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# MECS3301/3302

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## Independent Research Project



2018-2019

UNIVERSITY OF WORCESTER

Dr Barbara Mitra

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## **RATIONALE**

The Independent Research Project, equivalent to two modules, allows you to plan and execute a major research study or project on a topic of your choice. Assisted by tutorial support, and continuing your previous work on MECS2031, you will have the option of either an empirical (quantitative) project or a theoretical/philosophical extended critical essay. The culmination of your work on the degree, the Research Project is designed to demonstrate that you have the intellectual, research and presentation skills appropriate to a graduate of Media and Culture.

## **CONTENT**

The module will normally involve the development, management and execution of the research project first devised on MECS2031. You will be free to choose your own topic, subject to: the chosen topic allowing you to meet the course learning outcomes for the Media and Culture degree; the agreement of the research project coordinator and/or module leader for MECS2031; the availability of essential resources and of staff with relevant expertise. You will generally choose between two approaches: an empirical research project (working with identifiable research methods such as content or semiotic analysis, or questionnaires, interviews etc) or an extended research essay (working with appropriate theoretical or philosophical paradigms e.g. critical theory, feminist theory etc). Original research may well form part of the project but you will also be expected to discuss and evaluate existing research in the field. Note that any modification to the topic or type of study, as the work progresses, will have to be negotiated with your Independent Research Project supervisor and/or module leader.

## **LEARNING AND TEACHING ACTIVITIES**

Independent research, supported by Research Project supervision and tutorials. The Research Project requires you to display evidence of an ability to work independently both by researching and presenting a topic of your choice. Among the skills you will acquire on the module is, therefore, the ability to plan and complete a substantial piece of work within set deadlines.

## USE OF LEARNING TECHNOLOGIES

The module is designed to enable you to demonstrate that you have the intellectual, research, and presentation skills appropriate to a graduate of Media and Culture. You will work independently but with individually-tailored tutorial guidance. This will be available regularly (up to the designated 4 hours' supervision) **but it's up to you to organise the tutorials**. You will be supported throughout by the module tutor. Key documentation – i.e. this Research Project guide – will be located on Blackboard.

## MODE OF MODULE DELIVERY

Independent research and tutorials (up to 4 hours in total) with an Independent Research Project supervisor.

## SET TEXTS/ESSENTIAL READING

There is no set text for this module but reading will be selected appropriate to your chosen topic. For more general advice on the research process, methodology etc you should consult the 'further reading' listed in the MECS2031 module guide (semester 2) or speak to your supervisor.

## INTENDED LEARNING OUTCOMES

On successful completion of the module, you will be able to:

1. devise an independent research project consistent with the scope and content of Media and Culture;
2. independently manage and successfully execute a large research project
3. identify and critically assess relevant scholarship and methodologies and/or theoretical approaches within a selected topic of research;
4. summarise the key debates and themes around a selected topic, while developing an argument that engages with those debates;
5. communicate detailed analysis and a sophisticated argument in an appropriately agreed format.

## ASSESSMENT

**Assignment: Research Project or Essay**

**Weighting: 100%**

**Length: 6,000-7,000 words**

### Deadlines

- **Thursday 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2019** (if taken over two semesters OR semester 2 only); 3pm
- **Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> January 2019** (if you are submitting in semester 1); 3pm

The basic guidelines for the project or essay itself are outlined in the 'Content' section above (see p.2). Beyond that, the exact shape and method of presentation of your project will be determined, under tutorial guidance, according to the nature of the topic selected and the techniques and conventions in your particular field of media/cultural studies. Further, detailed guidance is included towards the end of this module guide (see pp.9-13).

### RESEARCH PLAN

Aside from the research project itself, you will be asked to submit a detailed, unassessed plan of approximately 750 words. The plan should be e-mailed to your supervisor and the deadline(s) for this are: **Thursday 6<sup>th</sup> December** (if taken over two semesters (i.e. MECS3302)), **Monday 5<sup>th</sup> November** (if submitting in semester 1 (MECS3301)), or **Friday 8<sup>th</sup> March** (if taken in semester 2 only (MECS3301)).

The plan is an opportunity for you and your tutor to monitor progress and refine your project well ahead of submission. It should include:

1. a final version of the question;
2. an outline of the research project including planned chapter and section headings;
3. two key primary and two key secondary sources;
4. a statement of the proposed methodology or theoretical approach;
5. information on any appendices, additional material etc. likely to be included.

The plan can be written either as a series of points (following the listing above) or as a prose piece. The latter might become a draft of a section of your introduction and a good way of writing this would be in the form of an abstract, such as is seen at the beginning of most journal articles. This would provide a synopsis of the thesis and state, in more detail, the nature and scope of the work undertaken as well as the core primary texts to be studied. Your supervisor will advise further on this.

**Please note that submission of the plan is a requirement of the module and that a copy must be included in your final research project.** Submission of the plan will be followed by a formal meeting between student and supervisor (e.g. in January or February if you are taking the module across semesters) where further action points will be agreed.

## ATTENDANCE

As an independent research project, the standard attendance policy does not apply. However, students will be required to attend a minimum of two meetings: one to agree/consolidate the aims of the research project; and one to discuss the required plan and agree action points ahead of the submission of the assignment. There are also some group meetings that are scheduled which you are required to attend.

### Group Meetings Scheduled

You will need to attend the group meetings as scheduled below being run by the module leader. If you are unable to make these please contact the Module Leader for The Independent Research Project for 2018-2019 this is Dr Barbara Mitra ([b.mitra@worc.ac.uk](mailto:b.mitra@worc.ac.uk)).

Wednesday 26 <sup>th</sup> September 2018	9.15-10.45 BM your IRP/supervisor/module outline
Wednesday 28 <sup>th</sup> November 2018	9.15-10.45 (Allie Taylor/library for your IRP talk)
Wednesday 30 <sup>th</sup> January 2019	9.15-10.45 where you should be now with your IRP
Wednesday 10 <sup>th</sup> April 2019	9.15-10.45 Binding and online submission

## PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism is the submission for assessment of work written by or copied from another person; or, the use of ideas taken directly from another source without acknowledgement. Plagiarism includes:

1. directly copying another writer's words (paragraphs or even single sentences) as if they were your own (i.e. unacknowledged);
2. paraphrasing someone else's argument without acknowledgement;
3. plagiarism of your own work e.g. reproducing material used in another assignment and/or module;

4. plagiarising other students (i.e. copying someone's work). This includes near-identical essays produced by two or more students working together;
5. the use of 'model essays' (e.g. those downloaded from the internet).

Remember, each piece of coursework will have been accompanied by an **Item Report Form (or online receipt)**, to acknowledge that the work is your own and that all sources have been acknowledged.

## **REASSESSMENT**

In the event that you are required to take reassessment you will receive formal notification of this, in writing on your SOLE page, from Registry Services after the end of year meeting of the Board of Examiners in June. Reassessment tasks, including for semester 1, will be available from the Humanities administration office.



## **INDEPENDENT RESEARCH PROJECT: DETAILED GUIDANCE**

### **BEFORE YOU BEGIN: IDENTIFYING AND AGREEING A TOPIC**

1. The first stage in your Study is to identify the general topic you want to investigate and the approach you wish to adopt. This should have been done in the second semester of the academic year before the Study itself is begun (i.e. year 2, on MECS2031).
2. Any modifications to the topic or type of study will have to be negotiated with the Independent Research Project supervisor (if the change is relatively minor) or, in the case of major amendments, the module leader. Please note, that because supervisors are allocated on the basis of your stated topic, and because you are expected to begin your research early, we strongly advise against major changes in topic.
3. You should develop rough ideas yourself and then discuss these with one of your tutors. The research methods module (MECS2031) has been designed for precisely this purpose.

### **General guidelines for choosing a topic:**

1. The topic must meet the learning outcomes of the course.
2. Your topic must have clearly identifiable aims and objectives.
3. The topic should be manageable in the time allowed.
4. There should be primary and secondary material available (depending on the type of Research Project you are undertaking).
5. You must have developed or be able to acquire the skills necessary for carrying out the project (e.g. designing a questionnaire).
6. You might develop material studied on a previous module.
7. The topic needs to be able to sustain your interest for the months in which you are carrying out the research.

### **THE PROPOSAL FORM**

1. All topics require approval, partly to confirm that they meet the requirements and learning outcomes of the Media & Culture degree, partly so that we, and you, are satisfied about the University's ability to supervise and assess your Study fairly. If you are proposing to study an area where our staff are not expert,

we will do our utmost to accommodate this but may have to ask you to think again.

2. If you are intending to take your study across two Subjects you should discuss the topic with a tutor from each Subject (and get two signatures and approval), unless the tutor concerned teaches in both the Subjects involved.
3. You will need to hand the proposal form in during the second year (or part time equivalent). The date will be advertised at the time, but both submission and approval of your proposal will usually occur on MECS2031.
4. Please note that the proposal will not have been accepted until signed by a tutor, with a completed ethics checklist (see appendix 1).
5. If you do not submit a Proposal Form by the deadline you will not normally be allocated a Supervisor and you may not be able to complete your Study in the semester you intend.

## **YOU AND YOUR SUPERVISOR**

### **ALLOCATION OF SUPERVISOR AND INITIAL TUTORIAL.**

1. When the topic is approved, the information provided on your Proposal Form is used to allocate a member of staff to be your supervisor.
2. You will be notified, prior to the summer vacation, of who your supervisor will be.
3. You should then contact your supervisor and arrange an initial meeting as soon as possible.
4. The initial meeting will help you refine your ideas about the topic and work towards a plan.
5. In particular, if there are ethical issues or health and safety requirements involved in undertaking your Study, this meeting should consider them and develop a plan to ensure that these are resolved so you can begin your Study on schedule.

### **ONGOING SUPERVISION**

1. As a first principle, the Research Project is your own *independent* project, and must reflect your own work.
2. The responsibility for making contact with your supervisor and arranging these tutorials is yours; make sure you take advantage of the specialist help and advice your supervisor can give you.

3. Your supervisor is on hand to offer specialist advice and to guide your dissertation as it develops. Specifically, your supervisor will help you define the scope of your topic, locate or handle sources of information, and assist you in developing the appropriate scholarly apparatus (references, bibliography etc.).
4. There is no simple rule for the frequency of tutorials, but **you are entitled to four hours of supervision** (this includes time spent reading your draft material). If you are taking the module across semesters, a good model by which to organize meetings with your supervisor is as follows (adapt this if you are taking the research project over 1 semester only):
  - Framing a question, outlining a plan, help with the literature search (June-Oct)
  - Discussing the content of your plan (Oct-Nov)
  - Feedback on the completed plan and discussion of content (Jan-Feb)
  - Advanced feedback; outstanding questions; problems with structure and argument; and/or feedback on drafts. (March (i.e. before the Easter vacation))

## WHEN SUPERVISION ENDS

Please note that **your right to supervision ends two weeks before the deadline**. After this period, supervisors will not be able to read draft material or meet you for tutorials.

## WRITING YOUR INDEPENDENT RESEARCH PROJECT

### LENGTH OF RESEARCH PROJECT

The main text should be 6,000 to 7,000 words. *Please note: there is no 10% rule. 6,000 is the absolute minimum; 7,000 the maximum. Anything higher or lower will be penalised. Quotes are included in the word count. All details listed (below) under 'General Layout' are not included in the word count (except for 'Text').*

## GENERAL LAYOUT OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

- Title page
- Table of contents
- Tables of illustrations, diagrams, appendices etc (where appropriate)
- Preface and acknowledgements
- Abstract
- Text
- Endnotes\*
- List of abbreviations (where appropriate)
- Bibliography
- A copy of your project plan
- Illustrations, Diagrams, Appendices (where appropriate)

\* Notes should appear at the end of the Research Project unless the student is specifically directed otherwise by their supervisor.

## TITLE PAGE

The Research Project should have a **title** page giving the following information:

- The full title of the thesis;
- The name of the author;
- The qualification for which the Research Project is submitted;
- The name of the University;
- The month and year of submission.
- Some students have the University Coat of Arms on their title page, whilst some students prefer to include a picture relevant to their Research Project.

### **EXAMPLE OF TITLE PAGE**

Title of Research Project

Student's Name

Research Project submitted as part requirement for the

B.A. (Hons) degree in Media and Culture Studies, University of Worcester.

(Month and Year)

Picture: Some students prefer to put a picture here that is relevant to their topic rather than the University of Worcester coat of arms.

Please note that by putting your name to the study you are indicating that it is your own work and that you are not presenting it dishonestly (see section above on 'Plagiarism').

### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Some students like to thank people that have supported them in relation to their Independent Research Project. This could include your supervisor, family and friends that have supported you in producing your Project.

### **ABSTRACT**

The abstract is a short summary of your Independent Research Project. You should identify what you are writing about, what methods you used and your findings. The abstract should give enough information for someone to get a brief idea of what your Independent Research Project is about and your main findings in approximately 150 words.

### **SPECIFIC CHAPTERS OR SECTIONS OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT**

Given that each Research Project ought to be original, we do not wish to prescribe exactly how you set your thesis out. That said, there are conventions to the structure of a Research Project that you may find useful to follow. These generally divide into two types:

1. theoretical studies, which could be conducted around **textual analysis** or an extended essay format.
2. projects that involve significant, usually **quantitative and primary research** (e.g. questionnaires, interviews, etc);

### CHAPTER SUGGESTIONS: THEORETICAL STUDY

If you are conducting a **theoretical study** you may wish to include the following elements (all word limits are approximate).

1. Introduction (approximately 1,000 words)
2. Overview of the subject, including previous academic studies (1,500-2,000 words).
3. Outline of your theoretical approach(es) (1,500 words)
4. Discussion and analysis of topic (1,500-2,000 words)
5. Conclusion (500 words)
6. Bibliography

### CHAPTER SUGGESTIONS: PRIMARY RESEARCH PROJECT

Your Research Project should generally include these elements **if you are conducting primary research**

1. Introduction (approximately 500-1,000 words)
2. Literature review (1,500 words)
3. Methodology e.g. textual analysis, interviews etc (1,000 words)
4. Analysis (1,000-1,500 words)
5. Discussion (1,500 words)
6. Conclusion (500 words)
7. Bibliography

### WORKING ON YOUR RESEARCH PROJECT

1. It is important to work steadily at the Research Project during the semesters in which you are taking it.
2. You will not have the stimulus of regular class-contact in the same way as in other modules – it is your responsibility to manage your time and to work regularly and consistently.
3. Remember, as with all modules, you are expected to devote around 10 hours per week study time to your Research Project module.

## DRAFTS

One of the key roles of the supervisor will be to help you through the drafting process of your Research Project. It is impossible to specify precisely how many drafts of each chapter there might be as we all work differently. However, as a guideline, these might include the following:

1. A first draft in which you just write things down (i.e. without worrying too much about the quality!)
2. Fine-tuning of structure and argument i.e. getting the sequence of the dissertation correct
3. Fine-tuning the style – making it look and sound professional
4. Proofreading.

***Please note, your supervisor is only expected to read draft material once.***

## STYLE GUIDELINES

1. The Research Project should be word-processed (if you are keeping a bound copy, the usual format is on A4 paper of good quality and single sided).
2. Double (or one-and-a-half) spacing should be used except for indented quotations.
3. Use a standard font (e.g. Arial, Times New Roman), font-size (12), and colour (black)
4. Italicise book, film and TV programme/newspaper titles
5. Number your pages
6. Spelling, grammar and presentation are extremely important. Always spell check and proofread your Research Project.

## SUBMISSION AND BINDING

1. You submit 1 copy of the Research Project electronically via **Turnitin** **AND** you may also need to hand **in one bound copy** in the Humanities assignment box in Bredon or to the Admin office in Bredon (**as guided by your supervisor**) – it is important that you do submit online as well as the hard copy (if requested) as the online **SOLE** submission will otherwise count your Research Project as not being submitted).

2. Even if you are submitting solely online (as guided by your supervisor), you may also wish to have a permanent copy and if so, it is a good idea to bind one copy of your Research Project for yourself to keep.
3. If you are binding one copy, make sure you leave enough room for binding. Left hand side should be 3.5cm, and the other sides 2.5 cm).
  - a. The Library will have examples of bound studies for you to see.
  - b. research projects will be moderated.
4. Make sure that you have a spare/back up copy of the final draft of your research project. This should be kept electronically and securely (e.g. on a cloud and/or personal e-mail account, etc).
5. All deadlines, as for other work, are 3pm on the deadline day.

### **DECLARATION ON THE RESEARCH PROJECT SUBMITTED**

When submitting a Research Project, the author should indicate in a suitable declaration any material contained in the thesis which may have been used before. This applies, for example, where any of the material has been used in previous coursework.

### **REFERENCING**

Referencing should be the same as for most other work you will have completed on the degree (i.e. Harvard referencing, generally). Basic details are as follows.

### **CITATIONS IN THE BODY OF THE TEXT:**

1. When you cite a piece of work you should normally state the author, date of publication, page number(s). Do not include title, place of publication, and publisher as these details are included on the bibliography.
2. If the work has two authors, cite both names. If the work has three or more authors, then the abbreviation 'et al.' should be used after the first author's name.
3. If you are discussing, in detail, a particular author's argument or book (e.g. in the body of the text), and it is obvious to whom you are referring, you can leave the author's name out of the reference.
4. Page numbers are always required unless you are discussing the overall argument that the author makes in a book or article (see the examples below)



**Example - where there is 1 author**

Smith (2002: 23) argues that the research was ...

**Example - where there are 2 authors in the sentence**

- The work of Theakston and Boddington (2001: 4-6) argues that the research was ...

**Example – where there are 2 authors but not part of the sentence.**

There is some considerable debate concerning this field of research (see Theakston & Boddington, 2001: 4). Highlighted in particular is ...

## QUOTING IN THE TEXT

1. As a general rule, it is better to paraphrase than use direct quotes. This demonstrates that you have understood the meaning and context of what you have read. You must, nevertheless, still reference paraphrased material. As a guiding principle, no more than 10% of your project should be direct quotation.
2. Where direct quotes are used you must use single quotation marks.
3. For quotes within quotes use double quotation marks.
4. Longer quotes (3 lines +) should be indented.
5. Duplication of charts, diagrams, pictures etc. should be treated as direct quotes in that the author(s) should be acknowledged and page numbers shown.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

1. This is a list of all the sources that you have cited or directly quoted in the Research Project.
2. Different forms of written text (books, journals, book chapters etc.) can be included in one list.
3. This list should be in alphabetical order by the family name of the author(s).

4. It is the convention, however, to list other media in a separate list e.g. a filmography or, for music, discography.
5. All material should be laid out in a consistent format. Examples are provided below but you should also seek advice (where required) from your supervisor or the module leader.

#### EXAMPLE BIBLIOGRAPHIC ENTRIES

- Book: Strinati, Dominic. 2004. *An Introduction to Theories of Popular Culture*. London: Routledge.
- Book Chapter: Merrick, Helen. 2003. 'Gender in Science Fiction' in Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn (eds.) *The Cambridge Companion to Science Fiction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Journal Article. Johnson, Kirk. 2001. 'Media and Social Change: The Modernising of Television in Rural India' in *Media, Culture and Society* Vol. 23(2), pp. 147-169.
- Web: Edelson, Susan. No date. *Asperger's Syndrome*. [Online] Available from: <http://www.autism.org/asperger.html> [Accessed 19th September 2002].
- TV/Film: *Life on Campus*. (2006) [DVD] London, Imperial College London.
- For the latest version of the Harvard Referencing Guide please see the link <https://www-citethemrightonline-com.apollo.worc.ac.uk/> and the Short Harvard Referencing Guide <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ixTVQXOhx7YJ5qgd7CEK7w7AsIsTmUNu/view>

## MITIGATING CIRCUMSTANCES

1. The planning and successful completion (to the due date) of the Research Project is a fundamental part of the exercise. Extensions will not be granted.
2. If it's appropriate you can apply for mitigating circumstances. Mitigating Circumstances are defined by the University as exceptional circumstances, outside of your control, that have affected your academic performance e.g.
  - a. Serious illness
  - b. Serious illness of a partner or close relative
  - c. Bereavement
  - d. Excessive employment demands which were substantial and temporary (part-time students only)
  - e. Claims of exceptional mitigating circumstances should be submitted on the mitigating circumstances form before results are considered by the Board of Examiners and before the published deadline.
  - f. Information on how to submit a claim for mitigating circumstances can be found via your SOLE page in the "My Course Details" tab.
  - g. Full procedures and regulations regarding mitigation can also be found on the above link.

## APPENDIX 1

### ETHICS

Because of the nature of Media and Culture research, it is relatively rare that Independent Studies will require ethical clearance. However, you should have completed the ethics checklist attached to the proposal form before approval was given to your topic and it is the responsibility of every student (as with members of staff) to ensure that work carried out is within the University Guidelines for Ethical Conduct. If you didn't complete the checklist beforehand, please do so by following this link:

<https://www.worcester.ac.uk/registryservices/661.htm>.

Generally, you may need to get ethical clearance if your study involves working with other people, for example conducting a survey among other students or members of the general public, especially if your work involves gathering data from those in positions of vulnerability e.g. clients in care, prisoners, ex-offenders or children. The same applies if your work impacts upon the environment, involves research into illegal activities, or working with animals. In those scenarios, you probably will need to seek advice and then ethical clearance. To do so, please speak to your supervisor and/or the module leader.

Further information about the University's ethics process can be found here:  
<http://www.worcester.ac.uk/researchportal/699.htm>

## APPENDIX 2

### GRADING CRITERIA

Grade	A+/A/A-	B+/B/B-	C+/C/C-	D+/D/D-	E Failing Work
<b>Argument</b>	Excellently argued. Able to analyse and synthesise arguments to reach their own independent conclusion.	Fairly well argued. Able to engage in some critical analysis and interpretation of arguments, but does not conduct their own independent analysis	Generally fairly well argued. Able to describe arguments and debates but describes and reports rather than conducting own critical analysis	Poorly argued. Able to describe some arguments and debates but there are gaps in the knowledge and understanding of the topic area	There is no clear, coherent argument formed. The debates and arguments are not clearly described or analysed
<b>Research</b>	There is evidence of excellent research. The arguments are supported by a wide range of appropriate sources which are excellently referenced and acknowledged in a bibliography	There is evidence of some good research. The arguments are generally supported by an appropriate range of sources which tend to be well referenced and mostly acknowledged in a bibliography	There is evidence of some research. The arguments are sometimes supported by appropriate sources which are sometimes referenced correctly, although there are some mistakes in the bibliography	There is an acceptable level of research at this level. There is some acknowledgement of sources but often not referenced correctly and often not acknowledged in the bibliography	Little evidence of research having been conducted. There are either inappropriate sources used or little acknowledgement of sources. Hence the arguments are not supported by appropriate referencing and there is an inadequate bibliography
<b>Writing</b>	Excellent clarity of expression, grammar and spelling. Writes in a fluent and coherent style	Good clarity of expression. Grammar and spelling are generally clear	Satisfactory expression. Grammar and spelling are usually clear although there are some errors.	Mostly acceptable expression. Some inaccuracies in grammatical structures and or spelling tend to detract from the assignment	Very poor clarity of expression. The assignment lacks a clear coherent structure and suffers from numerous grammatical and/or spelling errors
<b>Comprehension</b>	Clearly comprehends the assignment and gives original or creative response to task set	Comprehends the assignment and gives a critical response to task but does not involve their own interpretation	Comprehends the assignment fairly well and gives an adequate response, but largely descriptive	Some comprehension of the assignment. There are some gaps in the response, but it is adequate	Does not comprehend what was required by the assignment and the response is inadequate. They do not address the task set.