

MA MAJOR RESEARCH PAPER
POLSCI 708
2022 - 2023

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Seminar: MRP advice will be provided
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Course Description

In addition to completing 18 units of graduate level coursework, students enrolled in the MA programs are required to complete a Major Research Paper (MRP). The MRP process will begin in the fall term with brainstorming about the topic, and will be completed in the spring/summer term following coursework. The default option is an individual MRP, but the Department also welcomes collaborative MRPs involving two or more students. This course outline starts by describing the individual option. It then provides a description of the expectations and modified procedures that apply to collaborative MRPs.

Individual MRPs

Length

MRPs are to be no longer than 10,000 words including all front matter, references and bibliography. Further information on formatting appears below.

Course Objectives

The Major Research Paper (MRP) is an opportunity for students to do an extended piece of research on a topic of their choosing. Additional guidance on the MRP will be provided in the MA Colloquium (POLSCI 775).

Students will be assigned a supervisor through a process orchestrated by the MA Colloquium Convenor. Students will be informed of their supervisor near the end of the fall term.

Required Materials and Texts

As noted in the course outline for the MA Colloquium (POL SCI 775) there are two readings on formulating a research question that are useful for you to read:

- Bachner, Jennifer, (2012). [The Common Mistakes Students Make When Crafting Research Questions](#) American Political Science Association 2012 Teaching & Learning Conference Paper.
- Day, C., & Koivu, K. L. (2019). [Finding the Question: A Puzzle-Based Approach to the Logic of Discovery](#). *Journal of Political Science Education*, 15(3), 377–386.
- Vicki Squire (2013). "Attuning to *mess*," in Mark B. Salter and Can E. Mutlu, eds., *Research Methods in Critical Security Studies: An Introduction* (New York: Routledge), pp. 37-41 [this reading will be posted in a file folder in Teams].
- *The following optional reading may be useful:*

Agee, Jane. 2009. "[Developing qualitative research questions: a reflective process.](#)" *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 22(4): 431–447.

Class Format

- n/a

Course Evaluation – Overview

Various assignments and expectations of students in the MA Colloquium course are related to the development of the MRP. More details on these are available in the course outline for the MA Colloquium. For convenience, some key deadlines for these are included in this list:

1. Create profile page and initial statement of research interests on Teams site for Pol Sci 775 MA Colloquium due Monday September 19, 11:59 pm
2. Sample research question, due Monday October 24, 2022, 11:59 pm
3. Formal proposal, for presentation to your Colloquium Topic Group, due Monday January 9, 2023, 9 am
4. MRP "First findings" presentation, transcript due Thursday March 9, 2023
5. Update on your MRP research, due Monday April 3, 2023
6. First full MRP Draft, due Monday, May 8, 2023
7. Second Draft, due Monday, June 5, 2023
8. MRP (final version), due Friday, June 30, 2023

Course Evaluation – Details

Details on expectations and evaluations of items #1-4 in the above list of deadlines are available in the MA Colloquium course outline. Some further details about items #5-7, the first, second, and final drafts of the MRP, are here:

First Draft Copy, due Monday, May 8, 2023

Your first draft copy is to be submitted to your Supervisor by this deadline. Comments will be returned to you on or about Monday, May 22, 2023.

Second Draft Copy, due Monday, June 5, 2023

Your revised second draft is to be submitted to your Supervisor by this deadline. Comments will be returned to you by or about Friday, June 16, 2023.

MRP Final Copy, due Friday, June 30, 2023 by 4:00 p.m.

An electronic copy (PDF) of your MRP in finished form must be submitted to the Graduate Administrative Assistant, Manuela Dozzi at dozzim@mcmaster.ca by 4:00 p.m. EST.

Research Ethics and Research Risks

This section provides information on requirements related to research ethics and risks that may be relevant when you start thinking about your MRP topic. We will have opportunities to discuss these in the MA Colloquium, and you are always welcome to ask for clarifications from the MA Colloquium convenor, or from others in the Department.

The McMaster Research Ethics Board requirements

Research that is based on public documents or secondary sources only does not require research ethics clearance. Almost any research that involves human participants will require research ethics clearance. For social science research at McMaster University the body that provides this clearance is the [McMaster Research Ethics Board](#) (MREB). In Canada the overall research ethics regime has been developed and managed by the three federal granting councils (SSHRC, NSERC, CIHR) and the key governance document is the "[Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans – TCPS 2 \(2018\)](#)." The key purpose of the regime is to protect human participants from the risks of research. In political science, for instance, such a risk could be associated with a researcher's careless treatment of personal interview information in a war zone. Typically obtaining clearance from the MREB can take several weeks following the preparation and submission of an MREB application form. The research ethics clearance process can be a valuable learning experience itself, but it requires additional time and planning which should be factored in when you start thinking about your MRP topic.

Research on Indigenous issues

Indigenous communities have a long and fraught history of researchers doing research about Indigenous communities for the researchers' own purposes, with no benefit, and often with harmful effects on Indigenous communities. If you are considering doing an MRP that addresses Indigenous issues then it is important to read Chapter 9 of TCPS 2 "[Research Involving the First Nations, Inuit and Métis Peoples of Canada](#)." Chapter 9 came about after a long process of consultation and input involving Indigenous communities and representatives. The research ethics expectations and rules for research on Indigenous issues go beyond the focus on individual participants that is sufficient for other types of research. As noted in Chapter 9, Section B of TCPS 2:

“Historically, the well-being of individual participants has been the focus of research ethics guidelines. In this Policy, the principle of **Concern for Welfare** is broader, requiring consideration of participants and prospective participants in their physical, social, economic and cultural environments, where applicable, as well as concern for the community to which participants belong. This Policy acknowledges the important role of Indigenous communities in promoting collective rights, interests and responsibilities that also serve the welfare of individuals...The interpretation of Concern for Welfare in First Nations, Inuit and

Métis contexts may therefore place strong emphasis on collective welfare as a complement to individual well-being.”

An implication of this is that if your MRP is on Indigenous issues, even if it does not directly involve interactions with human participants, it will likely be important to consult and solicit advice with Indigenous individuals, communities, or representatives.

Your personal risks when doing field research

The MREB's primary concern is with risks to those involved with your research other than you, but McMaster University also has responsibilities and rules with regard to your personal risk in doing research. The key document is "[Field Trips, Student Placements and Research Activity Planning and Approval Program](#)" Risk Management Manual 801 (RMM 801). If for your MRP you are considering doing research in a country deemed by Global Affairs Canada (GAC) to have any significant security concerns, even if you have lived there for many years and have family there, you will be required to explain how you will manage these risks. It is likely that you will not be permitted to conduct research in countries for which GAC is recommending that travel be avoided. You should factor in the time needed for approval under RMM 801 if you are doing field research in other countries. Travels for conferences and travel not related to your academic program fall outside the scope of RMM 801 and do not need approval through this procedure.

Course Policies

Submission of Assignments

An electronic copy in PDF form must be submitted to the Graduate Administrative Assistant, Manuela Dozzi at dozzim@mcmaster.ca by Friday, June 30, 2023 by no later than 4:00 p.m. EST.

Your MRP must be prepared with a word processor, double-spaced, set to a paper size of 8 ½ x 11" paper. The MRP must be in either 10 or 12 point Arial font. Top and left margins should be 3.8 cm and the right and bottom margins should be 2.5 cm. All pages are to be numbered EXCEPT the title page and all pages should have header information containing the degree program, author's name, McMaster University and the department, e.g.

MA MRP – A. Smith; McMaster University – Political Science

Sources must be documented according to the conventions of a recognized academic style (MLA, Chicago, etc.).

Grades

Your MRP will be read and marked by your Supervisor and a second reader, normally chosen by your Supervisor and/or MA Convenor.

The MRP is marked on a pass/fail basis. Truly outstanding papers may be given a pass with distinction (P+). We will collate comments from both markers and pass them on to the students by August 31, 2023

MRPs will be graded and grades will be released informally via email on or about Friday, July 21, 2023. A student whose MRP receives a failing grade will normally have the opportunity to revise and resubmit for August 15, 2023.

Collaborative MRPs

An alternative to an individual MRP is a project done in collaboration with other students, and potentially with partners external to the university. This section describes the purposes and procedures specific to this option, indicating where they differ from the procedures for individual MRPs set out above.

Purposes and Value of a Collaborative MRP

A collaborative MRP involves the identification of a shared research interest among a group of two or more students and a division of labour that may specify both an identifiable individual component and a collaborative component that is co-authored. The total amount of effort involved in a collaborative MRP is expected to be equivalent for each student to the work involved in an individual MRP.

There are benefits and limitations to both individual and collaborative MRPs and the choice between them should be shaped by individual preferences (some students prefer working independently, and some enjoy collaborative work) and the availability of a group of students with shared interests. Students planning to continue on to a PhD will likely find the individual MRP more useful since it will allow them to showcase the type of independent research that is typically expected in completing a PhD dissertation in a Political Science department. Otherwise, the department sees both options in general as equally beneficial.

Some benefits of a collaborative MRP include:

- More concentrated and substantial focus on a research topic through shared effort, bringing out more complex interconnections between the topic's dimensions and creating a more substantial output that may be useful in advancing understanding of the issues involved.
- The enjoyment and effectiveness of brainstorming and other ongoing interactions among researchers about a research project as it is being developed and implemented.
- Take on more challenging methods, such as interviewing requiring MREB clearance, which may be difficult for an individual student to do in the time available.

- Obtaining experience with collaborative projects, which are common in work settings.
- For some projects it may be possible to establish a link with an external partner.

How to arrange and organize a collaborative MRP

There are two pathways for arranging a collaborative MRP:

1. Students may spontaneously identify shared interests and propose a collaborative MRP to the MA Colloquium convenor, who will then provide advice and arrange supervision. The MRP discussions in the MA Colloquium in the fall term can provide opportunities for this pathway.
2. Faculty members may propose a topic for a collaborative MRP project and see if enough students are interested to carry this out. Normally such a topic should be communicated to the MA Colloquium convenor in advance of the first session of the MA Colloquium.

There are two basic models for the division of labour in a collaborative MRP, reflecting different intensities of collaboration:

1. *Separate papers, shared discussion.* The group identifies different subtopics related to a single shared interest and each group member creates an individual MRP on one of the subtopics, following the individual MRP procedures above. The group meets throughout the MRP process to share tips, to provide feedback to one another, and to minimize duplication of effort.
2. *Individual papers integrated into a collaborative document.* In the fall term the group identifies a division of labour and each group member specializes in one subtopic. The final output of the collaborative process will be a single document that is similar to an edited book or a collaborative policy report from a think tank. Individual papers will be grouped together, similar to chapters in an edited volume, and an introductory co-authored paper will be added by the group at the beginning of the final document. The division of labour should reflect principles of research design (for instance if they are about different cases, a rationale for case selection) and be a logical reflection of the purposes and methods used for the research. The introductory co-authored paper should bring out such useful insights as common themes or comparative insights generated by the individual papers.

Variations on these models will be considered. For instance, the group could carry out a survey or gather data jointly and write individual MRPs based on different findings from that joint research.

If students have concerns about ownership of work or appropriate allocation of credit they can consult the McMaster [“Ownership of Student Work”](#) policy, the University’s

[research integrity policy](#), or seek legal advice that can be provided by the [McMaster Industrial Liaison Office](#) (MILO).

Format, supervision, expectations, and grading of a collaborative MRP

Separate papers, shared discussion model:

As noted above, the “separate papers, shared discussion” model involves the same procedures and formatting as individual MRPs. The grading of the MRPs will be based on the same expectations, and the quality of the collaborative process will only factor in to the degree that it affects the quality of the individual MRPs. Students are primarily responsible to organize their shared discussions, but supervisors will communicate with one another to help enhance the quality of the shared discussions and complementarities between the individual MRPs involved.

Collaborative document model:

All the deadlines and events listed as milestones for individual MRPs will apply, but the students in the research group will be jointly responsible for them, including how to present updates in the MA Colloquium.

The individual paper components of the final document will be a maximum of 6500 words, not including a bibliography. The introductory co-authored paper component of the paper will be a maximum of 1500 words multiplied by the number of students participating in the group. The document should have a single bibliography of a maximum of 2000 words times the number of students in the group. The use by the group of a collaborative referencing software such as Zotero is highly recommended. The group is jointly responsible to create a cover page and table of contents.

Each group member will be responsible to submit a confidential assessment of their own and each other group member’s contributions to the group process. This should be a maximum of 700 words. This will be considered in the evaluation and grading of the collaborative MRP.

The collaborative document and the individual assessments should be submitted as specified in the “Submission of Assignments” section of this course outline above, except that the header information should be as follows:

Collaborative MA MRP – [list all coauthors in the same format as for individual MRPs];
McMaster University – Political Science

If there are too many authors to fit in the header an abbreviated version of the collaborative MRP title should replace the author names.

Supervisors will be matched with the collaborative MRP group in a similar procedure as with individual MRPs, but with additional communication between the supervisors. The total time involved for supervisors should be similar to the time involved for those supervising individual MRPs. Communications between supervisors will be similar to communications in an MA or PhD thesis committee. One supervisor should be identified as the lead supervisor for purposes of coordination, but the time involved in supervision should be distributed equally across the supervisors. Assembling the collaborative MRP supervisory committee will be the responsibility of the MA Colloquium convenor, in consultation with potential supervisors. If problems arise in the working relations of the students involved in the collaborative MRP, the collaborative MRP supervisory committee will seek to resolve those problems or alter the expectations associated with the collaborative MRP in a manner that is fair to all involved.

The final assessment of the collaborative MRP will be the responsibility of the collaborative MRP committee, and there will be no additional second readers. If external partners have been involved, their feedback on the project can be considered by the faculty members who constitute the collaborative MRP committee but decisions on grades can only be made by McMaster faculty members. Individual grades, using the same alternatives as for individual MRPs, will be assigned to each group member. The grades will reflect the quality of the individual paper, the quality of the group paper, and the contribution of the individual group member to the collaborative process. Any unresolved differences in grading among the supervisors will be adjudicated by the Department's graduate chair.

General Rules for Individual and Collaborative MRPs

Late Assignments

Those who fail to submit the final copy by the due date risk not graduating.

Absences, Missed Work, Illness

Please note that INCOMPLETES will only be granted for legitimate medical or other properly documented reasons.

Faculty of Social Sciences E-mail Communication Policy

Effective September 1, 2010, it is the policy of the Faculty of Social Sciences that all e-mail communication sent from students to instructors (including TAs), and from students to staff, must originate from the student's own McMaster University e-mail account. This policy protects confidentiality and confirms the identity of the student. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that communication is sent to the university from a McMaster

account. If an instructor becomes aware that a communication has come from an alternate address, the instructor may not reply at his or her discretion.

Academic Integrity

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behaviour in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity. **It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty.**

Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behaviour can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: "Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty"), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the [Academic Integrity Policy](https://secretariat.mcmaster.ca/university-policies-procedures-guidelines/), located at <https://secretariat.mcmaster.ca/university-policies-procedures-guidelines/>

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

- plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one's own or for which other credit has been obtained.
- improper collaboration in group work.
- copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

Authenticity / Plagiarism Detection

Some courses may use a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal authenticity and ownership of student submitted work. For courses using such software, students will be expected to submit their work electronically either directly to Turnitin.com or via an online learning platform (e.g. A2L, etc.) using plagiarism detection (a service supported by Turnitin.com) so it can be checked for academic dishonesty.

Students who do not wish their work to be submitted through the plagiarism detection software must inform the Instructor before the assignment is due. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to the plagiarism detection software.

All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld (e.g., on-line search, other software, etc.). For more details about McMaster's use of Turnitin.com please go to

www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity.

Courses with an On-line Element

Some courses may use on-line elements (e.g. e-mail, Avenue to Learn (A2L), LearnLink, web pages, capa, Moodle, ThinkingCap, etc.). Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of a course using these elements, private information such as first and last names, usernames for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the

same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in a course that uses on-line elements will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure please discuss this with the course instructor.

Online Proctoring

Some courses may use online proctoring software for tests and exams. This software may require students to turn on their video camera, present identification, monitor and record their computer activities, and/or lock/restrict their browser or other applications/software during tests or exams. This software may be required to be installed before the test/exam begins.

Conduct Expectations

As a McMaster student, you have the right to experience, and the responsibility to demonstrate, respectful and dignified interactions within all of our living, learning and working communities. These expectations are described in the [Code of Student Rights & Responsibilities](#) (the “Code”). All students share the responsibility of maintaining a positive environment for the academic and personal growth of all McMaster community members, **whether in person or online**.

It is essential that students be mindful of their interactions online, as the Code remains in effect in virtual learning environments. The Code applies to any interactions that adversely affect, disrupt, or interfere with reasonable participation in University activities. Student disruptions or behaviours that interfere with university functions on online platforms (e.g. use of Avenue 2 Learn, WebEx or Zoom for delivery), will be taken very seriously and will be investigated. Outcomes may include restriction or removal of the involved students’ access to these platforms.

Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities who require academic accommodation must contact [Student Accessibility Services](#) (SAS) at 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or sas@mcmaster.ca to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. For further information, consult McMaster University’s [Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities](#) policy.

Academic Accommodation for Religious, Indigenous or Spiritual Observances (RISO)

Students requiring academic accommodation based on religious, indigenous or spiritual observances should follow the procedures set out in the [RISO](#) policy. Students should submit their request to their Faculty Office **normally within 10 working days** of the beginning of term in which they anticipate a need for accommodation or to the Registrar’s Office prior to their examinations. Students should also contact their instructors as soon as possible to make alternative arrangements for classes, assignments, and tests.

Copyright and Recording

Students are advised that lectures, demonstrations, performances, and any other course material provided by an instructor include copyright protected works. The Copyright Act and copyright law protect every original literary, dramatic, musical and artistic work, **including lectures** by University instructors

The recording of lectures, tutorials, or other methods of instruction may occur during a course. Recording may be done by either the instructor for the purpose of authorized distribution, or by a student for the purpose of personal study. Students should be aware that their voice and/or image may be recorded by others during the class. Please speak with the instructor if this is a concern for you.

Extreme Circumstances

The University reserves the right to change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances (e.g., severe weather, labour disruptions, etc.). Changes will be communicated through regular McMaster communication channels, such as McMaster Daily News, A2L and/or McMaster email.

Course Modification

The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of the student to check his/her McMaster email and course websites weekly during the term and to note any changes.