



Law Dissertation Course Descriptor

Course Title	Law Dissertation	Faculty	Law
Course Code	NCHLW638	Course Leader	Head of Faculty
Credit Points	30	Teaching Period	Michaelmas & Hilary
FHEQ Level	6	Date Approved	June 2020
Compulsory/ Optional	Optional for undergraduate combined and single honours students, and for Senior Status students		
Pre-requisites	None		
Co-requisites	None		

COURSE SUMMARY

A dissertation is intended to enable a student to deepen his or her understanding of a particular area of Law. It gives students the opportunity to choose a topic independently and work under supervision to produce a work of academic research of approximately 7,000 words in length. The dissertation prepares the student for independent research and postgraduate study.

A Law dissertation will only be permitted in a subject already studied by the student in their first or second years. A student taking a dissertation will be assigned a supervisor, who will give guidance to and review the student's work. In order to ensure academic integrity, this guidance and support will be limited, so the student must therefore have demonstrated sufficient academic ability and self-reliance to undertake the dissertation. This is normally satisfied by the student having attained a mark of 52% or higher in the course relating to the dissertation. A student who did not attain that mark may nevertheless be deemed suitable if there has been a marked increase in overall performance between the first and second years of study. The decision on whether a student has met the pre-requisites for a dissertation and which of their proposed dissertation titles is acceptable will be made by the Head of the Faculty of Law, in consultation with the dissertation Course Leader, if different.

Dissertations can take a wide variety of forms, including empirical, theoretical, case study, or comparative study approaches, among others. Approaches will be dictated to a large degree by the title and abstract that the student has submitted (see procedure below), but this may be modified by agreement between the supervisor and student.

There is a procedure for determining the topic of a dissertation:

By the end of Hilary term in Year 2, students must submit, to the Head of Faculty, a proposed dissertation title and abstract of no more than 250 words. This must relate to a

subject already studied by the student in their first or second years. If desired the student may submit up to two reserved titles and abstracts meeting the same criterion. The Head of Faculty will identify a validator for the first-choice dissertation (who will usually be the intended supervisor) and pass the title and abstract to that validator for validation as suitable, possibly on condition that a specified amendment is made. If deemed unsuitable this procedure will be iterated for any second- or third-choice dissertations.

By the end of the Easter vacation in Year 2, a dissertation will be validated (possibly on condition that a specified amendment is made) and a supervisor chosen, or the student will be informed that none of their choices was suitable for a dissertation, in which case they will not be permitted to take one.

On successful validation the student will be informed whether they are unconditionally accepted to take the dissertation or whether acceptance is conditional on results in their second-year examinations.

The decisions on whether a student has met the pre-requisites for a dissertation and which of their proposed dissertation titles is acceptable will be made by the Head of Faculty, in consultation with the dissertation course leader, if different.

COURSE AIMS

The aims of the course are to:

- Give students the opportunity to carry out independent research, including topic choice, finding material, choosing methods and producing analysis
- Enable students to carry out in-depth academic analysis, whether empirical or theoretical, case study or comparative approach
- Train students in writing up their findings and ideas clearly and coherently in a style appropriate to legal writing

LEARNING OUTCOMES

On successful completion of the course, students will be able to:

KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING

- K1c critically analyse legal theories, principles, doctrines, values and rules which underpin the area of law on which they are writing, through in-depth research and study
- K2c if applicable, critically analyse the institutions of the English legal and justice systems relevant to the title of their dissertation
- K3c critically analyse the area of law on which they are writing, within the parameters of the title of their dissertation

COGNITIVE SKILLS

- C1c apply knowledge and understanding to determine solutions to complex research problems in the area of law on which they are writing

- C2c critically analyse factual information, selecting and prioritising from possible alternatives using reasoned judgment and recognised legal arguments pertaining to the area of law on which they are writing
- C3c recognise ambiguity with and deal with uncertainty in the area of law on which they are writing

TRANSFERABLE AND PROFESSIONAL SKILLS

- T1c communicate accurately and effectively, using a variety of media and technological resources whilst demonstrating care and accuracy in use of English and legal terminology
- T2c demonstrate a high level of ability to manage personal development by effective use of feedback, reflection, determination of needs, acquisition of knowledge and skills and collaborative working
- T3c undertake self-directed research using a wide range of legal and other information sources, evaluating and selecting information based on reasoned criteria

TEACHING AND LEARNING

The teaching and learning strategy for the course will comprise mainly independent research by the students. This is supplemented by communications between the student's supervisor and the student. Meetings between the student and supervisor will be scheduled, at times determined by mutual agreement. Normally the first of these sessions will include guidance on how to write a good dissertation. When the student has a draft for review this will normally be sent to the supervisor in advance of the corresponding meeting. If deemed necessary by the supervisor, emailed correspondence dealing with points raised at the meetings may supplement the meetings. Any communications, whether face to face or by email, will cover approach and strategy, not detailed advice on content. In total, the supervision time will not exceed a maximum of four hours.

Course information and supplementary materials, if required, will be available on Moodle.

At the end of each term, students will attend a formal meeting (a 'Collection') in which they receive comprehensive and collated feedback about their performance over the term.

Students are expected to carry out independent research into the topic. Readings should include (as appropriate to the dissertation title and approach) case law, legislation, books, journal articles, Law Commission reports and other relevant documents.

EMPLOYABILITY SKILLS

The employability skills that law students develop by writing a law dissertation are, inter alia, the following:

- Preparing students to be solicitors or barristers or working as in-house lawyers by allowing them to practice detailed legal writing
- Due diligence and fact-checking
- Legal essay writing and proof-reading
- Legal research skills (incl. online legal databases Westlaw and LexisNexis)

- Current affairs and commercial awareness (e.g. if the dissertation is on Public Law, real life examples will be needed, e.g. if it is about the legality of the exercise of the royal prerogative, they will need to engage with the attempt of the British Government in September 2019 to prorogue Parliament and its subsequent defeat before the UK Supreme Court)
- Understanding and practical knowledge of the English legal system

ASSESSMENT

FORMATIVE

Formative assessment is by discussion, review of drafts and feedback (emailed and face to face) throughout the two terms.

SUMMATIVE

No:	Assessment Type	Weighting	Online submission	Duration	Length
1	Dissertation	70%	Yes	N/A	7,000 words
2	Viva	30%	N/A	30 minutes	N/A

FEEDBACK

Feedback is by emailed and face to face communications throughout the two terms.

The 'Collection' meetings referred to above also provide feedback on a student's performance during the preceding term.

INDICATIVE READING

This will depend on the topic selected. The students then need to read their Course Syllabus for that particular course (e.g. Public Law) and build their own reading list, in collaboration with their supervisor.

INDICATIVE TOPICS

The topic will be taken from a course that the student has already studied. For combined honours students this will be:

- English Legal System
- Public Law
- Contract Law
- Criminal Law
- Law of Tort
- Equity & Trusts

For single honours students the following topic will also be available:

- Employment Law

Title: NCHLW638 Law Dissertation Course Descriptor					
Approved by: Academic Board					
Version number	Date approved	Date published	Owner	Location	Proposed next review date
1.0	June 2020	June 2020	Dimitrios Kyriazis	1. Academic Handbook > Course Descriptors 2. VLE	April 2025
Modifications (As per AQF4)					
Version number	Date approved	Date published	Modification (including category number)		