



# Research Dissertation Handbook (C8824) 2016-2017

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## MODULE INFORMATION & REQUIREMENTS

The information in this final year project handbook applies to all students on the Psychology, Psychology with American Studies, Psychology with Cognitive Science, Psychology with Neuroscience and Psychology with Sociology and Experimental Psychology degree courses. Please read the information in this handbook carefully and keep it somewhere safe so that you can refer to it again at a later date.

**You should be aware that your Empirical project Dissertation (which is worth 45 credits) should notionally involve about 450 hours of work (including initial preparation and writing up as well as data-collection and processing). You must therefore leave adequate time for conducting this major piece of work (the most highly weighted in your degree) in Autumn and Spring terms. It is also important to appreciate that if you fail to submit a dissertation, you can only achieve a Pass classification and the British Psychological Society will not accredit your degree.**

The University of Sussex is committed to ensuring that all students are treated equitably and it has a long tradition of supporting students with a wide range of impairments. If you are disabled, or are a student with dyslexia or specific learning difficulties, then please discuss these, and any adjustments that you feel may be necessary, with your supervisor.

### Module aims

The School of Psychology has a diverse array of researchers engaging in many different types of research projects ranging from social, developmental, clinical, experimental, and cognitive psychology. Naturally, the empirical project will vary in nature from student-to-student because they reflect the rich diversity of the psychology faculty. Some projects may be partially designed from the beginning by your supervisor due to the nature of the research, whereas other projects may have to be designed by you from the ground up. Each type of project will have its unique rewards and challenges. However, the common thread amongst all projects is that you will gain first-hand experience of carrying out a piece of psychological research, under the supervision of a member of faculty. The project consolidates and extends the research skills acquired in your second year and involves you designing, conducting, analyzing and writing up a piece of empirical research. As part of this, you will experience and solve a range of the practical, methodological, conceptual and ethical problems that are typical within the research process. The successful completion of this project will undoubtedly result in you having a more analytical and critical mindset, and a professional working attitude, which are characteristics often sought after by employers.

### Objectives:

In carrying out their dissertation, students should:

- Utilize a range of library resources in researching the chosen project topic
- Participate constructively in supervision sessions
- Acquire practical and problem-solving skills through making research questions operational

- Extend skills of logic and critical argumentation by developing a well-reasoned research rationale
- Consider, and demonstrate awareness of, the ethical implications of the proposed research
- Collect original data (although secondary data analysis may be possible in some cases)
- Conduct appropriate analysis of the data
- Show an understanding of the research findings and be able to present them appropriately
- Give a short talk summarising the rationale and main findings of the project
- Produce a project report, modelled on a psychology journal article
- Demonstrate an appreciation of the limitations of their own research

## Research Supervision

All students are allocated a supervisor in the summer term of their second year. If you haven't already done so, you should contact your supervisor as soon as possible. The supervisory practices of different supervisors will vary considerably: you should therefore discuss this with your supervisor and be clear which particular mode of supervision s/he expects to employ with you and how meetings between you will be organised. Projects can also take a number of different forms: for example, they may involve quantitative or qualitative research, or both; students on some projects act very much in a research assistant role, or may be involved in partial replications of existing research; other students may be very much pursuing their own ideas on original studies of their own design. Some students work as part of a research team or group; others work more independently. Where you work as part of a group to collect data, it is essential that each member of the group generates their own research question(s) and hypotheses, conducts the data analyses, interpretation and project write up completely separately from the other group member(s). (i.e. You might collect the same data set, but everything else is generated/conducted independently.) This ensures that your final project thesis will be uniquely your own.

Over the course of your project you are entitled to appropriate tutorial time with your supervisor (a minimum of 6 hours, but usually substantially more than this). This is something that is flexible and that will vary depending on the nature of your project. How tutorial time is organized will be something your supervisor will discuss with you. Also, it would be very useful for you to take initiative and discuss some key project milestones in order to ensure that your project will progress in a timely manner (for more examples of the key milestones please see the section 'key deadlines' on page 10. This is a great opportunity for you to further learn time management and organizational skills.

Students may seek general guidance from their supervisors in planning many aspects of the project write-up - and are encouraged to do so. Also, your supervisor will be permitted to read and comment on a complete draft of the Methods and Results sections of your report and a statement of the aims/hypotheses (but NOT other sections). Comments may be received via email or in an individual or a group feedback session. This feedback is likely to make a significant difference to the quality of your report (and students in previous

years have found it extremely helpful). Once such feedback is received (e.g. by email or in a session), students should revise their reports accordingly. At this stage you should not ask for further feedback on your revised versions. Your supervisor will agree a deadline with you for providing the draft sections for comments; this should be ideally handed in before spring break starts. Please note that students should not expect supervision during or after spring break, other than receiving comments on their drafts.

Please note that before considering publishing project work in conference proceedings, papers or other public formats you must first discuss this with your supervisor, as he/she would normally have to agree (as co-author).

### Ethical Clearance & Risk Assessment

ALL students must gain ethical approval for their research before they begin data collection - failure to do so could incur significant loss of marks. You will not be entitled to use data collected prior to, or in the absence of, ethical approval. Projects for which no record of ethical approval is provided will not be marked. You must provide a section on the Ethical Issues that relate to your project in the Methods section of the Final Report (see below), and also include the automatic email that you receive from the system confirming your ethical approval in the Appendices of the Report (see below). A copy of your completed Ethics Form must be included on diskette/USB (see Appendices and provision of raw data and outputs below) but not printed in the report itself. No confidential participant details should be included with your submitted report.

**Before you read the sections below, you should familiarise yourself with the School of Psychology ethical review procedures described here:**

<http://www.sussex.ac.uk/psychology/internal/hse>

This page also contains many other useful links and documents (e.g. consent forms, standard operating procedures, etc.).

Students working with **human subjects** must complete the appropriate Ethics form **at latest by 16:00 Thursday on week 8** of the autumn term at the latest. **Students who need to start data collection earlier should submit the form earlier.**

Please be aware that while gaining ethical approval for low risk human projects usually takes about a week, some projects may require much longer (e.g. 1-2 months; projects involving NHS patients 3-6 months). Students may want to consult their supervisors regarding the time frame required for approval to better plan their projects. It is thus essential to start the process as soon as possible and make sure you leave adequate time.

You may apply for ethical review at the following page:

<http://www.sussex.ac.uk/staff/research/governance/apply>.

Even if your supervisor already has ethical approval you must submit your own application using the link above. In item A9 you should provide the ethics code for your supervisor's approved project and in Supporting Documents you should upload a PDF showing the ethical approval (e.g. a copy of the email sent to your supervisor). This can expedite the process for you, especially for projects with special populations (e.g. children).

**Every year, many applications are returned to applicants before they can be sent to the Cross-Schools Research Ethics Committee (CREC) because they are either incomplete or filled out incorrectly! In order to prevent any delays of your application, please carefully read the 'Guidance notes for completing your application' on this page when filling out your application:**

<https://www.sussex.ac.uk/webteam/gateway/file.php?name=completing-your-crec-application-1507133.pdf&site=23> (Google search keywords "*guidance notes completing application Sussex psychology*")


**If you require consent forms for your study, please use the template provided here and modify it accordingly:**

<http://www.sussex.ac.uk/psychology/internal/documents/infoconsent-template-revised.doc> (Google search keywords "*Sussex completing crec application*")

**Animal projects require a different form** (please find this on study direct) and will undergo a different approval procedure. Students will submit this form to their supervisor who feeds back and suggests relevant changes. For guidance on submission, students should consult their project supervisor.

Where your project involves risk to you or the participants that is either greater than, or different from, that experienced in normal every day life, you must also fill in the appropriate Risk Assessment form as part of the Ethical Review process. Some types of study will automatically require a Risk Assessment (e.g. unaccompanied visits off campus, fieldwork, work in biological laboratories or with non-human animals). The Risk Assessment should be included on your diskette/USB.

<http://www.sussex.ac.uk/staff/research/governance/apply>  
**Research and knowledge exchange**


**How to apply for research ethics review** 

You can access the new online ethical review application system via [Sussex Direct](#). (When you have logged into Sussex Direct, click on the 'Research' tab, and then select 'Ethical Reviews'.)

The new online ethical review application system provides:

- an online version of the University's *Application Form for Ethical Review*;
- the facility to upload supporting documents (in PDF format only);  
**Important note:** To help make sure your pdf document merges successfully, follow the recommended instructions in the [ITS Guidance on Uploading Documents](#) [PDF 200.58KB];
- the facility to submit the application online to Supervisor (for students), C-REC (for staff);
- the facility for Supervisors, SREOs and C-REC administrators to review applications on Sussex Direct and enter review decisions online;
- alert emails to users will be generated automatically as part of the application process.

Further information about the new system can be found in the FAQs below.

**User Guide** 

An overview of the new system's functionality can be found in the [User Guide for Online Ethical Review Application System](#) [PDF 814.60KB].

**Guidance Material about applying for ethical review**

Help text is available in the online form, but you can also download a PDF of [Guidance for Completing the Ethical Review Process](#) [PDF 420.16KB] to help you prepare your application for research ethics review.

**Templates for Consent Form and Information Sheet**

Templates are available below to help you develop a Consent Form and Information Sheet appropriate to your research.

## Research Expenses

Limited funds are available to cover the costs of your research materials. You should discuss this with your supervisor. Please note that any materials for photocopying should be handed in to the Psychology School Office (Pevensey1 2A13), with clear instructions regarding the number of copies required. Photocopying carried out anywhere else will not be reimbursed. If you are recruiting participants for experiments from the Psychology Subject Pool database you may offer a prize draw of up to £25, please contact Pennie Ingram in the Psychology Office (P.M.G.Ingram@sussex.ac.uk) for details.

## Project Talks

You may give a short oral presentation (maximum of 10 minutes including time for questions - budget for approximately 7 minutes of talking and 3 minutes of questions) on your project, usually between weeks 7 and 12 of spring term. The talk represents a very good opportunity for you to get your ideas organised and receive some general feedback from your supervisor (and the rest of the audience). It will not count directly towards the final mark, instead representing an opportunity for you to receive constructive comments on your hypothesis testing, methodology and results (or anticipated results) that should help you to structure and present your final project report in the best possible way.

## Lectures on Statistics

There will be a short series of lectures focusing on statistical methods for projects during the spring term, as well as one on writing techniques (consult Study Direct for details):

Lecture 1: Writing up your research project: How to avoid common pitfalls

Lecture 2: Reintroduction to SPSS

Lecture 3: Basic Statistics 1

Lecture 4: Basic Statistics 2

The statistics lectures are intended to help you to revise some of the main statistical techniques that you may want to use in analysing your data. They are not intended to cover all the techniques that may be used - students should also refer to their notes from "Discovering Statistics" and "Social Research Methods" modules and take guidance from their supervisors when analysing their data. Supervisors will expect students to know the material covered.

## Guidelines for Writing Up & Submitting Projects

The project should be written up as a scientific paper, in a style and format similar to that of an article published in a Psychology journal. **To enhance the legibility of reports and facilitate binding, please use a 12 pt font and at least one and a half line spacing, and allow a left hand margin of at least 2.5 cm (1 inch).**

Follow the general style used in the *British Journal of Psychology* (available electronically from the library) or APA (American Psychological Association) journals (the Publication

Manual of the American Psychological Association (APA), 6<sup>th</sup> ed. (2010) is available in the University Library). Also refer to the crib sheet that Andy Field provides at:

<http://www.discoveringstatistics.com/docs/writinglabreports.pdf>

Different types of research generate differences in reports: for example, a study quantitatively testing an experimental hypothesis will be written up in a different way from a study which uses qualitative data or case studies. In preparing to write up your project, you should therefore look at published studies with a similar design to your project (in the key journals in your particular field), and use these as models for writing up. You can discuss this with your supervisor who will be able to indicate relevant journal articles and past project reports. Prize-winning projects from last year are posted on the web as examples of good practice at:

<http://www.sussex.ac.uk/psychology/internal/students/undergraduateprizes>

and should be useful in giving you an idea of the standard of the best project work. You may also find it useful to look back over the handouts from “Discovering Statistics” and “Social Research Methods” modules, which give detailed advice on how to write up different types of methodology (from observational studies to hypothesis testing experiments).

Your report should be no more than 6000 words in length. Any footnotes, subheadings, in-text citations (e.g. Smith et al., 2009) and/or endnotes and quotations in the text are counted towards the word length, but the title, abstract, acknowledgements, references, appendices, transcriptions of data, tables, figures and table/figure captions do not count. Please note that 6000 is not a target length - the aim is to produce a concise scientific paper and the word length needed to describe the methods and results, and to introduce and discuss them appropriately, will vary according to the type of project and the nature of the data. Thus for some pieces of work a word limit of significantly shorter than 6,000 words (e.g., 4,000 words) will be entirely appropriate. Please provide a word count on the front page of the report. If the examiners consider that an unfair advantage has been gained by exceeding the given word length they will reduce the mark.

Your report should include the following sections:

### *Abstract*

The objective of the abstract is to provide an effective précis of the aims, method and results of your study. This section should be **no more than 200 words** in length and does not count towards the 6,000 words. You are advised to look at a number of published abstracts from work in an area similar to your project, and use these as models.

### *Acknowledgments*

This section, which should come after the abstract and form a foreword to the report, must make explicit what your contribution to the work actually was (in terms of design etc) and what aspects did not come from you. All contributions, including those from your supervisor, other project students, and DPhil students or postdocs involved in the project, should be acknowledged. This is particularly relevant where you are using data that has already been collected by your supervisor - or jointly collecting data with another student for your project. You may find it helpful to discuss this with your supervisor. This section would not normally exceed 200 words and again does not count towards the 6,000 words.

### *Introduction*

The aim of the introduction is to explain the background to the particular research you have carried out. It should outline whatever previous studies are necessary to highlight why your own work is necessary/interesting. You should explain how your research relates to previous research and what it adds to previous research. The introduction should finish with a clear statement of your aims/objectives. The aim of the introduction is thus to explain and justify the hypothesis or question which motivates your study.

### *Method*

A good tip here is to model this section on a published example of research of a similar design. Use the usual subheadings (where appropriate): *Participants*, *Materials*, *Design*, and *Procedure*. You must also include a section on the Ethical Issues that relate to your project as part of the methods section. You need to describe your methods in sufficient detail so that the reader could replicate exactly what you did. Explain who your sample were, how you recruited them, how you briefed and debriefed them. Describe your materials fully and explain how they were constructed, and explain exactly what your procedure was. Justify why the methods and design you used were appropriate to test the hypotheses.

### *Results*

The results section of your report should be structured around answering the questions which motivated your study - and which you have spelt out in the introduction. Summarise the data relevant to each hypothesis to be tested, and report on the analyses you have done of those data. Double check your statistics: have you chosen the right statistic to test the hypothesis? Is it the right statistic for the kind of data you have? If in doubt, check with your supervisor. Describe your results fully but save interpretation for the Discussion. Tables and/or Figures are likely to be useful in helping you communicate your results to the reader. Please note that you should not simply copy across figures and tables from a statistical package and insert them unedited in your text - prepare Tables and Figures to the standard expected in psychology journals using appropriate software, and make sure that they are properly labelled and annotated.

### *Discussion*

Discuss your results in relation to the hypotheses and issues that motivated your study, and then in the light of any broader implications they may have. How do your results fit in with findings from existing studies in the literature? What do they add to the literature? What new questions do they raise? Be careful not to over-interpret your data: do not make claims about the implications of your research that are not justified by the data. Remember that, in both the introduction and discussion, you have the opportunity to discuss the implications of obtaining results in one direction or the other with respect to your hypotheses - and this may be particularly useful if you are presenting results that are not statistically significant but where sample size means that the power of the statistical tests you are using is low (and it remains possible that statistical significance may have been reached with a larger sample size). Think about any confounding variables, the reliability of your data collection procedure, the implications of your findings and how subsequent research could extend or clarify your work. Demonstrate awareness of the shortcomings of your research but do not engage in endless faultfinding.



### References

References must be presented in a standardised format. Follow the style used in the *British Journal of Psychology* (available electronically from the library) or APA (American Psychological Association) journals.

### Appendices and provision of raw data and outputs

Include a copy of any questionnaires, interview schedules, consent forms or other directly relevant documents in your printed appendices, which form the final part of the report. Where any of these documents include your name, the identifier should be removed prior to printing and binding to maintain your anonymity. *Do not* include computer print-outs of statistical analyses, instead this may be included on diskette (see below). One diskette (CD) or USB stick containing your raw data, SPSS outputs, a copy of your completed ethics form (and where appropriate your risk assessment form), and an electronic version of your complete project as a Word document (which may be screened to check for plagiarism) should be attached to one of the two copies of the reports that you submit (on the second copy you can write – diskette/USB stick attached to other copy). The CD or USB stick may be contained in an envelope/sleeve and can be attached (e.g. stapled/taped) to the report. Again, this should be labelled with candidate number only to maintain your anonymity. We require that the student retain all data pertaining to the project, including original copies of any paper questionnaires and similar materials. These data may be asked for at any point during the marking and classification procedure where a query is raised, and each year a random sample of students may be routinely asked to supply them.

### Binding & Submission

Two copies of the entire printed project dissertation (including appendices) will be required at submission. You should soft-bind your project dissertation with a simple plastic comb binding so that the pages stay together whilst being read. The appropriate cover-sheet (pink coversheet for formal submissions) should be inserted at the beginning of the report and included within the binding (this coversheet can be obtained from the reception desk at the Psychology office Pev1 2A13)

Useful references
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Field, A. (2013) *Discovering Statistics using SPSS*. 4th edition. London: Sage Publications.

Pallant, J. (2010) *SPSS Survival Manual: A step by step guide to data analysis using SPSS*. Maidenhead: Open University Press, McGraw-Hill Education.

Brace, N., Kemp, R. & Snelgar, R. (2009) *SPSS for Psychologists*. 4th edition. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Field, A. & Hole, G. (2003) *How to Design and Report Experiments*. London: Sage publications.

Forshaw, M. (2004) *Your Undergraduate Psychology Project: a BPS guide*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Harris, P. (2008) *Designing and Reporting Experiments in Psychology*. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition. Maidenhead: OUP.

## Assessment criteria

The assessment criteria for Project Reports will be available under Examinations and Assessment at:

<http://www.sussex.ac.uk/psychology/internal/students/examinationsandassessment>

Along with a copy of the project marking sheet and the Supervisor's Statement (which your supervisor will fill in to document your contribution to the various aspects of project work including design, data collection etc). The Supervisor's Statement can be found on the study direct site under 'Project resources'.

Student contribution from all aspects of research that is noted in the Supervisor's statement is carefully scrutinized and taken into account in your final marks. These may include effort, originality of thought in the discussion section, designing the study, choosing the procedural details, running the statistics, etc.

## Submission of Project Dissertation

Details of the submission deadline can be viewed in Sussex Direct on your assessments timetable.

<https://direct.sussex.ac.uk>

**Project dissertations are submitted to the Psychology Office (final year coversheets for the projects to be collected here for insertion at the beginning of the project prior to binding).** Please direct all enquiries on submissions to the School of Psychology Office ([psychology@sussex.ac.uk](mailto:psychology@sussex.ac.uk)).

**Information on the following can be found at the link below:**

- submitting your work
- missing a deadline
- late penalties
- Exceptional circumstances
- Help with managing your studies and competing your work
- Assessment Criteria

<http://www.sussex.ac.uk/psychology/internal/students/examinationsandassessment>

## Reminder of key deadlines and suggested milestones

- Submission of ethics forms: **16:00 hrs, Thursday of autumn term 8<sup>th</sup> week**; the form should be submitted on the online system (available via Sussex Direct - see link to instructions in Ethical Clearance section above). As mentioned previously, **students who need to start data collection earlier need to submit this form earlier than this date.**

- Submission of project dissertations: Project dissertations are submitted at the beginning of Summer term – you should consult Sussex Direct deadline details; project dissertations are to be submitted to the School of Psychology Office (coversheets for the reports to be collected from the Psychology Office prior to binding and submission).
- Students are encouraged to discuss some key milestones with their supervisors in order to ensure smooth completion of their projects. In general, projects that require much longer time for ethical approval should start much earlier for proper completion. Although key milestones may vary from project to project, the template on the next page may serve as a guide and you may agree tentative deadlines with your supervisor(s).

### Issues or non-engagement with your project dissertation

You are expected to meet with your supervisor throughout the academic year to discuss your project and the key areas of development of it. **In term 1 this would normally be research design, literature review, research and specifically the preparation and submission of your ethics form, which is due in week 8.** From this contact, your supervisor will then be able to monitor your progress and make sure you are meeting expectations of being able to complete on time. **Because of the level of work involved in the empirical project, it is essential that you speak to either your supervisor, your academic advisor, the Director of Student Experience or the Student Life Centre as soon as possible if you experience problems that affect your attendance and completion of assessments.**

Then the appropriate support and advice can be provided at the right time to enable you to continue you with your studies.

**If this does not seem to be the case and concern is raised, your supervisor will inform the school office if you:**

- Appear to be struggling or not engaging with your empirical project
- Do not attend scheduled appointments to discuss your empirical project
- Do not respond to emails from your supervisor regarding your empirical project
- Have not started preparation of your ethics form
- Do not submit your ethics form and no reason is given to the supervisor for this

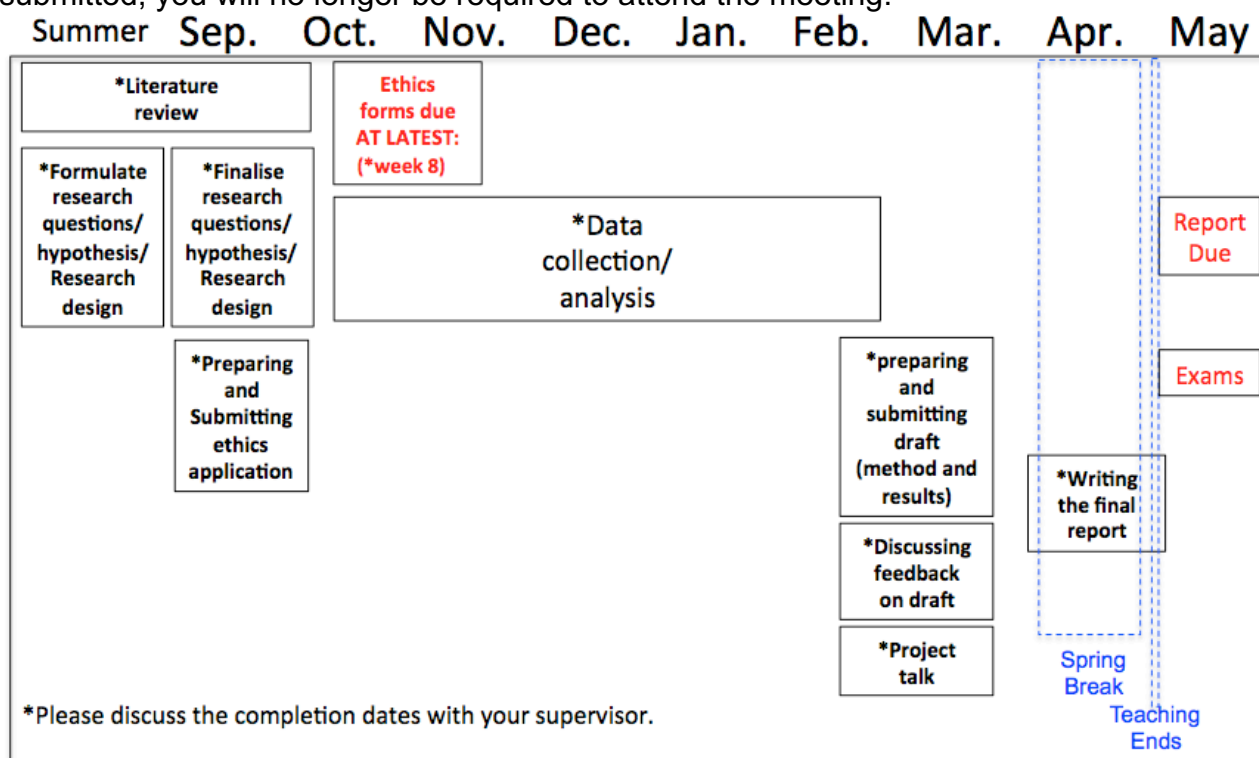
The Director of Student Experience will then decide if it is necessary for you to attend a School Student Committee meeting. This would take place in Week 12 of term 1 to discuss any issues you are experiencing which are preventing you from engaging with your empirical project, ethics form submission and your progress on the course.

### School Student Progress Committee (SSPC) Meetings

The Director of Student Experience chairs the meeting and the Director of Teaching and Learning and the School Administrator will also be in attendance. You would be given 2 weeks notice to attend and present your case and you may ask someone to accompany you to the meeting if you wish.

If it is felt that you will be unable to realistically complete your project and progress with the year, then liaison with the Student Life Centre, Student Support Unit or intermission from the course may be some of the options considered to be in your best interests.

If your issues can be resolved before the SSPC meeting takes place and your supervisor is satisfied that you will be able to realistically proceed and/or your ethics form can be submitted, you will no longer be required to attend the meeting.



An example chart for setting milestones.