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Business Study Skills & Methods

Welcome to the course

The course offers a foundation in the study skills required to excel on a university degree course. It explains the aspects of online tutorials, note taking and essay writing you will need to master in order to complete the programme. Additionally the course will introduce you to the various research methods used by business academics, guide you in managing your time more effectively and aid you in your revision of topics covered.

Course Introduction

Welcome to the first module on your Business and Management degree from Royal Holloway, University of London. You are about to embark on what will, hopefully, be an exciting and interesting period of study and reflection as you work through the various modules that you need to complete to earn your degree qualification. While each module will be different, covering a different topic and introducing you to different concepts, theories and practical tools and techniques, there are also similarities across the modules, which this first module will outline.

About the authors



Chris Howorth:

Deputy Dean, Faculty of History and Social Sciences and Director of External and Executive Programmes, Royal Holloway, University of London.

Research Interests:

International health systems analysis, health care financing and management, and the socio-economic causes of changing health care organisation both from a demand and a supply perspective; equal opportunities recruitment.



Prof. Sue Newell:

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Research Interests:

Innovation from a knowledge perspective.

Note

Audio Welcome

For an audio welcome message from the author, please go online and enter the course through the WWLC

Transcription of audio welcome message:

Welcome to the business study skills half-unit module of the BSc in Business Administration.

The module authors are: Professor Sue Newell, Professor Craig Littler and Chris Howorth.

We have written this course to enable you to gain a rapid grasp of the study skills required to excel at undergraduate degree level study.

At the end of this module you will have mastered both the theoretical and practical skills required to gain the full benefit of future modules. You will understand the difference between theoretical and empirical work, you will be aware of the advantages of qualitative and quantitative work and you will have been able to enhance your reading, note-taking and academic writing skills.

I wish you well with this module and with the rest of your degree.

Enjoy your work.

Aims and Outcomes

Aims

The aims of this module are to:

- provide realistic expectations about what it means to study for an under-

- graduate management degree.
- develop study skills that will provide the basis for learning for all other modules on the degree.
- develop an understanding of different approaches to management research.

Outcomes

By successfully completing this course, you will have a sound conceptual and practical understanding of the skills necessary to successfully study for a degree in management. More specifically, you will be able to:

- Participate effectively in on-line tutorials.
- Understand the importance of managing time to ensure that adequate attention is given to studying.
- Search for and evaluate reading material from different sources that can provide useful insights into a given topic.
- Take notes effectively from material presented in different formats.
- Understand what is required in writing an academic assignment or an examination.
- Evaluate different approaches to research methodology used in the social sciences.
- Understand the differences between quantitative and qualitative research methods.

This module should be completed before other modules are started as it provides essential introductory information that will be needed in order for you to fully engage with subsequent modules. In particular, it provides important information about interacting in on-line tutorials and about accessing articles from the electronic library. In addition, the discussion of general study skills and research methods provides an introduction to the key skills that will be needed for the effective study of material for the other modules. While the examination for this module will not be until the end of the academic year, it is important to work through these topics before embarking on other modules.

Formative assessment

Essays

During the course you are encouraged to write one essay of around 1500–2000 words. Once you have written it you can submit it. It will be marked and will be returned to you with feedback from a tutor. While the mark you will be given on the essay will not count towards your final degree grade, it will give you a good indication of the progress you are making on the course and the areas you will need to focus on.

For the submission deadline please check the course calendar.

Please choose one title from the two below:

Essay title 1:

How would you prepare and produce an academic essay on the topic: “What are the strategic constraints to cross-border airline mergers?” Make use of the course material in thinking through the nature of academic writing and the steps you would need to take in addressing the question. Please also remember to consider the constraints you face when writing good quality academic work.

Reading material

There are no set texts for this course, but readings and references are provided at the end of each topic from a variety of sources.

Essay title 2:

Critically discuss the difference between qualitative and quantitative work. Your answer should include some indication of the benefits and disadvantages of both approaches and indicate the circumstances in which you might use either approach. Your answer should include at least two examples.



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Topic 1

Overview

Objectives

The purpose of this topic is to:

- provide an overview of this module
- clarify expectations about studying for a distance learning degree in management

Introduction

You have embarked on a new venture – hopefully an exciting one and one you will find stimulating and useful. But, like any new venture, you are likely to be feeling slightly nervous because you are not entirely sure what to expect. The objective of this module is to try and make you feel more at ease by making the expectations explicit. In addition, this module will help you to develop the study and research skills that will enable you to learn effectively from the various modules that you will engage with. You will read about the various study and research skills that are necessary for studying at degree level and you will be able to practise some of these skills in the various exercises and activities that you will confront in the different topics. Obviously, you will subsequently be able to practise these in the other modules that you take, but here the objective is to help you understand and start to develop these skills. This is important, because research has shown that students do better on academic programmes of all kinds, if they develop effective study habits (e.g. Jegede et al., 1997).

In this introduction we provide answers to some of the questions that you may be asking yourself as you set out on this degree programme. It is important that you understand these answers so that you can study effectively for this UG management degree programme. We start with a fundamental question about the amount of time that you will need to devote to your studies.

How much time will I need to study?

In topic 3 of this module we discuss the issue of time management – that is we introduce you to strategies that might help you to ‘find time’ and ‘make best use of time’. Here, however, we want to clarify expectations about how much time you are expected to study for. Obviously it is not possible to answer this in any definitive way – individuals differ significantly in terms of how slow or fast they read, how easily they absorb ideas, how deeply they wish to pursue their studies and so on.

However, there is a Quality Assurance Framework in the UK, which specifies the different amounts of time that a student should devote to their study, depending on the level of qualification they are pursuing. According to this framework a person studying for an undergraduate degree should study for about 1200 hours per year, for each of three years. That is, for a total of 3600 hours.

Now, as a DL student you are probably not studying for your degree full-time and so what is more relevant is to understand the amount of study time that you should expect to put in for any given module. Essentially this works out at about 300 hours for each full-weight module that you study and 150 hours for each half-weight module (such as this one) that you study. More details about the structure of a module are provided later in this topic. So, if you can find 10 hours a week for your study, this will allow you to take one full-weight and one half-weight module per year – assuming that you study for 45 weeks, giving you 7 weeks of holiday! If you can find 20 hours per week then you can take three full-weight modules.

This provides you with a realistic basis on which to decide how many modules to register for at any given time. It is important that you estimate sensibly what is realistic, given your particular circumstances. Hopefully, the above will provide you with a useful metric to assess what is possible for you.



How many hours per week on average, can I realistically devote to my academic studies?

Where should I study?

This may sound like a trivial question but research has demonstrated that many students studying from home, try and study in a room where the television is switched on or where there is other distraction (Beentjes et al., 1996). In order to find out whether this impacted on performance Pool et al. (2000) undertook an experiment. They randomly divided a group of Dutch students into three. The table below indicates how the students were divided into groups and what the results were. The first group were the control group. Click on the other two items in the 'Study conditions' column to reveal how the conditions impacted on the student's work.

Study conditions	Impact on work
No TV	Control group
TV on – English language music channel	Did not affect work performance
TV on – Dutch language soap opera	Work was affected. Students needed more time to complete the task and the quality was not as good – particularly when the task was difficult.

Interestingly in this study, having a music video on in the background did not affect work performance. The important topic to learn from this research is that you need to find an environment to work in where you are not distracted – having music on in the background may not distract you; having a non-music programme on (or the equivalent, having other people making a noise in the background) may do. So you need to find somewhere to study that you are comfortable with and that does not provide you with distractions.

Having said this, it is also possible to make a distinction between the kind of activity that you are engaged in. You might find that you can read a book or an article as you commute to work, providing of course that you are not driving! You might actually be able to block out distractions from other commuters by using a personal stereo, playing background music that still allows you to read. Even 15-minute periods can allow you to read something that is useful. On the other hand, writing an assignment probably requires a more concentrated period of time, and a place where you can have access to various resources, including books, articles and study guides. This may be very difficult to do on the train.



Where am I going to actually do my studying?

What is a module?

Modules vary somewhat in their format and in the number of topics that they include. But, on average, a module will consist of 20 topics (10 for a ½ weight module), with each topic expected to take a student approximately 10 hours to study, including of course the reading of the topic in the on-line study guide, the reading of any additional materials, engagement with any activities and participation in on-line tutorials. Of course, not all topics will take exactly the same amount of time to work through – some topics, like this one here, will be relatively short, while others will be longer. On average, however, you should expect to study each topic of each module for about 10 hours. This leaves 100 hours (50 hours for ½ weight module) that is available to you for the preparation of assignments and for exam revision.

How will the learning be organised?

This learning will be spread out over an academic year. You can study the material in your own time but the tutorial activities will follow a structured weekly rota over 20 weeks (10 weeks for ½ weight modules), following the College term dates, which you will be able to find on the College website. During these dates you will need to go on-line regularly, at least once a week for most modules. Also, you will need to go to the DL UG Management website for specific details of the on-line tutorials for the subjects that you have signed up for. In the next topic of this module, we will explore what is involved in on-line tutorials in more detail.

What will a topic consist of?

A topic will normally consist of:

- study guide teaching material that you will download from the VLE (as you must have done with this one to be reading it!). This is equivalent to the weekly lecture if you were studying on-campus and indeed the programme that you will be studying is based on what our on-campus students follow, albeit the mode of delivery is rather different so that the material has been modified to take this into account
- a textbook (if appropriate) – here we have 2 textbooks that each cover different parts of the module
- reading literature that you can access from the electronic library – details about how to access this library are provided in topic 4 of this study guide
- tutorial activities that support and provide a check on your learning and skill development – details about on-line tutorial activities are provided in the next topic of this module.



What modules am I going to study for this year?

How will I be assessed?

It is important that you understand how you will be assessed on this degree course. You can read about the main assessment criteria, the role of on-line tutorials and the importance of academic literature below.

Main criteria

You will be assessed on each module that you take. Details about this can be found in your copy of the regulations. But put simply, each full-weight module is typically assessed through:

- Engagement in tutorial activities
- 2 written assignments
- 1 examination of 3 hours

A ½ weight module is assessed through:

- Engagement in tutorial activities
- 1 written assignment
- 1 examination of 1½ hours

Online tutorials

Although it is not compulsory, it is highly recommended that you take part in the on-line tutorial activities. Your involvement is not formally assessed in terms of being given a grade, but hopefully you will find these tutorials interesting and stimulating and so participate in all of them.

Using academic literature

One thing to remember is that you have embarked on an academic degree and the examiners (whether in relation to an examination or an assignment) are looking for evidence of your knowledge of the academic literature. Of course, your personal knowledge and experience is also relevant and useful, but it is not enough. For example, if you take a look at one of the specimen examination papers, say on marketing or human resource management, you could probably develop answers to most of the questions asked, without having studied the modules. These might be very good answers, but they would not lead to a pass mark, because they do not demonstrate your knowledge and understanding of the theories, models and concepts that you will cover in these courses.

In your answers, therefore, you are expected to reference the literature that you have studied. This means in the body of the text you give the name and date of the author and at the end you give the full reference. I have given an example of this below when I discuss goal-setting. In an examination you would not be expected to provide the full reference at the end of your answer, but you would be expected to reference the names of authors of theories and models discussed (and the date if you can remember it). We will discuss this more fully in the topic on writing essays and assignments.

These academic models/theories/concepts provide you with a structure to explore and analyze your own experience. They can help you to reflect on your experience and, hopefully, develop new approaches to your work that make you more effective. At the same time, you can use your own experience to critically review the academic models/theories/concepts, understanding their limitations and weaknesses as well as their potential application.



What are the Royal Holloway term dates for this academic year? (you will need to go to the website to find the answer).

Am I up to this?

While the answers to the last few questions may appear to be daunting, they are there to help you clarify our expectations. If you have been accepted on to this programme it is because the admissions officer has judged that you are capable – so you should feel confident that you can get through this degree, as long as you put in the effort. There is a very old and simple principle that has been developed by people who study motivation, which is that performance is dependent on two variables – ability and effort. You have been adjudged to have the ability; only you can determine whether you put in the effort!

What can I do to keep myself motivated?

In relation to the issue of effort or motivation, Edwin Locke and Gary Latham (1990) point to the importance of setting goals. Goals, according to Locke and Latham, provide a direction for people's behaviour and so guide thoughts and actions to one outcome rather than another – here, hopefully, successfully completing your degree. Following extensive research Locke and Latham were able to show that certain features of goals make them more likely to provide this directional motivation. These features are discussed below and applied to goals that you might set for yourself, thus improving the chances that you will be successful. Goals are more likely to lead to the desired outcome if they are:

- Specific – so in setting goals for you to complete each module, be as specific as possible (e.g. I will spend 2 hours every weekday evening, between 6-8pm studying, rather than I will study for 10 hours a week).
- Difficult (albeit possible) – so you may want to set yourself the goal of

getting a distinction (70% or more) on the various modules, rather than simply a pass grade.

- Owned and accepted by the individual – as you are setting your own goals here this element is less relevant, but generally it suggests that individuals should be allowed to participate in the goal-setting process, rather than have goals imposed.
- Provide timely feedback about progress – you will get feedback from your assignments and examination that will help you to monitor your progress. More immediately, you will get feedback through engaging in the on-line tutorial activities.

An acronym sometimes used in relation to setting goals is SMART. SMART goals are goals that are:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Achievable
- Realistic
- Time-bound



*What is my specific goal in doing this degree programme?
The first activity below asks you to focus on this question.*

Task ...

Task 1.1

Readings

Read the text by Feldman in Appendix A. This will help you to complete the tasks listed below.

In this chapter the notion of POWER learning – Prepare, Organise, Work, Evaluate, Rethink – is introduced. This can be helpful to you in thinking about how best to approach your study. In this chapter, there are also a number of additional exercises that you might find useful in thinking about how you can make the most of your time as a degree student.

Once you have finished the reading, please complete the tasks described below.

1. Goal-setting – given the importance of setting goals discussed above, set yourself some goals for studying this module that are specific and sufficiently difficult. In other words, set yourself some SMART goals. Once you have done this it will be helpful to share them with a friend and discuss how realistic they are. Following this discussion you might decide that you need to change these goals – do so and then write them out and put them up on display somewhere so that you can periodically assess how far you are achieving these goals that you have set for yourself.

2. Introducing yourself to fellow students – in the next topic of this module, you will be introduced to the on-line tutorials and will engage in an activity where you introduce yourself to your tutorial group and in turn find out something about the others. In this first topic you will need to do some preparation for your first on-line tutorial. In preparing for this you will be encouraged to think about why you have decided to undertake this degree. Hopefully, making these reasons explicit will provide you with additional motivation to study. So, you need to introduce yourself to the rest of the group. Think of three things about yourself that you feel will provide someone else with a good idea about 'who you are'.
3. Thinking about the reasons why you want to study for a degree – also for the next topic you will need to think about the reasons why you decided to undertake this degree. First think about all the reasons why you want to study for this degree. Then prioritise these reasons in terms of how important they are and write a sentence explaining why they are important to you. Once you have done this you can compare the reasons you have identified with the reasons given by other students that can be found in the reading for this topic.

Summary

In this module we have covered a number of points including:

- The amount of time you need to devote to your studies
- The most appropriate places in which to study
- An overview of what a module is
- An overview of how you will be assessed throughout the degree

In covering these topics we have fulfilled the initial objectives of this topic, which were to provide you with an overview of this module and help you to clarify your expectations about studying for a distance learning degree in management.

Reading Material

Beentjes, J., Koolstra, C. & van der Voort, T. (1996) Combining background media with doing homework: Incidence of background media use and perceived effects. *Communication Education*, 45: 59–72.

Jegede, J., Jegede, R. & Ugodulunwa, C. (1997). Effects of achievement motivation and study habits on Nigerian secondary school students' academic performance. *The Journal of Psychology*, 131(5): 523–529.

[See Appendix B for a copy of this article.]

Locke, E. & Latham, G. (1990). *A Theory of Goal Setting and Task Performance*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Pool, M., van der Voort, T., Beentjes, J. & Koolstra, C. (2000). Background television as an inhibitor on easy and difficult homework assignments. *Communication Research*, 27(3): 293–326.

[<http://search.epnet.com/direct.asp?AN=3098818&db=buh&%22>]