BA (Hons) Insurance Practice

Capstone Project

Guidelines & Handbook

A Guide for Academic supervisors, Apprentices and Employers 2023

Adapted from ATU Sligo Level 8 Research Dissertation Handbook

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Introduction

The Capstone Project is an integral part of the BA Insurance Practice, providing an excellent opportunity for apprentices to consolidate their work from the course as a whole and undertake a meaningful piece of research.

This course guide has been prepared to explain the purpose, format and academic requirements for the Capstone Project. It contains important information on planning, getting started, staying on track and completing a successful piece of research.

While undertaking the research project, apprentices have the opportunity to research an area of interest, engaging in a literature review/background information, field research and analysis of a practical area of a relevant topic. One of the main objectives of the subject is to facilitate the development of research skills and this includes the ability to produce a written report and poster at the end of the course that satisfies the examiners and any likely external recipients of the research.

Although there are many lessons about the planning and conduct of research, which can be learned only from experience, this guide contains details about the most common lessons learned by research apprentices. The estimated amount of time per week for the research should be a minimum of 8 hours as the Capstone Project is equivalent to 10 credits for the written project and 5 credits for the written report and poster module. However, since all apprentices and their projects differ, as does the extent of resources, this is only an estimate of the time required. It is impossible to specify the exact amount of time but time management is extremely important, as you must finish on the due dates that will be provided to you.

The most important aspect of the Capstone Project is to consider at the outset the whole project before you start any work in a comprehensive manner. This will ensure that the data is collected and organised in an appropriate fashion once the project is completed. You should make use of the framework for thinking through your topic so that you can be as focussed as possible by the time you will start writing and data collection.

Role of the Apprentice, Academic Supervisor and Employer

The apprentice will likely be undertaking research into an area of interest related to the employer, or the insurance industry. In terms of the capstone project, the employer will not be directly involved in the supervision or execution of the project, but may be able to assist with access to information, or facilitation of aspects of the research process, such as interviews.

The roles of the apprentice and academic supervisor are described in the sections that follow.

The research process

A systematic and planned approach is vital allowing for flexibility to cope with unforeseen circumstances. The project should fall into four distinct stages:

- Problem/opportunity identification

- Planning

- Data Collection and analysis

- Writing up and communication of results via the written report and poster module

Stage 1 - Problem/ Opportunity Identification

The first stage concerns the identification, clarification and definition of a problem or opportunity. Unrealistic research questions and objectives at this stage can lead to major difficulties later in adequately completing the overall project. The objectives will guide the whole research process. At this stage, it is critical that the researcher thinks about "what you want to find out" and "why you need to find it out" and then address the particular questions you need to ask to investigate in order to receive answers to the originating questions.

Research objectives can be considered to have 3 main sections:

1. Identify a topic area

2. Define the research questions and the research rationale

3. Identify key aims and objectives.

Secondary enquiry with the relevant documents available and with individuals into the chosen topic area regarding problem/opportunity, available data and resources available coupled with discussions with the lecturer/academic supervisor is important at this stage.

Stage 2 - Planning

Planning is the next stage researched after coming to an understanding of the purpose of the investigation and has been shared with the academic supervisor. This is a difficult stage as the researcher is forced to make initial plans without necessary information.

The researcher must establish what type of research methods to be used. This will depend on the area of study, the research question you have chosen and the type of information needed to address the research question. The methods may include:

- A qualitative or quantitative approach.

- The use of surveys: person to person, internet or telephone

- Interviews: structured, semi-structured and unstructured

- Experimental design

- Case studies

Choices have to be made concerning the data needed, which will provide the researcher with the subject matter for the research in question. In the case of the literature review/background information chapter, research involves the identification and choice of the most appropriate documents to be studied. When the preliminary choice of research methods has been made,

apprentices should be able to justify why they have chosen this particular mode and above all how it will help the researcher to answer the research question.

One of the major challenges is gaining access to relevant documentation, an identified population sample or research site. Failures in this area can lead to frustration and attempts to change the research design at a mid-point stage, which has to be avoided. A realistic approach to accessibility is advised.

Similarly, you may have limited resources in terms of access to computers, internet access, travel, interviewing time, and administration costs (telephone, postage, stationery etc). Therefore, this issue must be addressed right at the start and should influence the research approach.

Pilot studies

The use of pilot studies or testing of part of your research is essential. This will often alert the researcher to any ambiguous or unclear questions may have been included and will give the researcher an indication of whether the method is going to produce the type of information required to answer the research question.

The feasibility of the project within the time available must also be addressed. The most important tool is to have a calendar or a critical path analysis of the work to be achieved by a particular timeframe.

Stage 3 - Data Collection and Analysis

The next stage concerns data collection and analysis. For this, the researcher will need skills such as questionnaire drafting, extraction of data from printed and electronic sources, interviewing and statistical analysis.

Depending on the type of questions, your design and in particular the methods chosen, various types of data analysis are available. Quantitative data can be carried out using many statistical packages such as excel and SPSS. Qualitative data is analysed via coding and thematic analysis.

To develop your research skills, you are required to use questionnaires using a sampling frame of at least 60, or less if agreed by the academic academic supervisor. You may add to this and use qualitative data, which is far more subjective by its nature. The analysis of the data collected should be carefully considered at the research stage, to ensure you have selected a topic with enough respondents to survey. Qualitative person-to-person interviews should have a minimum of 5 interviewees.

The use of pilot studies or testing of part of your research is essential. This will often alert the researcher to any ambiguous or unclear questions you may have included and will give an indication of whether the method is going to produce the type of information required to answer the research question.

Stage 4 – Writing up and Communication of results

The final stage concerns the communication of the research undertaken. This is in the format of your final dissertation and poster. The academic format and content of your final dissertation is critical, where the quality of the data, assumptions, arguments and reliability of your conclusions will all need to be sound. The skills of analytical argument and presentation are very important at this stage.

Subject structure and format

In the first semester of the final year, apprentices undertake a research methods module, which is designed to provide knowledge on how to progress onto the next phase of practically undertaking the research.

The purpose of these classes will be to ensure that the apprentices are equipped with the necessary skills to undertake the research and that the course requirements are fully explained and understood. Your research proposal must also be submitted as part of this module.

The role of Academic Supervisors

After presenting a proposal regarding the area the apprentice wishes to undertake an academic supervisor will be assigned. Your academic supervisor will provide guidance on an ongoing basis, up until the end of the supervision period, regarding the following:

- The scope of the project and its feasibility within the confines of the course

- The planning approach

- The statistical validity of the data collection plans

- The analysis of data

- The dissertation contents and presentation

- Guidance for the independent preparation of the poster and written report. An appropriate time in which to meet the academic supervisor should be arranged. It is important to point out that the academic supervisor also performs another role in relation to examination script marker.

The following guidelines should be adhered to regarding working with the academic supervisor:

- Establish contact early

- Agree communication and feedback arrangements

- Attend weekly meetings

- Clearly indicate the proposed timetable of research

- Give early notification of problems which the researcher may encounter

- Give a clear indication of the research rigor and comprehensiveness

Course format

Apprentices will work individually and are expected to complete a detailed Capstone Project culminating in a written report and poster presentation.

A soft copy of the report must be sent to your academic supervisor by the deadline. Two soft bound copies of the Capstone Project should also to be sent to your Academic supervisor, Department of Business, ATU, Sligo. You must follow any instructions regarding submission and the use of Turnitin etc.

The entire Capstone Project should be typed and should be 8,000 words in length plus or minus 10%

Marks will be awarded as follows:

Chapter 1 - Introduction	10%
Chapter 2 - Literature review	15%
(Including Reference list)	
Chapter 3 - Methodology	15%
Chapter 4	
Findings,	15%
Discussion	15%
Chapter 5	
Conclusions and Recommendations	10%
Content, Style and Presentation	10%
Total:	**90%**

You must agree Indicative dates with your academic supervisor for the following:

Meetings

Agree/test/redesign primary research

Update literature review

Fieldwork

Write up

Final draft to academic supervisor

Final feedback from academic supervisor

Submission of final bound copies and electronic submission - To be confirmed

Please note that no academic supervision will be provided after the date of the final draft submission.

The due dates are designed to ensure that the apprentice is aware on the ongoing process of the Capstone Project and to have key deliverables met by specific target dates. This is to ensure that all work is not rushed and left to the last minute which often happens with projects.

Plagiarism

When completing the Capstone Project, it is the responsibility of each apprentice to ensure that plagiarism is avoided. Plagiarism is using or attempting to use another persons work without acknowledgement. The phrase "using another person's work" includes, but is not limited to:

- Paraphrasing the work of another person without acknowledgement

- Directly copying any part of another persons work without acknowledgement

- Summarising the work of another person without acknowledgement

The Harvard referencing guide is the best method to use when acknowledging secondary data within the Capstone Project. When completing the Capstone Project it is essential that all sources of information be acknowledged to its source.

Capstone Projects or parts of projects consisting substantially of passages or text copied from publications, books, the internet or other sources including the work of other apprentices with only minor variations or without quotation marks and acknowledgements will not be accepted and will be dealt with through the ATU Sligo Plagiarism procedure.

Guidelines for presentation of written Capstone Project

The purpose of this document is to set out general guidelines for layout and presentation of the Capstone Project. However, some individual variations may arise due to the nature of particular projects. Please discuss these with the academic supervisor to arrive at a satisfactory method of presentation. **The capstone project wordcount for the dissertation is 8000 words (+/-10%).**

The written report should contain the following sections:

Title page

Abstract

Acknowledgements

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of figures

List of abbreviations

1.0 Introduction

2.0 Literature Review

3.0 Methodology

4.0 Findings

5.0 Discussion

6.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

Reference List

Appendices

Explanation of each heading

Title page:

See attached template in appendix (A) for sample. Choose title carefully. It should contain the fewest possible words to convey the full content of the project

Abstract

This is generally written last and outlines the entire project. Usually about 300 words and describes the study from beginning to end. Abstract wordcount is not included in overall capstone wordcount

Abstract should include reference to Introduction, Literature Review, Methodology, Findings, Discussion, Conclusion

Acknowledgements

You may wish to thank people or organisations who have helped with the research process.

Table of contents

- Details each section of the project and the page on which it starts

- List of tables/figures/abbreviations

- List and name all tables, figures and abbreviations used in the Capstone Project and page numbers

- Utilise MS Word Table Formatting tool

Introduction

This section sets out the reasons for studying the area and your objectives in completing the Capstone Project. The approach to the research should also be set out. You should also clearly outline what is in each chapter/ section. Authors should refer in this chapter to items such as Background to Are of Study, Research Question, Research Rationale, Hypothesis, Aims & Objectives etc

Literature review

This section reviews any relevant documentation that relates to your topic and present the current state of knowledge in the field highlighting any important research. Indicate where your own research fits into the literature/reports reviewed. Please also include your search methods such as Keywords and Databases searched.

Methodology

This section must include an account of how you went about the study and the research methods used. Describe all relevant items in this chapter such as; Introduction, Research Design, Data Collection Method/ Measurement tool, Sample/Participants and Sampling Method Recruitment, Procedure, Analysis, Ethics.

Findings

Present your findings in an appropriate manner using quotes, graphs, tables or giving clear descriptions of data. Chapter should also include a participant summary section.

Discussion

The researcher must interpret the findings and relate them back to the literature and established theory and practice. If your results do not agree with theory or are unexpected, say so and explain why you think this has happened. Please include an Introduction, Summary of Findings, Discussion of Results, Limitations Section, and Conclusion

Note* It is acceptable to combine the findings and discussion sections if the researcher thinks it will result in a clearer and more interesting report.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This section should comprise a summary of your discussions and the essential findings of the work.

Refer to essential points from Chapter 1 such as Research Question, Hypothesis, Aims and Objectives etc and were these points answered/fulfilled.

Recommendations should include one heading for Industry Recommendations and another for Future Research Recommendations.

Referencing

Every book, article and web reference used in the Capstone Project should be listed according to the Harvard System of referencing.

Sources of information on referencing are available from your academic supervisor and the library website. Please follow the guidance on this very carefully.

Software tools such as Endnote or Mendeley can be used to organise your references.

Appendices

Certain items may be too large to place in the Capstone Project, so can be placed in appendices within reason. Tables, graphs, interview notes and coding are examples of what could be included here.

Important information:

- The Capstone Project should be typed on white paper A4 using 1.5 inch line spacing

- Both right and left margins should be 4cm wide, to allow for binding and for written comments by examiners

- Use Times New Roman Font, size 12 for the text

- Two soft bound copies are required of the final Capstone Project

- 1000-2000 words per chapter approximately (8000 total), however the introductory and concluding chapter may require less words allowing for more words for literature review, discussion etc. The academic supervisor will advise.

Referencing

The use of high-quality sources/references is recommended such as previously published peer-reviewed articles/journals on the subject. Please refrain from (where applicable) from the use of general webpages and newspapers etc. Compare a newspaper article with an article on the same topic in a scholarly journal or book and you will notice that one of the main differences is that the latter will feature references. These are links to other published (and sometimes unpublished) material on the topic. This is known as 'the literature'.

There are a number of reasons why one should refer to other peoples work (both in-text citations and reference list) in writing a Capstone Project. These include:

- It is an ethical way of drawing on other peoples work

- It improves the credibility of the document, by showing how it fits into existing literature

- It shows you have worked at researching the Capstone Project

- It allows people to check the data or to follow up interesting leads

- It reduces the chance of a plagiarism issue with your dissertation

So therefore, it is very important to become familiar with referencing and practice how to do it properly.

Note* 10% of the capstone total grade will go to progress and engagement reports (see appendix C & D). Consequently, the Capstone Dissertation will be graded out of 90% (see appendix B).

Marking Criteria

The criteria below is a guide for examiners in assessing the grade of the overall Capstone Project. Please note that Capstone Projects are cross marked between 2 or more examiners to ensure transparency and that the Capstone Project may be sent to an external examiner (Please see specific marking rubric in Appendix B).

Criteria	Fail	Pass	Merit	Distinction
Identification of and approach to the problem to be researched and clearly identified objectives outlined	Does not grasp or address the problem. No clear objectives and limited exploration of the topic	Broadly addresses the problem or task but lacks some clarity or shows limited consideration of contextual issues. Some justification of the methods of investigation	Clearly addressed the problem and demonstrates the ability to understand contextual issues. Clear objectives and justification of research undertaken	Very clearly identifies and discusses the problem. Demonstrates an awareness of contextual issues and understands the possibilities of the research. Comprehensive justification of investigative methods
Sources of reference and underpinning data	Very little evidence of reference to relevant literature or current data sourced	Some use of relevant literature or current practice applied to the research topic	Clear and adequate use of relevant literature and current practice underpin the approach taken in dealing with the research. Literature references included in a bibliography	Comprehensive use of up to date and relevant literature and current practice using journals regarding the research. All stages of the work underpinned by reference to relevant sources. Bibliography extensive
Methodology	Poorly thought out methodology and not appropriate to answer the research question	Rational for chosen methodology explained but limited and does not fully appropriate to address the research questions.	Rational for chosen methodology explained and fully address the research questions. There may be a lack of triangulation or confidence or some other deficiency. Mostly appropriate to address the research questions.	Rational for chosen methodology well explained. A range of methods considered and choice of methods fully justified and the data can be triangulated. The methodology is appropriate to fully addresses the research questions and there is confidence in the methods employed.
Information collection and analysis	Inadequate collection and analysis of data. Descriptive rather than analytical	Adequate information collected and some analysis and application to the research	Competent collection of information that is analysed and used in problem identification and resolution	Comprehensive collection of information that is analysed and clearly applied to resolution of the research
Findings and analysis	Findings unrelated to information collected. Contains a number of unsupported observations or actions	Findings and analysis broadly follows from the information collected and are reasonably logical	Findings developed logically from the research obtained. Addressed key issues	Findings developed logically and show full appreciation of the data collected. Detailed findings supported by careful analysis. Potential barriers or opportunities identified
Recommendations	Recommendations do not follow on from the facts. No exploration of the feasibility of the study. Failed to reach	Recommendations are broadly logical and practical but some work required for effective implementation	Recommendations are appropriate and capable of implementation.	Practical and logical development of recommendations that consider implications and implementation.

	informed recommendations			

Bibliography

Hanrahan. J (2008) Bachelor of Business in Tourism Research project handbook. Institute of Technology, Sligo

Nolan. A (2008) How to Reference Harvard Style. National College of Ireland, Library and Information Services

Appendix A: Title page template

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NAME OF THE STUDY

Presented in partial fulfilment for award of BA Insurance Practice

Apprentice name:

Student number:

Capstone Project Academic supervisor:

Dept. of Business

ATU Sligo

Date:

Appendix B: Marking criteria for academic supervisors

Distribution of marks	Clarification of marks	Potential mark 100%	Overall mark
Title/Abstract/Introduction	The title clearly reflects the topic. The abstract contains the key information. Background, Research Question/s, Rationale, Hypothesis, Aims & objectives, chapter overview, list of definitions referred to.	10%	
Literature Review	An up to date and critical literature review. Good use of a variety of secondary data from a number of sources. Good structure and ability to compare and contrast the points outlined. Search Methods (Keywords/databases) noted.	15%	
Methodology	Evidence of primary research undertaken. It will demonstrate theoretical understanding along with one or both of the following: Appropriate use of methodology for the study undertaken. Key areas such as Design, Data Collection, Sample and Sampling method/s, Recruitment, Procedure, Analysis, and Ethics have been considered.	15%	
Findings	Presentation of results. Discussed and clearly focused, based on adequate reading of both secondary and some primary source material; well structured, weighing up and evaluating evidence, and identifying key issues. Good discussion and analysis based on the primary research undertaken. Well written. Study Limitations discussed.	15%	
Discussion & Analysis		15%	
Conclusions and Recommendations	Relate to the overall research undertaken. Concise and logical with a basis within the other chapters. Shows linkages between chapters and considers chapter one items such as Research Questions, Hypothesis etc. Industry and Future research Recommendations are realistic, based on meaningful primary research and reflect feedback received from employer during feasibility study presentation.	10%	

Style, content, presentation and formatting	Bound document. Overall presentation of the document. Appropriate layout. Responds to guidelines. Graphs and tables are listed. Grammatical and spelling mistakes are minimal. Referencing is correct and high quality sources used with minimal errors.	10%	
Total overall marks		**90%**	

Markers comments:

Appendix C Progress Report 5%

Student Progress Report at 6 weeks	Grade
Student not progressing, no engagement	0%
Student progressing minimally with little engagement and draft deadlines not being met	1%
Student progressing with little engagement but draft deadlines being met	2%
Student progressing with engagement and deadlines being met	3%

Student progressing well with good engagement and deadlines being met	4%
Student progressing very well with excellent engagement and deadlines being met competently	5%
Comments	

Appendix D Student Engagement 5%

Engagement over total supervision process	Grade
Student did not engage	0%
Little to no engagement, missed many supervision meetings and submission points	1%
Some engagement, missed many supervision meetings and some points	2%
Relatively good engagement and deadlines being met	3%
Good and consistent engagement and deadlines being met	4%
Excellent, consistent and competent engagement and with all deadlines met.	5%
Comments	