’s dissertation; it demonstrates appropriate structure and methodology.</td>
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<td>The dissertation is comprehensive without an original contribution to the field.</td>
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<td>The methodology implemented is fairly basic for the level of study.</td>
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<td>The document adheres only partially to academic conventions and formatting standards.</td>
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<td>The written language shows signs of carelessness and could be significantly improved.</td>
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<td>The dissertation meets the requirements for a Master’s dissertation; it demonstrates good structure and methodology.</td>
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<td>The dissertation is comprehensive and shows some signs of original contribution to the field.</td>
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<td>The qualitative or quantitative methodology implemented is adequate for the level of study.</td>
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<td>The document adheres to all academic conventions and formatting standards.</td>
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<td>The written language is free of errata.</td>
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<td>The dissertation demonstrates excellence and makes significant contributions to the field.</td>
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<td>The qualitative or quantitative methodology implemented, exceeds expectations for the level of study.</td>
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<td>The document adheres to all academic conventions and formatting standards.</td>
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<td>The written language is excellent.</td>
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MASTER’S DEGREE PROGRAMME IN BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

Oral component / Presentation

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<tr>
<td>▪</td>
<td>Overall the oral presentation was inadequate and difficult to comprehend.</td>
<td>▪ Overall the oral presentation was adequate.</td>
<td>▪ Overall the presentation was adequate.</td>
<td>▪ Overall the presentation was excellent</td>
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<td>▪</td>
<td>The presenter was insufficiently prepared</td>
<td>▪ The presenter was insufficiently prepared</td>
<td>▪ The presenter was adequately prepared.</td>
<td>▪ The presenter was fully prepared</td>
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<td>▪</td>
<td>The presenter did not respect the presentation time given.</td>
<td>▪ The presenter respected the presentation time given</td>
<td>▪ The visual material adequately supported the dissertation content.</td>
<td>▪ The visual material fully supported the dissertation content.</td>
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<tr>
<td>▪</td>
<td>The visual material was difficult to read and had plenty of errata.</td>
<td>▪ The visual material barely supported the dissertation content.</td>
<td>▪ The presenter respected the presentation time given.</td>
<td>▪ The presenter kept the presentation time to the minute.</td>
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<td>▪</td>
<td>The presenter failed to respond successfully to the discussion with the examiners.</td>
<td>▪ The presenter responded adequately to the discussion with the examiners.</td>
<td>▪ The presenter participated fully in the discussion with the examiners.</td>
<td>▪ The presenter engaged fully in conversation with the examiners.</td>
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</table>

3.7. Submission of the dissertation to the HOU library

The final version of the dissertation is submitted to the HOU library, according to the specifications of the library. The HOU reserves the right to use the dissertations and reproduce copies for teaching and research purposes.

3.8. Final check of the dissertation

When the writing of the dissertation is complete, it is important to check it for mistakes or omissions. An illustrative checklist is the following:

1) Is the topic of the dissertation well described in a clear and concise manner for the reader?
2) Is the purpose of the dissertation accurately communicated to the reader?
3) Are there coherent connections between the different chapters and sub-chapters?
4) Is the methodology used based on theory which is suitable for solving the problem that the dissertation deals with? Are there any points that are not substantiated?
5) Are the conclusions carefully thought out and presented or do they seem pedantic?
6) Do the conclusions and the findings correspond to the purpose of this work?
7) Is the dissertation well-written?
8) Is the dissertation properly formatted using all appropriate document conventions?
9) Are the figures, diagrams and charts reported and commented in the text?
10) Is the work of others acknowledged by using proper citation and referencing in the dissertation?