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# BBA HONOURS HANDBOOK FOR STUDENTS

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2021/2022

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Application forms, as well as a PDF copy of this Handbook, are available online through the Bissett School of Business Academic Advising website.

The Bissett School of Business strives for accuracy with respect to the information contained in this document. Some of the contents, however, may be subject to change and/or revision.

## Why pursue an Honours Degree?

The Honours Bachelor of Business Administration (Honours BBA) program is designed for students who are interested in gaining an additional in-depth perspective of their major. The key advantages of an Honours degree are:

- 1) Encouraging the student to undertake independent research and to develop appropriate academic and experiential skills;
- 2) Providing the means by which the student can demonstrate her/his ability to undertake research at a professional standard and communicate the results in a professionally acceptable way;
- 3) An important step for students who may wish to pursue graduate school;
- 4) The benefits of conducting an Honours Research Project:
  - a) Honours graduates are an elite group. The opportunity to do sustained, independent research with academic supervision is an “apprenticeship” which will likely be beneficial in more advanced (graduate) studies, as well as in future employment.
  - b) The Honours Research Project provides an opportunity for the student to bring together many of the aspects of business which have been learned in earlier years as separate subjects.
  - c) The research project assumes an environment where distinctive qualities of a high-achieving student are exhibited clearly, so the Honours Research Project is a valuable instrument for assessment. Among the qualities assessed are originality, mastery of business and research ideas, the appropriate structure of presentation, the requisite academic and applied knowledge, and how to use them.
  - d) The Honours Research Project develops and tests a student’s ability to organize and execute a sustained piece of research and to present complex material both effectively and well.
  - e) The ability to develop a close professional relationship with a professor. This has the potential to translate into strong letters of reference for employment and/or future educational endeavors.

## Admission to the BBA Honours Program

All Honours BBA candidates must complete the same course requirements for the standard BBA, but at a higher overall standard of performance than is required for the major. **The entrance requirement for the program is a 3.50 GPA in their most recent 20 courses prior to June 30 of the year they apply for entrance into the Honours program. Please note that Admission into the Honours program is competitive and is not guaranteed.**

**Note: A student who has already graduated with a Bachelor of Business Administration may not apply to enter the Honours program.**

Students may apply for admission into the Honours program in the fall of their third year. Applications will only be accepted once per year from September 15 to November 15. To apply, the student will complete an Application to the Honours BBA Program form, which is available in the Bissett School of Business Administration Office or Bissett academic advising, and which is also replicated for informational purposes in the back of this Handbook. In point form, the process for application to the Honours program is as follows:

- i. The student completes an application for admission into the Honours BBA program, as well as an Honours Research Project Agreement Form. Completion of the latter form requires that the student obtain in advance the agreement of a full-time faculty member of the Bissett School of Business to be that student’s Honours Research Project supervisor.

- ii. The student submits both documents to a Bissett School of Business academic advisor who will confirm that the student has met the minimum entrance requirement into the Honours program. This is an opportunity for the student to discuss their professional goals with an advisor and how an Honours program may support this.
- iii. The Advisor will then submit both documents to the departmental chair for evaluation. The chair make take the opportunity to discuss with a student their research goals and interests and to provide guidance on a supervisor candidate(s) who may have both the expertise and capacity to support these goals.
- iv. When the application period closes on November 15, applications will be evaluated and acceptance offers made based on student GPA and enrollment capacity. Admission into the Honours stream is competitive and is not guaranteed. Students will be notified in writing to their @mtroyal.ca email address regardless if they are successful or not in their admission to the program.
- v. If a student is accepted into the program, they will take Research Methods for Business (MGMT 5110) in the Winter semester (it is anticipated this course will be offered only once per academic year). Upon successful completion of MGMT 5110, the student will then commence their Honours Research Project in the Fall of their final year.

## Program Structure

### MGMT 5110 - Research Methods for Business

This course is an introduction to research methods for business. Students will gain an introduction to the philosophy of science, the research process (including theory development), and methods of primary and secondary data collection. Students will learn how to apply research methods to address a broad array of basic and applied research questions in the administrative sciences.

Upon successfully completing this course, students will have the knowledge and skills to:

- understand the importance of conducting research ethically
- understand the range of primary and secondary data collection methods, including their strengths, weaknesses, and application to basic and applied research questions
- understand the differences between qualitative and quantitative research methods and when it is best to use each approach (or a mixed-methods approach)
- develop research, analytical thinking, and writing skills through the development of a comprehensive literature review and research proposal
- become a critical consumer of research from the administrative sciences
- understand the business implications of research findings

### Research Proposal Deliverable

The major deliverable of the Honours research methods course will be the completion of a formal research proposal. Therefore, a key deliverable of this course is each student confirming a faculty member who will act as their Honours faculty supervisor. The exact scope of the research proposal will depend on the Honours stream chosen:

- I. **Scholarly stream:** Students who have declared a scholarly stream will prepare a scholarly research proposal that will become the foundation for their Honours thesis. Their proposal may be subject to Human Research Ethics Board (HREB) (depending on method) to enable the public dissemination of results.
- II. **Applied stream:** Students who have declared an applied stream will prepare and completed

an applied research project for an external organization. As this is defined as a commercial research project that will not be disseminated in the public domain, HREB is not required. However, if there is a potential that you may want to disseminate the results publically, HREB approval should be sought.

### Research Proposal Structure

Before completing the Research Methods in Business course, the student must identify a faculty member who agrees to supervise their research project. The supervisor will then provide an evaluative response by the end of the second week of the following semester, after which the supervisor will arrange a time to discuss her/his response with the student. The purpose of the proposal is to ensure the project is of a reasonable scope and has a well defined critical path. Specifically, the research proposal will demonstrate that the student has progressed to the stage where s/he can declare with appropriate certainty that the proposed project is a) feasible; b) will outline the methodology to be used; and c) will identify the appropriate data sources.

### MGMT 5120 - Honours Research Project

The Honours BBA program involves completing and defending an Honours Research Project (either a thesis or applied research project) to an appropriate standard. Subsequent to acceptance into the program, by registering in the Honours Research Project course (MGMT 5120). In addition, the student is also contracting to meet with her/his Honours Research Project supervisor at all scheduled meetings and to complete all assignments on time, as per the established timetable. In addition, the student must complete an Honours Research Project Agreement Form, available at the end of this Handbook. This agreement outlines the faculty and student affiliation for an Honours Research Project. This form must be completed, signed by both the student and the supervisor and submitted to the Bissett Administration offices along with the student's application to the Honours Program.

Prerequisite: MGMT 5110 (Business Statistics II) or an alternative data analysis course by the consent of the department.

Recommended Preparation: Senior data analysis or specific topic preparation course by the recommendation of the honours-student supervisor.

### HREB Clearance

It is a requirement of Mount Royal University that the "ethical conduct" of research activities be assessed by Mount Royal's Human Research Ethics Board (HREB). This policy applies to any Honours thesis involving human subjects. Working with her/his Honours Research Project supervisor, the student is expected to seek ethical approval for any interview, survey or other research involving people. The application form is available at <http://research.mtroyal.ca/ethics.php>. It is not necessary to produce an application for ethical clearance with your initial Honours application. However, ethics approval must be obtained prior to commencing your research.

### Assessment Policy

The grade assigned for the Honours thesis or applied research project is based upon the quality of the written output; the purposes of the presentation are to verify the originality of the research project's content; to determine whether the student thoroughly understands, and can defend, the analysis in the written study; and to provide the student with an opportunity to provide clarification of the project's content and to discuss it intellectually with the evaluators. The written draft(s) of the research project will be assessed by the supervisor. The chair (or his/her designate) of their research project will moderate the presentation, and as such will neither ask questions, make comments, nor grade the

project. The final research project grade will be awarded by the supervisor. The presentation of the research project consists of a brief student presentation of no longer than 30 minutes, followed by questions and comments by the supervisor and department faculty.

The assessment rubric for MGMT 5120 – Honours Research Project is attached as Appendix 1.

## Honours Streams

The Honours BBA provides students a choice of two streams. The first is a *scholarly stream* and intended for students interested in pursuing graduate school. The second is an *applied stream* and intended for students seeking to enhance career skills – with a focus on applying theory to practice.

### Scholarly stream

The scholarly stream requires students to complete a thesis. An Honours thesis is a rigorous scholarly research project that seeks to provide a concise theoretical contribution to the discipline. This stream is ideally suited for students who may seek to pursue graduate school research. The scholarly stream will require a faculty thesis supervisor to mentor the candidate from the research proposal stage through to the assessment of the final thesis. It is anticipated that a faculty member will be selected based on their discipline and/or methodological expertise.

### Applied stream

The applied stream requires students to complete an applied research project and report based on the proposal developed and approved in the research methods course. The project will be conducted for an external organization that aligns to the student's major and area of professional interest. The identification and cooperation of the organization will be the sole responsibility of the student. The applied research project is an opportunity to integrate theory and practice and introduce students to the critical role of evidence-based management in a professional context. Similar to the scholarly stream, the student will require a supervisor to mentor the candidate and conduct a final assessment. However, as an applied research project, this project is considered significantly more independent than the scholarly stream. This stream is ideally suited for students who may seek to advance their expertise in their field prior to their career. This applied research project may be completed in conjunction with a student's co-op assignment.

## Further Advice for Honours Students

The thesis or applied research project is the most distinctive part of the Honours program. To make this apprenticeship in research more valuable and less stressful, the following guidelines have been developed to assist students in obtaining appropriate and consistent levels of supervision:

- i. Although the supervisor should assist the student to define a topic, the student is responsible for proposing the area and general idea behind the study. The supervisor may also provide help in advising whether a topic is of a manageable size, and in determining the appropriate level of analysis.
- ii. The supervisor should also: a) suggest ways to make effective use of research time; b) discuss the standards required of an Honours Research Project; c) make arrangements for regular contact with their student; and d) provide a constructive and critical assessment of any work submitted.

- iii. It is appropriate that the supervisor indicate to the student areas of the literature that are relevant, as well as potentially useful techniques and specific references to items of knowledge which may have escaped the student's attention. This is not considered to be an excessive amount of help.
- iv. Although more frequent meetings may be arranged if desired, students are expected to see their supervisor regularly. It is the responsibility of the student to arrange (and keep) these meetings. It is expected that the frequency of these meetings will be significantly higher for students who pursue a scholarly stream.
- v. Supervisors should read and respond promptly to any sensible material handed to them. It is very helpful if students start to put ideas in writing as soon as possible.
- vi. The supervisor will point out sloppy or incorrect grammar or expression. However, it is not the supervisor's responsibility to rewrite material for students.
- vii. Always back up your material. Students are strongly advised to make hard copies, as well as soft copies on a flash drive or similar electronic media. Faulty or corrupt software, flash drives, and even hard disks have often been sources of great angst, especially where there is a loss of material.

## Important Information

Students accepted into the Honours BBA stream have the continuation requirement of maintaining a minimum GPA of 3.50 in each semester they are enrolled in the Honours program. Students who fail to maintain a GPA of 3.50 during their Honours program will be subject to losing their place in the program. Students will normally not be permitted to reapply for Honours, and may do so only with the permission of the Chair of their Honours discipline. Students permitted to reapply must follow the procedures for "application into the Honours stream," as mentioned above. There is no guarantee that a student will be re-admitted into the Honours program.

**Double counting of courses:** Students are reminded that substantially similar material cannot be submitted for assessment more than once in the program (i.e., in courses and/or in the study).

## Frequently Asked Questions

### 1. What is the value of an Honours degree?

The Honours Bachelor of Business Administration (Honours BBA) program is designed for students who are interested in gaining an additional in-depth perspective of their major. An Honours degree will provide the ability for high performing students to conduct rigorous independent research.

### 2. Why are there two courses two streams (Scholarly and Applied)?

The two courses/two streams model was based on two important criteria.

- One of the historic challenges with any Honours program is ensuring sufficient faculty resources are available for supervising students. In fact, faculty supervision can act as a potential bottle neck for eligible students being admitted into an Honours program. The two courses – two streams model is designed to overcome this. First, the core outcome of the Research Methods for Business course is a completed research proposal (and HREB application if required). Consequently, this course will deal with a significant portion of traditional faculty supervisor's role. In addition, the faculty supervision hours anticipated for the applied research project will be significantly less than the traditional thesis stream

without compromising the rigour of the degree. The result is that with our two courses – two streams model we do not anticipate access to a passionate qualified faculty supervisor will be a barrier to our students who seek admission into the program.

- The convergence of theory and practice is at the core of the MRU vision and central to management education. The two stream model recognizes the diversity of our students and their professional goals. The scholarly stream is ideal for our students who have a desire to pursue a research oriented graduate degree. In contrast, the applied stream is ideal for students who seek to develop more applied research skills prior to starting their career.

### **3. Is there a difference in the role of the faculty supervisor between supervising a scholarly thesis and supervising an applied research project?**

Both streams require a student to conduct highly rigorous research based on the proposal developed and approved in the Research Methods for Business course (MGMT 5110). The faculty supervisor role for both the scholarly thesis and applied research project will require a faculty to assess and grade the quality of the final output. However, the scholarly thesis stream will involve a significantly increased focus on contribution to theory. The result is that a thesis supervisor will need to mentor these students through the literature review and conceptual development process. The outcome of this process is a 40-60 page scholarly thesis. It is anticipated that a thesis supervisor may have to dedicate between 20-30 hours in this role. In contrast, an applied research project is focused on using rigorous research methods to support evidence-based decisions in an actual business setting. The outcome of this process will be an applied research report in a format that is acceptable to both the supervisor and the management of the business where the study is being conducted. It is anticipated that an applied research supervisor may dedicate between 8-10 hours in this role.

### **4. What are the assessment differences between the scholarly thesis and applied research streams?**

Both research projects will have identical assessment for the rigour associated with the research. However, the assessment will vary based on the goal of the research. For example, a scholarly thesis must demonstrate a deep understanding of related theory and literature. In contrast, an applied research project must demonstrate how the research has contributed to effective evidence-based decision making in the context of a real company.

### **5. Does the applied research project dilute the rigour of the Honours program?**

No. Both streams are focused at meeting a common learning outcome of developing advanced research skills by conducting rigorous independent research. The core difference is that the audiences for the output of these two streams are very different. A scholarly audience demands that the research make a significant contribution to theory development through a scholarly paper. In contrast, a practitioner audience demands the research make a significant contribution to evidence-based management through a concise research report. In both streams, highly rigorous research is at the foundation.

### **6. Who is eligible to apply for the Honours program?**

The minimum entrance requirement for the program is a 3.50 GPA in their most recent 20 courses prior to June 30<sup>th</sup> of the year they apply for entrance into the Honours program. Admission into the Honours stream is competitive and is not guaranteed. Note that a student who has already graduated with a Bachelor of Business Administration may not apply to enter the Honours program.

### **7. Why are the admission criteria so restrictive?**

An Honours program is a highly rigorous degree and a significant academic achievement. As a result, the admission requirements should reflect the minimum requirements we anticipate a student will need to



be successful. Currently, 20% of our BBA students will meet the 3.50 GPA requirements.

### **8. How do students apply for admission?**

We have designed a simple two-stage admission process that is consistent with our student-centric mission. Students may apply for admission into the Honours program in the fall of their third year. Applications will only be accepted once per year from September 15 to November 15. Admission into the Honours stream is competitive and is not guaranteed. To apply, the student will complete an Application to the Honours BBA Program form, which is available in the Bissett School of Business Administration Office or academic advising, and which is also replicated for informational purposes in the back of this Handbook. In point form, the process for application to the Honours program is as follows:

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The student submits both documents to a Bissett School of Business academic advisor who will confirm that the student has met the minimum entrance requirement into the Honours program. This is an opportunity for the student to discuss their professional goals with

- i. The Advisor will then submit both documents to the departmental chair for evaluation. The chair make take the opportunity to discuss with a student their research goals and interests and to provide guidance on a supervisor candidate(s) who may have both the expertise and capacity to support these goals.
- ii. When the application period closes on November 15, applications will be evaluated and acceptance offers made based on student GPA and enrollment capacity. Admission into the Honours stream is competitive and is not guaranteed. Students will be notified in writing to their @mtroyal.ca email address regardless if they are successful or not in their admission to the program.
- iii. If a student is accepted into the program, they will take Research Methods for Business (MGMT 5110) in the winter semester (it is anticipated this course will be offered only once per academic year). Upon successful completion of MGMT 5110, the student will then commence their Honours Research Project in the fall of their final year.

### **9. Why do I have to wait until my third year to apply?**

It is important that we have sufficient evidence that a student will be successful in the Honours program. The completion of 20 courses is the halfway point of a student's degree. At this stage, they will have sufficient courses completed to declare a major and identity their passions. In addition, we will have sufficient academic evidence that they will be successful in this program.

### **10. Does the Honours program replace the Directed Readings course?**

No. The Directed Readings project is an ideal route for students who seek to conduct research but do not meet the admission requirement for the Honours program or their schedule or time commitments do not make the Honours program a feasible option (e.g. students pursuing a double major). Running both a Directed Readings and an Honours program has proven to be viable in other departments at MRU.

**11. Do I need to be registered for the Honours program to take the Research Methods for Business course?**

No. Any student who meets the pre-requisite will be eligible to enroll in the Research Methods for Business course. However, priority will be given to students who are enrolled in the Honours program.

**12. Why is the Research Methods for Business (MGMT5110) course scheduled in the Winter semester only?**

It is anticipated that it will require up to three semesters to complete the Honours program. Therefore, in the winter semester of their third year an Honours student will complete the Research Methods for Business course. In this course they will complete a full research proposal (and the applicable HREB proposal if required). Following this course, they will submit their HREB application for review and approval over the spring. This will allow them to initiate data collection in the fall semester of the following year. Once the data is collected a student will be in a position to prepare their thesis or report. It is feasible that the thesis and report could be completed in the fall semester; however, given the unpredictable nature of research, a student may be granted an extension into the winter semester of their final year to complete their thesis or report.

**13. Why are these courses coded as MGMT (e.g. MGMT5120) as opposed to being coded for each major (e.g. HRES 5120)?**

We have been provided guidance by administration that the Honours program can be at the degree-level (as opposed to the major). This allows us to have a single Honours program for all BBA students regardless of major.

**14. How do I know which professors are willing to supervise an Honours BBA student?**

Students can consult the Bissett website for a list of interested faculty, including their areas of specialty and areas of research interest. Students are also welcome to approach a faculty member not on the list to see if they will agree to supervise an Honours BBA student.

## Appendix 1 - Sample Honours Research Project Rubric Guidelines

The following are brief descriptions and corresponding grades of outstanding, very good, acceptable, pass, and unacceptable research studies. This is meant as a brief guide only.

| <b>Outstanding<br/>(A+)</b>   | <b>Very Good<br/>(A/A-)</b>  | <b>Acceptable<br/>(B+/B)</b>   | <b>Pass<br/>(B-/C+/C)</b>  | <b>Unacceptable<br/>(C- and below)</b>   |
|---|--|--|--|--|
| <p>An outstanding research project has the following features:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· very well written and very well organized;</li> <li>· exhibits mature, independent thinking;</li> <li>· displays understanding of the literature and exhibits command over the material;</li> <li>· is researched thoroughly;</li> <li>· addresses an important question or problem;</li> <li>· clearly states the problem and explains why it is important;</li> <li>· excellent research design;</li> <li>· well-planned and well-designed questionnaire (if used);</li> <li>· shows deep understanding of the theory;</li> <li>· data from multiple sources; and comprehensive, complete, sophisticated, and convincing analysis.</li> </ul> | <p>A very good research project has the following features:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· displays student's understanding of the field and the analysis undertaken;</li> <li>· addresses a meaningful question or problem;</li> <li>· executed competently;</li> <li>· uses appropriate, standard theory, methods, and techniques;</li> <li>· includes well-executed research;</li> <li>· very good research design;</li> <li>· demonstrates technical competence;</li> <li>· presents solid, expected results/answers; and</li> <li>· well-written and well-organized.</li> </ul> | <p>An acceptable research project has the following features:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· typically focuses on a question or problem that has predictable results;</li> <li>· demonstrates technical competence;</li> <li>· shows student's ability to do research and use standard methods;</li> <li>· competently applies theory to a problem;</li> <li>· acceptable research design;</li> <li>· narrow understanding of the field;</li> <li>· uncritical review of the literature; and</li> <li>· analysis is unsophisticated or limited.</li> </ul> | <p>A research project that is acceptable for credit towards graduation with a BBA degree (but <i>not</i> with Honours standing) has the following features:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· mainly descriptive, some analytical work;</li> <li>· vague or confusing study statement;</li> <li>· ignored counterarguments;</li> <li>· weaker structure;</li> <li>· under-developed ideas;</li> <li>· weak argumentation;</li> <li>· poor utilization of primary and secondary sources;</li> <li>· confusing expression;</li> <li>· poor grammar and spelling; and</li> <li>· poor citation style.</li> </ul> | <p>An unacceptable research project has the following features:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· question/problem is unclearly defined, or is trivial, weak, or unoriginal;</li> <li>· method(s) is/are used inappropriately;</li> <li>· organization, spelling/grammar and weak;</li> <li>· literature review is weak or missing;</li> <li>· appropriate theoretical analysis is missing, wrong, or not handled well;</li> <li>· unsophisticated or limited.</li> <li>· hypothesis is inconsistent, does not flow from theory, or non-existent;</li> <li>· data are flawed, misrepresented, or wrong;</li> <li>· research design is poor;</li> <li>· results are obvious, already known, unexplained, or misinterpreted;</li> <li>· analysis is wrong, inappropriate, or confused; and</li> <li>· conclusions drawn are invalid or oversold.</li> </ul> |