**Information for Students Considering a Research Project**

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The following information is for Doctor of Health students and Master of Public Health students undertaking the research component of their course.

**What is a research project?**
A research project is an original piece of research conducted by the student with the assistance of their supervisors. It must be in the field of public health and requires at minimum, 6 months of work, longer for doctorates.

**What is the format?**
The research project may be in one of the following three forms:

(a) a paper dealing with research on a specific topic which would be acceptable for submission to a peer-reviewed scientific, academic or professional journal for consideration for publication

(b) a report concerning certain health problems, their causes and proposed solutions, which would be suitable for presentation to a government department, an independent agency or inquiry, the private health care industry, international-aid health organisations, or a research granting body. This form is acceptable only if there is no censorship or other interference with your academic freedom from the government department or commissioning agency; if this is or may be a problem you should submit a separate treatise in form (c).

(For (a) or (b) the paper or report would normally be supplemented by appropriate appendixes. The main body of the document should be direct and concise, and should include a short summary. The appendixes can be used for in-depth exposition of the methodology, more detailed presentation of sources or results, a full bibliography, or an expanded discussion of certain arguments.

(c) A formal academic composition, or thesis, which clearly states the context and importance or relevance of the subject matter, specifies the research question(s) or aim(s), outlines existing knowledge which has a bearing on the research, describes methods used and results obtained, critically discusses these in the light of existing knowledge, and ends with the formulation of conclusions and/or recommendations. The expected length varies according to the course – Honours, Masters or Doctorate.

**What will I learn?**
You will probably learn a lot about one particular topic of your choice in public health. As well as developing your capacity and skills to critique research practice in the public health area; primarily through articulation and analysis of relevant literature and ethics processes; plus the synthesis of the necessary principles of good practice and development of research study.

**Learning Outcomes:**
On completion of the research project students should be able to:

- Develop a research question relevant to contemporary public health practice
- Conduct a critical review of the literature that demonstrates a synthesis of concepts and theories
- Prepare a research proposal utilising appropriate research methodologies and consideration of ethical issues
- Plan and undertake data collection and analysis in accordance with the research design
- Prepare a thesis, or alternative, that has a clear and sustained argument which embodies the results of the research.
How do I select a public health topic?
Choosing and defining a topic to research is often an ongoing process and can be one of the most challenging aspects of completing your assignment. Initially, your choice of topic may be influenced by the following factors:

- **Purpose:** Is this an Honours, Masters or Doctorate research project?
- **Degree of interest:** Am I truly interested in and curious about the topic?
- **Length:** Can I get enough quality data to write the depth I need?
- **Research methods:** Should this topic be explored by qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods?
- **Time constraints:** Is this due in 6 months, 2 years or 3 years?
- **Available resources:** Does the library have the resources to support the subject area of the topic and can I find supervisors with expertise in this area?

What should I consider in choosing a topic?
It is best to choose a topic that is interesting as well as relevant to your situation, as well as manageable and researchable. It is best to be pragmatic rather than idealistic. Sometimes there are projects that are already formed by a research team within Menzies School of Health Research but they lack personnel. Contacting the research divisions may supply you with a topic.

How can I find a supervisor?
You may already be aware of experts in your topic area of interest; you are welcome to discuss your ideas with them. Menzies School of Health Research has many researchers and contacting the Education and Training unit can be a way of making initial contact. You will have a minimum of 2 supervisors on your panel who should be experts in either your chosen topic or research methods.

What is the role of the supervisor?
Supervisors should assist you to critically approach the topic, suggest readings, raise questions, suggest alternative strategies, listen to your ideas, and comment on drafts of your written work.

How do I choose a supervisor?
Really it is up to you to approach and choose potential supervisors with the support of the Education and Training unit. Consider their research interests, their level of expertise, their ability to supervise, how many other students they have, how busy they are with their career and whether you get along with them as a person.

How do I fund my research?
This is a problem that all researchers face. You may be working for an organisation that would like to support you to study a particular problem; you may be able to approach NGOs or community groups. You may have to apply for grants or scholarships. Considering your budget is another pragmatic aspect of research.

The Charles Darwin University offers many resources and training opportunities for research students. This is an important webpage to look at: [http://www.cdu.edu.au/research/office/postgradresearch.html](http://www.cdu.edu.au/research/office/postgradresearch.html) as well as this one: [http://learnline.cdu.edu.au/myresearch/](http://learnline.cdu.edu.au/myresearch/)

Good luck with your research project!