



**MLA  
COLLEGE**

# MSc Project Handbook

2022/23

For students on the following programmes:

MLA713 MSc Advanced Hydrography for professionals

MLA714 MSc Advanced Meteorology for professionals

MLA715 MSc Advanced Navigation for professionals

MLA716 MSc Advanced Oceanography for professionals

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# 1. Introduction

Welcome to your MSc project module!

This handbook is your guide to successfully completing the module. **It is very important that you read this handbook in full before beginning your studies.** The following pages contain critical information on what is expected from you, the student, over the course of the next 12 months. Vital detail on the various assessment components, how you submit your work and in what format, important academic writing principles and how to remain in contact with your supervisory team can all be found within this handbook.

The MSc dissertation forms a significant part of the assessment for this module. You are encouraged to identify a suitable topic, explore ideas with your supervisory team and plan your work programme as early as possible. Successful completion of your dissertation is a key requirement of the award of your degree, a copy of which will be permanently stored in the University library for future reference, giving the opportunity for the next generation of students and industry professionals to use and potentially add to your research.

An important point to note from the outset is that whatever your entry route onto the programme, upon successful completion you will be awarded a Masters degree that comprises of 120 general credits and 60 credits for this module. **This means that the mark that you are awarded for this module will determine the final mark given for your Masters degree and any applicable classification (e.g. Pass, Merit or Distinction).**

## 2. Aims and Learning Outcomes

The aims of this module are: To undertake a programme of advanced scholarship in advanced Hydrography. Plan, execute and report on a programme of research appropriate to *your* aspirations and your current or chosen field of work within the maritime sphere.

### **The Learning Outcomes are to:**

1. Plan and manage a self-directed period of higher-level study
2. Demonstrate an ability to critically analyse current research and advanced scholarship in the topic of choice
3. Gather, analyse and evaluate relevant material using appropriate advanced methodological approaches
4. Communicate your work effectively and professionally to a specialist and non-specialist audience

## **3. Dissertation Subject Selection**

Students are encouraged to devise their own subject for investigation, where possible. This could be closely associated with industry sponsors, or a relevant research project in the University or elsewhere. The choice of topic is one of the most critical stages of your dissertation: it is very difficult to produce a good dissertation out of a poor topic. If you are struggling to identify your own topic area, then please discuss this with your supervisory team at an early stage, and they can certainly assist you in developing an interesting subject for investigation.

Whatever the subject, it should involve a measure of first hand research; it should not be merely a literature review. This does not mean that you must try to do something never attempted before. Scholarship is advanced by critically evaluating and building upon the work of others, and you should show an appreciation of this when you consider background material relevant to your topic.

Although your topic should be clear and specific, it is often best to start with your broad area of interest and then focus down to a precise research question, or questions, that will form the core of your work. The question or problem you decide on must also be practicable. Make sure that the data you require to address your chosen topic are available. If you intend to generate your own data (e.g. in the laboratory) make sure

you have access to the necessary facilities and/or technical support, and ensure that sufficient data can be obtained within the time available.

Choosing where to work is also important. For many students, local-based projects will prove most practicable. Some students may, however, want to work abroad or at other locations. If you are considering a project abroad, you are advised to begin consulting with your supervisory team at the earliest possible stage. Health and Safety issues relating to your work will require careful consideration on your part.

While some students will want to devise their own project, many others will undertake a project defined by someone else, possibly in association with an employer or an external agency. Working on a project relevant to a company or agency can be very rewarding. You may be able to gain access to data or to sites that would otherwise be inaccessible and someone (other than your examiners) will be interested in your results. Should you decide to undertake a listed project, especially one with an outside agency, it is important to remember that:

- The project must be appropriate to your Masters degree
- The project should be your own work, not that of someone else
- You may be required to write a report for the project sponsor, and provide them with a copy of your dissertation

## 4. The Academic Literature

Although the problem that you have decided upon may be clear and precise, your work must not exist in isolation. Your dissertation is likely to benefit greatly by being related to broader issues. **It is therefore essential that you are aware of, and that you show that you are aware of, the wider literature.** The best way you can do this is to demonstrate that you understand the links between your study and the wider context in which it sits. Reading widely on a general

question is also a good way of stimulating your ideas about a more specific research question. **It is expected that at the end of the dissertation you will need to evaluate your conclusions in the light of existing literature.** However, do not review literature that is irrelevant to your topic and avoid reviewing 'obvious' material that can be found in any undergraduate textbook.

## Referencing

Please read thoroughly the guides 'Why' and 'How to' reference, which are found in the study help section of the TLP. This will give you all the information you need about appropriately referencing the literature in accordance with the Harvard System, which is the required format for your dissertation; however, a few short examples are reproduced here for convenience and clarity:

The preferred method of referring to other papers is by surname and date, e.g.

'Osborne and Greenwood (1992) show that...' or

'... when the beach has a bar (Osborne and Greenwood, 1992).'

The first surname and 'et al' are usual when there are more than two authors.

**To avoid any suggestions of plagiarism, make sure that citations from the works of others are clearly differentiated from your own text, by citing the source.** Cited items must appear in the reference list. Statements derived from the work of others must be clearly identified and distinguished from your own ideas, either by reference to a published paper or, in some cases, by adding to the text a statement like 'J.Bloggs - personal communication'.

Your references must be listed in full and in alphabetical order at the end of your dissertation. All journal and book references should include the names and initials of all authors and the year of publication or production. Journal articles must include the full title of the article, and the full name of the journal together with the volume and page numbers. Book references must include the full title of the book, the publisher, the place of publication, and – where appropriate – the number of the edition.

Figures and tables should generally appear in the text close to the location where they are first cited. Graph axes must be carefully labelled, and each figure should have a clear caption explaining any symbols used. Maps and diagrams should normally be drawn using graphic packages such as Corel Draw. Photographic reproductions or extracts of published maps may be included, but remember to acknowledge the source of the map in a caption or footnote. Wherever possible, drawings should fit on A4 size pages, although fold-out maps or diagrams may be used if necessary. Computer-produced graphics should be printed or mounted on paper suitable for binding.

### ***List of References***

This must be a complete list of all published material cited. The following are examples of the preferred format:

#### **Papers**

Osborne, P. D. and Greenwood, B. 1992. Frequency dependent cross-shore suspended sediment transport. *Marine Geology*, 106, 1-24.

#### **Books**

Watts, S. (ed.) 1996. *Essential Environmental Science methods and techniques*. Routledge, London

#### **Chapters in books**

Dearing, J. 1994. Reconstructing the history of soil erosion. In Roberts, N. (ed.) *The changing global environment*. Blackwell, Oxford, pp.242-261.

#### **Conference Proceedings**

Noda, H. 1968. A study of mass transport in boundary layers in standing waves. *Proceedings of the 11th International Conference on Coastal Engineering*, ASCE, New York, 485-504.

#### **Reports, etc.**

Ebersole, B. A. and Hughes, S. 1987. Duck85 photopole experiment. US Army Waterways Experimental Station, miscellaneous paper CERC-87-18, Vicksburg, MS, USA

#### **Electronic sources**

NOAA National Climatic Data Center, 2009. NOAA Paleoclimatology. Available from <http://www.ncdc.noaa.gov/paleo/paleo.html> [accessed 15 October 2011]

## 5. Data Collection

One outcome of your completed research project proposal should be a research methodology appropriate for the problem under investigation. The techniques you employ will determine the sort of data that you collect, and the answers you find will depend on the research philosophy you adopt. It is wise not to be over-ambitious in the number of different analytical tools you use; learning how to use them usually takes longer than you think. Preferably the techniques you use should be ones of which you already have some knowledge or background, through any taught element of your Masters programme, or prior education or experience. If, for example, you want to employ remote sensing techniques in your dissertation study, you should have some demonstrable experience or knowledge of where or how the principles and practice of remote sensing are outlined. You should not expect academic or other staff to spend time laying on special one-to-one practical tutorials with you, particularly as your supervisory team are likely to be displaced from you geographically.

When planning your data collection, it is essential that you give prior consideration to:

- Resource implications
- Safety considerations
- Any ethical issues (e.g. this is important when collecting information from or interacting with human participants. See section on this below)

For each of these you are required to complete and have approved the necessary forms (e.g. risk assessment for safety). All of the necessary forms are located on the TLP. **Completion of these is a required component of your project proposal, and you will not be permitted to proceed with data**

**collection unless these have been approved and deemed valid by your supervisory team.**

You should note that funds to support field and laboratory work are **not available from MLA College or Plymouth University**, and you will therefore need to scale your plans for collecting data appropriately.

A pilot study, whether in the laboratory or in the field, can be invaluable in assessing the feasibility of your planned data collection, and help in identifying and ironing out practical problems. How many field measurements can, or should, be collected? How many questionnaires can be completed in the time available, and how many/what questions can reasonably be asked? Including results of a pilot study in your dissertation write-up is often a good way of demonstrating that you have thought carefully about your research process. A pilot study is often best carried out in advance of the main period of data collection, although there may be exceptions (e.g. environmental conditions may not be appropriate). In the light of your pilot study, you may need to modify your original planned research design and methodology. You should consult with your supervisory team after a pilot study is complete, and before you embark on the main phase of data collection.

If your study involves fieldwork (i.e. it is not a desk-study), then careful prior planning is essential. You may want to make a preliminary reconnaissance visit in order to get a “feel” for your study area. It is also likely that you will need to organise permission to obtain access to sites (e.g. from landowners or local authorities) or to carry out work, and this should be sought well in advance. Success of fieldwork often depends on you adopting a professional, helpful and patient approach to those people with whom you will have contact. Your main phase of data collection (laboratory and field work) should be completed by the end of week 39, and in most cases well before this.

### ***Research Ethics***

It is the duty of all researchers to consider the ethical implications of their work. Often, there are none, but it is still important that you engage with your

supervisor to talk through your methodology, and attempt to discover whether further scrutiny is required, through a process called Ethical Approval.

As a rule of thumb, any research that involves testing, observing, asking questions of, and collecting personal information about human participants (that might be you, work colleagues, individuals within your and other sectors) will require ethical approval. Approval is often granted; however, common examples of projects that may not receive approval include those that intend to work with vulnerable adults or minors, or projects where the student cannot clearly demonstrate that no harm will occur to participants of the study, or their wider protection cannot be guaranteed. As an example, the act of asking people about their mental health status may seem an innocent enough question, but by doing so you may find yourself compromised and the participant significantly upset by the line of questioning. To be clear, this does not mean such tasks cannot be achieved, just that full ethical approval will be required (which will include you outlining your safeguarding measures), and the MLA College Ethics Committee reserve the right to refuse your idea on these grounds.

Please be aware that the involvement of human participants is not the only way that ethical issues can arise. The use of classified or commercially sensitive information pushes the bounds between unethical and illegal behaviour. Work that might have unconsidered environmental impact is unethical. Work that might have an unconsidered impact upon cultural heritage is viewed as unethical. Thus, it is not as simple as negating the participation of people in your work.

Undertaking your project without considering the ethical implications of your work, not seeking ethical approval where it is required, or continuing to work without or beyond the conditions of approval is in itself unethical. **We cannot accept such work for assessment and ignorance is no defence.** Therefore, it is crucial that you engage with this issue BEFORE you start any research work and await any decisions that may be forthcoming before continuing with your Project/Thesis. Postdating ethical approval or arranging ethics agreements after the work has been completed is unacceptable. In other words, not producing

evidence that you have thought about ethics, and agreed your conclusions with a supervisor, is an automatic failure of the module.

Ethical approval forms can be found on the TLP. The form contains a declaration asking you to confirm you have read the MLA College Ethics Policy and requires you to state whether your research project will include aspects likely to require ethical approval. Please review this form carefully and complete it as instructed. Your supervisor will be able to guide you as necessary. Completed forms must be submitted to the MLA College Ethics Committee as soon as possible (via the class area on Turnitin, see below), **but by no later than the end of Week 8.**

## 6. Data Analysis

You should consider carefully the nature and quantity of your results before embarking on any further analysis of them. There is no merit on using a particular technique (e.g. multivariate statistics) if the data do not warrant it. On the other hand, a wholly descriptive text has little value.

If your dissertation involves a large amount of computer-based work, make sure in advance that the appropriate software is available and that there is sufficient time for your work on the system. Try to become familiar with system manuals and help guides before asking questions of IT technical support staff or your supervisory team. Document your data files carefully and manage your file store by deleting unwanted files. **Take regular back-ups of your data**, remembering that protecting against computer failure or loss of files is your responsibility and does not count in any Extenuating Circumstances claim.

**Data analysis and presentation can take more time than anticipated, and deficiencies with this aspect of project work are one of the most common failings of dissertation studies.** A frequent criticism of examiners is that statistical analyses, in particular, are inappropriate or wrongly applied. It is vital that you allow sufficient time for data analysis.

## 7. Writing and Data Presentation

The research problem or question you initially identified should provide the necessary focus for the subsequent synthesis and writing up of your information and ideas. Do not let your reading and the other material you have gathered dominate you! If some of your material proves not to be relevant to the question under study, do not be afraid to leave it out. Equally do not be afraid to include results which do not meet your expected outcome; refuted hypotheses may be even more valuable than confirmed ones.

Writing should not be thought of as a separate stage that comes at the end of the research process. Before you put together a first draft, you should already have written your literature review and methodology chapters. Writing inevitably takes longer than you think, so allow plenty of time. **In particular, if you would like to obtain general comments from your supervisory team on your first draft, you must complete this well in advance (e.g. 6 weeks before the final submission date).** Of course, such a draft need not include conclusions or final, best-quality graphics. You should not expect your supervisory team to comment on final drafts or on drafts submitted very close to the final submission deadline. Finally, note that your work should be your own and not a collaborative effort between you and the supervisory team. As such, your supervisors will not be able to comment on successive or iterative drafts.

## 8. Project Assessment

There are multiple assessed components to this module, split into what is termed formative and summative. Formative assessment comprises of tasks and activities that are designed to increase your skills and understanding in a specific area (e.g. academic writing practice), but do not contribute to your final mark. Summative assessment comprises specific tasks that do contribute to your final mark.

This Masters project module has three summative assessed components, each due at separate intervals. The table below summarises the summative requirement and identifies the relevant marks awarded for each component.

<b>MSc Project Assessed Components</b>				
	<b>Component</b>	<b>Suggested word count</b>	<b>Allocated marks (%)</b>	<b>Deadline</b>
<b>1</b>	Forum task and peer-review	c.300*	10	Weeks 4-10
<b>2</b>	Dissertation Thesis	c.12,000*	80	End of week 49
<b>3</b>	Project presentation	-	10	During weeks 50-52**
<b>Totals</b>		<b>c.12,300</b>	<b>100</b>	

\* see the text description of each component for further detail

\*\* scheduling of the presentation will require coordination between the student and supervisory team. **You must be available to schedule the presentation within this window. Those unable to schedule the presentation must seek an extension through the Extenuating Circumstances (ECs) process.** Presentations will be delivered in most cases via Teams/Zoom or other means of video conferencing. Detailed instructions and guidance will follow closer to the presentation deadline.

## 8.1 Formative assessment tasks throughout the first 16 weeks

There are several additional formative tasks that are required during the first 16 weeks which are detailed in the schedule of tasks table below and will be discussed further by your tutor. At regular intervals throughout the first 16 weeks, you are required to submit these formative assessment tasks. **You will submit these via Turnitin (see section 11)**, where your tutor will review what you have written and use the tasks as a basis for their guidance and advice during your meetings. The tasks are designed to give you practice in important aspects of studying this module, such as academic writing, reading and research. Further support on each of these aspects is contained in the study help section of the TLP. Look at these now and familiarise yourself with all of

the resources on offer. Pay particular attention to the guides on referencing, report and essay writing and critical thinking. **You must also make sure that you watch the lectures on research skills which offer invaluable advice to students returning to Higher Education following a prolonged period in industry.**

*Schedule of key tasks for the module*

<b>Module week</b>	<b>Task</b>	<b>Notes</b>
1-2	Familiarise with TLP and make contact with supervisory team. Initial discussions with first supervisor and subject matter expert.	Instructions and support for this issued via email.
3	Submit 200 word plan of project to supervisor. Must include research question(s).	Discuss expectation and scope with supervisor.
4	Revised plan to be submitted to discussion forum for peer review during weeks 4-10.	Abstract may be revised following discussions with supervisor.
<b>5</b>	<b>Academic writing skills session 1</b>	<b>A live session but will be recorded and made available via the forum.</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Academic writing skills session 2</b>	<b>A live session but will be recorded and made available via the forum.</b>
7	Submit annotated bibliography of key resources to Turnitin (see guide on TLP).	Demonstrate engagement with the Academic literature in this task.
8	Submit Ethical Approval form to Ethics Committee (if applicable).	Form found on the TLP. Submit to the Turnitin class.
9	Submit short literature review of key resources to Turnitin. Revised plan including aim & objectives to supervisor.	Further opportunity to demonstrate engagement with the Academic literature in this task.
10	Submit final version of plan to Turnitin.	Feedback and marks for the forum task will be made available on Turnitin by the date indicated
16	Submit project proposal in format consistent with instructions set out in section 8.2.	Include risk assessment and COSHH forms if applicable
20	Feedback received on project proposal	Posted on Turnitin by the date indicated
21-39	Experimental/data collection and analysis phase	Critical to remain in close contact with supervisory team throughout
<b>32</b>	<b>Preliminary findings/progress check</b>	<b>Book a meeting with your tutor to discuss preliminary findings</b>
49	Submission of thesis	Calendar date on Turnitin
50-52	Presentation of main findings	Delivered to supervisory team via video conferencing

## 8.2 Forum task and project proposal guidance

### **Forum task**

There are some common issues when undertaking projects by distance learning.

Firstly, many students struggle to formulate the research questions. Along with the advice given in this handbook, your supervisors will stress the importance of developing a good research question, or questions, and the role they play in shaping the entire project. Ultimately, there is no substitute to delving into the literature and uncovering gaps in the knowledge (or building upon existing knowledge) of the subject that interests you, in order to construct a project that is successful. Secondly, often students find it challenging to transition between previous *taught* modules, or their other experiences in education or the workplace, and this *project* module - where it is intended that you take ownership of your research autonomously and independently; however, a sense of isolation might therefore result. The objective of this task is to address these issues and encourage discussion and interaction on the College forum. Not interacting with colleagues on the forum is potentially a missed opportunity to increase the sense of community amongst the group by sharing your experiences. **You should also use the comments and advice gained from your peers to help improve your project proposal (see next section).**

You should submit a new post on the forum (<https://www.mla.ac.uk/forum>) **by the end of week 4 (note: advise your supervisor immediately if you are unable to meet this deadline)**, that includes the title of your project and also a short written plan (e.g. 250-300 words) that describes it. In the plan, you should try to answer the following questions:

- What is the problem under study? Are there other relevant solutions, and what do they fail to address (i.e. the motivation to study this problem)?
- What are your proposed Research Questions?
- What is your proposed approach to the problem under study?
- How do you plan to methodologically approach the collection of data?
- What are the expected results and contributions of your project?

Also, please peer review the plans of your fellow students. **It is expected that you will participate actively in the posts made by your peers, and contribute to the discussions of at least two of your colleague's plans during weeks 4-10.** When submitting a response to one of the plans, please prioritise those who have not received responses from at least two other colleagues in the course. In this way, we want to have equality of opportunity for the discussion of all posts. Your peer-review of a post should go further than saying that a given project sounds interesting. Try to engage with the subject, and offer advice or ask meaningful questions about what is being suggested. Positive criticism is essential, but please keep any comments respectful and constructive. The exercise will hopefully help your project to move beyond answering 'what?' type questions, towards answering 'so-what?'

### ***Project proposal***

The precise format of your Project Proposal will be determined by the conversations you have with your supervisory team. As a minimum, you should create a professional document which includes the following:

- (i) The title of your project, followed by an introduction that sets the scene and includes **the clearly stated aims and objectives of your proposed project**
- (ii) A short literature review which supports your project
- (iii) A proposed fieldwork/data collection plan. This should incorporate your knowledge of project management and project leadership gained from watching the lectures on the TLP
- (iv) All required Health and Safety documents (e.g. risk assessment, COSHH forms and evidence of ethical approval if required)

### ***Project title***

The title should be a statement that concisely summarises the project content and identifies the main purpose. Avoid journalistic statements; simple descriptions of the project intentions are fine, though be as concise as possible. You are advised to research appropriate title styles by reviewing previous Masters projects held in the University library (available by login to your student account at: <https://pearl.plymouth.ac.uk/handle/10026.1/5563>).

### ***Aim and Objectives***

The project proposal should include a clear and concise summary of your intended activities. **Within this must be both the proposed aim and objectives of the project, clearly set out and identified.** The aim and objectives will highlight the rationale of the project, and what will be achieved and reported on in the final written thesis.

### ***Literature review***

The importance of the literature to this project module is given prominence in section 4. If you have not done so already, please read this section carefully.

It is important to note that the purpose of this section is to review the current literature on a selected topic. You are expected to describe the major trends in a selected area, elaborate on several important solutions to past challenges, and identify the major challenges to be addressed in the future. When describing the challenges that researchers and practitioners will face, you need to critically analyse the current theories, processes, and methodologies, and identify promising directions that future research could take.

The literature review will form a key part of your final thesis (see the next section), and set the rest of your project in context with the work that precedes it; **however, it will likely be considerably modified from the version included with the proposal to when it is incorporated into the Thesis proper.**

There is no upper limit to the number of articles from the literature you choose to review. Your supervisory team can advise you of course, although the final decision is yours and it is recommended that you make full use of the university library facilities. **To help you, there are very many past MSc theses available for you to browse in electronic format in the library, all of which are accessible remotely online (see above).**

### ***Fieldwork and data collection plan***

The question or problem you decide on must be practicable within the limitations of time, finances, equipment and support that you have available. Make sure that the data you require to address your chosen topic are available, or that *you* can collect the data you require. Remember that you do not have to try something never attempted before. Scholarship is advanced by critically evaluating and building upon the work of others, and you should show an appreciation of this when you consider background material relevant to your topic during the literature review.

You must include a proposed time line, and typically this will be in the form a Gantt chart. Time-management will be key to the successful completion of your project. Your plan to acquire data must be realistic and include contingency periods within the time line to account for unexpected events.

### ***Health and Safety documentation***

If engaging in field work, you must include a risk assessment of your intended field work, along with ethical approval and control of substances hazardous to health (COSHH) forms where necessary. It is expected that you will discuss the need for each of these forms with your supervisory team; **however, when engaging in fieldwork the completion of the risk assessment form is mandatory, and you will not be permitted to proceed if you fail to submit it.** A blank copy of each form is available on the TLP.

## 8.3 The MSc Project dissertation

The suggested word count for the dissertation is not supposed to be a target! Projects in science and engineering can rarely be constrained to fixed limits; it is uncommon to expect a thorough and robust explanation of your activities in response. There are exceptions to this, for example when writing articles for certain journal publications; however, this is not the goal of the dissertation. Further, the range of potential projects is large. A project that focused on modelling a physical process may require fewer words to explain than would a

complex set of field activities and subsequent analysis. Ultimately, you can expect to be guided on this by your supervisory team, who will be content to point out the areas that require further explanation, and the areas where you are not being sufficiently concise.

The dissertation itself must be word processed, written with 1.5 line spacing (i.e. as the text appears in this document). The normal typeface for the body of the report is Arial 12 points and headings should be 14 point bold. Page numbering should be located bottom centre, and include pages of figures, tables, etc. It is conventional to number the 'prelims' or 'preamble' (i.e. everything from the title page through to the acknowledgements) with lower case Roman numerals. All subsequent pages are then numbered with Arabic numerals, starting with 1.

Your work will be assessed by your supervisory team and a moderator. It is permissible to send the digital copy of your project via WeTransfer in a zipped file, though note that the contents may exceed the permissible free limit. The disk or zipped file should contain the final thesis, the essential data and code files for the project (please consult your supervisor on this). The second page of the PDF copy of your dissertation (following the cover page) must contain the following licence statement:

### ***Masters Dissertation licence***

*This material has been deposited in the Plymouth University Learning & Teaching repository under the terms of the student contract between the students and the Faculty of Science & Technology. The material may be used for internal use only to support learning and teaching. Materials will not be published outside of the University and any breaches of this licence will be dealt with following the appropriate University policies.*

Supervisors might want to suggest minor changes to the dissertation before it is submitted to the library. Please let your advisor know how you can be contacted after the submission date.

As mentioned above, the appropriate length of the dissertation depends very much on the nature of the work involved (e.g. theoretical/practical, the number of publications on the project subject, the number of figures and other illustrations, the need for appendices etc.). **It is far more important that the dissertation contains a well-rounded piece of work than being of any particular length.**

### ***Dissertation Thesis structure***

- Title page: See Appendix 3.
- Copyright statement: The following copyright statement should be included in the dissertation:

*This copy of the thesis has been supplied on condition that anyone who consults it is understood to recognise that its copyright rests with the author and that no quotation from the thesis and no information derived from it may be published without the author's prior written consent.*

- Abstract: The title of the thesis and the author's name should be followed by a synopsis of the thesis, giving the nature and scope of the work done and a summary of the results and conclusions.
- List of Contents: A list, in sequence and with page numbers, of all subdivisions of the thesis, including appendices and lists of references.
- List of Tables, Figures: to follow the list of contents.
- List of Symbols: may be included where appropriate, in alphabetical order.
- Acknowledgements: To include thanks for any support, whether financially, through discussions or through direct help. In some cases, it may be appropriate to clarify use of datasets that have not been collected by the student.

### ***Chapters or Sections of the dissertation***

The internal structure of the dissertation may vary slightly from project to project, but should follow reasonably closely the traditional research report format, as follows:

- **Introduction:** An outline of the rationale and context of your work. This should include a statement of the central question to be answered or hypothesis to be tested with a clear statement of the aims and objectives of the project. You might also include a brief description of the structure of the dissertation.
- **Review:** A critical review of relevant literature that justifies the aims, theory and methods used in your work. You should identify previous important findings and highlight any apparent contradictions.
- **Method:** A description of the design of any experiments, tests or procedures and an outline of any theory or analyses that you develop or adopt.
- **Results:** Clear presentation of the results of your work. Graphs are generally much clearer than tables, but make sure they are properly labelled and clearly described. Although sometimes difficult to separate, here you should describe your results but not interpret them; (e.g. “Loss-on-ignition data show an upward trend through time”). It will pay to give this careful thought before starting to write.
- **Discussion:** Discussion of your results, trying to make sense of your results and say what you think they mean (e.g. “The upward trend in loss-on-ignition data shows increasing primary productivity through time”). If you have multiple data sets, this is normally the best place to compare and report statistical analysis of relationships between them. Compare what you found with reference to the published work of others and explain the implications your findings have on the knowledge of your subject area. You should be constructively self-critical.

- **Conclusion:** Synthesis of the main findings, your methods and practical procedures addressing the aims of the project. Highlight any future work you suggest and identify any weaknesses in your approach.
- **List of References:** Comprehensive, properly referenced list of evidence drawn from literature, all of which must have been referred to within the main body of the dissertation (see Section 9).

**Appendices:** Surplus results, theory, drawings or other detailed information not essential to your arguments, but nonetheless useful to help support your work or enable others to take the work further.

The final dissertation is assessed for:

- Content and Structure
- Methodology, data collection and interpretation
- Literature
- Presentation

Further guidelines for grades awarded are given in Appendix 2: Guidelines for assessment of Masters' dissertations.

## 9. Supervision

Each student will be guided by a supervisory team, typically consisting of two experienced academics. In the case of an industrially based dissertation, one of the supervisory team may be from industry. **Students should meet or have email contact with their supervisors approximately once a fortnight. Note that the responsibility for regular contact lies with you, the student.** Any communications problems should be notified to the Module Leader or Student Support Officer ([student.support@mla.ac.uk](mailto:student.support@mla.ac.uk)).

## 10. Time management throughout the project

Time management is crucial to the successful completion of this module. It is one of the assessed skills. The process starts almost immediately when you begin to identify broad project areas in which you may be interested. Whilst you have a period of 12 months to complete the project module, you need to balance your professional and personal schedules across that time in order to stay focused on what is a demanding piece of work.

**Regular contact with your supervisory team is essential\***. Their advice will help you to modify your planned activities where necessary, to keep you on track and be confident that you will succeed. Making use of tools such as Gantt charts are advised, where you can more easily spot times where personal and professional needs will conflict with the needs of the project. You are also encouraged to discuss with your supervisory team their vacation arrangements, and the impact this might have on your meeting and communicating with them.

***\*note: in the event of repeated lack of engagement and/or contact with your supervisor at any point during the module, you are at risk of having your studies suspended and/or being withdrawn from the programme***

## 11. Submission of coursework, Turnitin and plagiarism

Submission of your written work will be via the online software Turnitin. Read the following steps and take action as appropriate:

1. You will receive an emailed invite to the module or class area from Turnitin. For new or first-time users, you may have to create an account but don't worry - full instructions will be provided on the emailed invitation. **Note: The invitation will be issued to your Plymouth University email account – Check this at regular intervals not only for the purpose of setting up access to Turnitin but throughout the project!**
2. The invite from Turnitin contains a link to the assessment submission section for this module. You will need to upload your documents following the instructions contained in this guide: [Turnitin quick start guide](#)

3. Should you have any difficulty in accessing Turnitin, please speak to your supervisory team without delay
4. Please read Plymouth University's plagiarism policy (<https://bit.ly/2CMKh1F>). If you are in any doubt as to what plagiarism means or consists of, contact your tutor immediately.
5. Please also watch the following videos (also available on the TLP) that have been produced specifically to help you understand plagiarism, and importantly, how to use Turnitin to submit your coursework (see below): [Plagiarism video tutorials](#)

**Please note that your assessment may be marked and/or moderated by a member of the academic teaching team other than your first supervisor/tutor. The marks awarded during your study of this module are provisional and will be confirmed at the next MLA College/Plymouth University Subject Assessment Panel and Award Assessment Board.**

***What happens if students are unable to meet the submission deadline?***

Many students discover that circumstances beyond their control prevent them from successfully studying. If you find yourself in this position, please get in touch with your supervisory team immediately. Alternatively, please contact the Student Support Officer ([student.support@mla.ac.uk](mailto:student.support@mla.ac.uk)) for advice and guidance.

Students who are unable to submit coursework on time are able to apply for an extension to the submission deadline of 10 working days through the Extenuating Circumstances (ECs) process. The ECs form, along with further guidance, can be found on the TLP. Students still unable to submit following the extended deadline, may then make a second application (as long as the circumstances that led to the successful application for ECs persist). If successful, this application will not lead to a further immediate extension, but will likely allow you to continue working on your thesis in what is called a referral period, following confirmation of your circumstances at the next meeting of the University Subject Assessment Panel and Award Assessment Board. If you find that you in this position, please get in touch with your supervisory team at the earliest opportunity.

Students on postgraduate modules are permitted to have two attempts at passing the module. Marks are capped at 50% for all students passing at the second attempt. Students unable to submit as a consequence of valid ECs, as described in the paragraph above, will likely have their first attempt preserved when attempting to complete their work in the referral period. Referral periods are normally fixed at 12 weeks, which means that students will be given a revised submission date of 12 weeks from the commencement of the referral period.

## **Appendix 1 - Guidelines for Assessment of Masters Dissertations\***

### **Distinction (≥ 70%)**

The dissertation should display a complete and thorough understanding of the conceptual and practical issues surrounding the chosen topic. The objectives and methodology should be clearly stated and the experimental strategy well-conceived. There should be evidence of independent work and thought in the form of some degree of originality in the presentation and discussion of the results. The report should be well structured and presented, with a clear line of argument and the quality of the analysis should be excellent and the material may be potentially publishable. The study should demonstrate a clear, succinct and accurate communication of ideas, arguments and information, and achieve a high standard of English and presentation.

For marks of 80% or above, in addition to these criteria, the dissertation should demonstrate a greater depth of argument and interpretation, and the literature review should show critical skills as well as breadth of knowledge. There should be evidence of a significant amount of independent work, critical thought and a degree of originality and initiative.

### **Pass (50-69%)**

The dissertation should show a satisfactory or better understanding of the conceptual issues underlying the research topic, as evidenced by an up to date literature review. The candidate will have identified appropriate research techniques and will have shown an aptitude for experimental design. The data gathering should be comprehensive, and the quality of the data synthesis should be sound. The arguments and critical analysis concerning the outcomes of the research should be structured in a logical way and there should be evidence of some original work. The aims and scope of the study should be clearly defined. Both the writing and presentation of the dissertation should be at least adequate.

**Fail (below 50%)**

The dissertation will display an inadequate understanding of the chosen subject area and/or the text will have no clear structure. The data gathering may be weak and its analysis poor or incomplete. There may be no clear definition of aims and scope, and a lack of clear focus. The study may fail to demonstrate an awareness of the relevant literature which sets the wider context for the study. The standard of presentation and written English may be inadequate.

\* See also the standard marking criteria in appendix 4

## Appendix 2 – Example Thesis title page

### MODELLING THE IMPACT OF BIOFOULING ON THE HYDRODYNAMIC PERFORMANCE OF MONOHULLED PLEASURE CRAFT

by

Iam A. Student

Thesis submitted to MLA College in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the  
degree of

**(insert relevant course name)**

*[e.g. MSc Advanced Hydrography for Professionals]*

**MLA College  
with Plymouth University**

in collaboration with  
**JC Field Research Facility, Someplace, Somecountry**  
*(where appropriate)*

September 2020

**Student declaration:** *I have read the guidance on Academic dishonesty in the student handbook and watched the tutorials on plagiarism and how to use Turnitin. I understand that plagiarism is an Academic Offence. I declare this work to be my own original effort and not the work of others. It has not been previously submitted for another assessment. I have credited all sources of information and ideas, where appropriate, by use of citation.*

Signed (Typing your name is acceptable):

Date:

### Appendix 3 – Marking template\*

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Comments from marker</b>
Content	
Understanding and Evaluation	
Originality/ Independent Thinking	
Data Analysis and Interpretation	
Use of Literature	
General Communication Skills	
Independence and Use of Support	

*\*note: markers are encouraged to complete their review of student work by using this template. Comments written here are then transferred to Turnitin and made available to students on the date published on the Turnitin class*

## Appendix 4: MLA College Dissertation and Presentation Marking Criteria

Criteria	A	B	C	D	E	F
<b>Content</b>	Fully addresses the assessment brief using all relevant information with few errors	Addresses the assessment brief with most facts relevant and no significant errors	Addresses the assessment brief using core information but some gaps in subject knowledge	Addresses the assessment brief but containing a minimal amount of the required material	A marginal fail, does not contain enough relevant information to address brief and/or contains multiple errors	Clear fail that does not address assessment brief, with totally inadequate or irrelevant information
<b>Understanding and Evaluation</b>	Full understanding of topic within wider context. Full critical evaluation with arguments supported by evidence and examples.	Substantial understanding demonstrated. Critical evaluation present with arguments supported by evidence.	Adequate understanding demonstrated although evaluation may be limited with restricted use of evidence	Enough understanding demonstrated but with minimal evaluation and/or evidence offered	Marginal understanding demonstrated that lacks evaluation and evidence	A concerning lack of understanding and evaluation present.
<b>Originality/ Independent Thinking</b>	Evidence of considerable insight and independent thinking e.g. by including own views; making connections with other subject areas etc.	Substantially correct independent thinking with links to other areas/studies.	Some individuality within the assessment but not always fully explored	Own views minimally offered and/or displaying scientific naivety	Marginal originality and/or independent thought	No evidence of any valid independent thought
<b>Data Analysis and Interpretation</b>	An analytical/discriminating approach to the data, applying appropriate statistics. Comprehensive understanding of implications & limitations of the data	A sound approach to data analysis, applying valid statistical tests. Good understanding of data and associated limitations	Suitable approach to most aspects of data analysis. Valid interpretation but gaps evident	Data analysis attempted but limited, including weak interpretation	Marginal or insufficient data analysis and interpretation	No, or wholly inappropriate, data analysis and interpretation
<b>Use of Literature</b>	Evidence of consulting wide range of valid sources of information, especially primary literature. Uses findings to support facts and arguments. Appropriately references sources within the text and in the reference list	Evidence of consulting a range of literature to support facts and statements. Mostly cites references sources in correct format within the text and in the reference list	Evidence of consulting a limited range of literature, often with a reliance on textbook sources. References in text or list may contain errors	Some reference to literature evident but statements not well-supported. References often incorrectly cited and/or listed	Marginal reference to literature with little attempt to incorporate references into work and/or incorrectly cited.	No, or totally inappropriate reference to literature
<b>General Communication Skills</b>	Excellent overall standard of presentation, exhibiting a high standard of English and clarity of expression. Excellent layout and structure of material. Legible handwriting or appropriate use of fonts. Highly effective use of relevant visual material.	High standard of presentation, exhibiting a good standard of English and clarity of expression. Good layout and structure of material. Legible handwriting and use of fonts. Good use of relevant visual material.	Adequate standard of presentation, using acceptable standards of English. Some attention to layout, structure and formatting may be needed. Visual material may need some attention.	Low standard of presentation with grammatical errors. Layout and structure may reduce impact and communication. Use of visual material not well-incorporated	Marginal standard of presentation. Poor use of English with clumsy structure. Handwriting may not be legible and/or inappropriate use of fonts. Visual material typically not relevant.	Totally unacceptable standard of presentation with concerning use of English. No, or totally inappropriate, use of visual material.

<p><b>Independence and Use of Support</b></p>	<p>Completely self-motivated; works independently or in collaboration with others where relevant. Seeks appropriate support as necessary. Formulates problem and relevant questions prior to seeking advice. Is meticulous in acknowledging support and contribution of others.</p>	<p>Mostly self-motivated and able to work well alone or in team. Seeks appropriate support as necessary. Acknowledges support and contribution of others.</p>	<p>Able to work independently or in a team but may not always access enough support where necessary</p>	<p>Partly relies on others for motivation or to ensure progress and may be reluctant to seek necessary help. Weak team member. Does not always acknowledge sources of support.</p>	<p>Depends on others for motivation or fails to seek necessary advice. Fails to work as member of a team. Work may be highly derivative and/or support not acknowledged.</p>	<p>Fails to start or progress with tasks. Does not seek and/or use help. Makes no contribution as member of a team. Does not acknowledge support and/or plagiarises.</p>
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**Appendix 5: Example Module Record (applies to all MSc programmes)**  
**SECTION A: DEFINITIVE MODULE RECORD.** *Proposed changes must be submitted via Faculty Quality Procedures for approval and issue of new module code.*

<b>MODULE CODE: MLA714</b>	<b>MODULE TITLE: Research project (Advanced Meteorology for Professionals)</b>
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<b>CREDITS: 60</b>	<b>FHEQ Level: 7</b>	<b>JACS CODE: F761</b>
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<b>PRE-REQUISITES: None</b>	<b>CO-REQUISITES: None</b>	<b>COMPENSATABLE: No</b>
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**SHORT MODULE DESCRIPTOR:** *(max 425 characters)*  
 Students have the opportunity to research a topic or problem of interest in meteorology. Starting with a taught chapter on Advanced Research Methods, the module covers project planning and literature review, building the student's capability to undertake an in-depth investigation employing numerical, analytical and/or modelling of data. Collaboration with the student's employer is encouraged

<b>ELEMENTS OF ASSESSMENT Use HESA KIS definitions]</b>					
WRITTEN EXAMINATION		COURSEWORK		PRACTICAL	
<b>E1</b> (Examination)	%	<b>C1</b> (Coursework)	<b>90%</b>	<b>P1</b> (Practical)	<b>10%</b>
<b>E2</b> (Clinical Examination)	%	<b>A1</b> (Generic Assessment)	%		
<b>T1</b> (Test)	%				

**SUBJECT ASSESSMENT PANEL Group to which module should be linked:** MLA

**Professional body minimum pass mark requirement:** N/A

**MODULE AIMS:**  
 To undertake a programme of advanced scholarship. Plan, execute and report on a programme of research appropriate to the aspirations of the student and their current or chosen field of work within the maritime sphere.

**ASSESSED LEARNING OUTCOMES:** *(additional guidance below)*  
 At the end of the module the learner will be expected to be able to:

1. Plan and manage a self-directed period of higher level study
2. Demonstrate an ability to critically analyse current research and advanced scholarship in the topic of choice
3. Gather, analyse and evaluate relevant material using appropriate advanced methodological approaches
4. Communicate their work effectively and professionally to a specialist and non-specialist audience

<b>DATE OF APPROVAL: 02/2017</b>	<b>FACULTY/OFFICE:</b> Academic Partnerships
<b>DATE OF IMPLEMENTATION:</b> 09/2017	<b>SCHOOL/PARTNER:</b> MLA
<b>DATE(S) OF APPROVED CHANGE:</b>	<b>TERM/SEMESTER:</b> AY

## SECTION B: DETAILS OF TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT

Items in this section must be considered annually and amended as appropriate, in conjunction with the Module Review Process. Some parts of this page may be used in the KIS return and published on the extranet as a guide for prospective students. Further details for current students should be provided in module guidance notes.

ACADEMIC YEAR: 2019-20	NATIONAL COST CENTRE: 111
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MODULE LEADER: Dr Jaimie Cross	OTHER MODULE STAFF: Dr Carlos Martins
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### SUMMARY of MODULE CONTENT

Identification of a research topic. Planning and management of a research programme, meetings schedule. Critical review of literature. Collection of data and/ or development of theory. Analysis and conclusions. Communication of research rationale, methodology and conclusions

### SUMMARY OF TEACHING AND LEARNING [Use HESA KIS definitions]

Scheduled Activities	Hours	Comments/Additional Information
Lectures (online) to support scientific research project	10	Indicative figures for distance learning
Tutorials	10	
Seminars	5	
Guided independent study	575	
<b>Total</b>	<b>600</b>	(NB: 1 credit = 10 hours or learning; 10 credits = 100 hours, etc)

Category	Element	Component Name	Component Weighting	Comments include links to learning objectives
Coursework	C1	Forum Task, detailed research proposal, Final 12,000 dissertation	100%	ALO 1 and ALO 3  ALO1, 2  ALO2, 3, 4
	P1	Presentation	100%	ALO4

Updated by: Jaimie Cross	Date: 18/12/2019	Approved by: MLA	Date: 18/12/2019
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### Recommended Texts and Sources:

- Judith Bell (2014) *Doing Your Research Project: a Guide For First-Time Researchers* (6th Ed), McGraw-Hill, pp. 317
- Andrew Northedge (2005) *The good study guide*, Open University Press, pp. 383