

# THE RESEARCH PROJECT COURSE: A MODEL FOR BRINGING ACCOUNTING RESEARCH INTO THE CLASSROOM

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## ABSTRACT

How to engage students with academic research presents an ongoing challenge for accounting professors. This article describes a course, along with recounting its historical development, which is being successfully used to meet this challenge. The “research project” course is arguably unique in accounting education in combining a varied set of delivery modes including traditional lecture, in office and boardroom sessions, and the hosting of an annual research conference with invited speakers from academia and practice.

**Key words:** Accounting research, research in the classroom, curriculum development, masters program

## INTRODUCTION

**N**ow fourteen years into its development, the “Research Project” course described in this article has reached a state where both demonstrated student performance and course evaluations provide solid evidence that it is achieving its objective of providing a large class of professionally-oriented masters students with a solid appreciation for, and understanding of, the

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Note: The author is willing to make all relevant course materials available to interested instructors.

academic research process.<sup>1</sup> This article recounts the genesis of this research course, describes its evolution over fourteen years, and presents its current organizational structure and mode of delivery.<sup>2</sup> Overall the article presents an interesting case of curriculum development. More importantly though, it provides a template that other instructors might consider using in teaching students about academic research. The article also complements the recent (2009) paper by Gordon and Porter in *Global Perspectives on Accounting Education* which provides a guide for accounting students in reading and understanding academic journal articles.

### COURSE GENESIS

In the early 1990's, the Department of Accounting at the University of Saskatchewan began development of its Master of Professional Accounting (MPAcc) program. The program's broad objective was to help prepare students for the practice of accounting in the "next millennium." Significantly informed by major reports from professional accounting bodies in Canada (e.g., Boyd, 1995; CICA, 1996a; CICA, 1996b), by earlier accounting education work in the U.S. (e.g., AAA, 1986; AECC, 1990), and from discussion and debate among accounting and business school faculty, it was determined that meeting this objective meant exposing students to a broad knowledge base supportive of a holistic view of organization decision making. Concurrently, it also meant ensuring graduates obtained an appropriate set of "skills" necessary for professional accounting success. Operationally, this resulted in an 11-course program covering not only the traditional functional areas of professional accounting – financial accounting, management accounting, auditing and taxation – but also ensuring a broadened knowledge base generated from courses in finance, information technology, human resource management, entrepreneurship, and corporate strategy.<sup>3</sup> It also required adopting modes of delivery both within and across the courses focused on skill development, notably intellectual, communication, interpersonal, organizational, and professional.

Crucially for this paper, the program's developers also felt strongly that its graduates be formally exposed to the academic research process through a course in accounting research. This view was grounded in the important learning – both knowledge and skills – that could be achieved from such exposure, and also from a shared belief that a Masters degree warrants some level of formalized research training. The MPAcc program was formally approved by the University in January 1998 and its first set of students began the program later that same year.<sup>4,5</sup> The research

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<sup>1</sup>In 2004 this course was awarded first prize by the Canadian Academic Accounting Association in its "Innovation in Accounting Education" competition. The underlying theme of this course – bringing accounting research into the classroom – was also selected as one of the winners of the American Accounting Association's 2002 "Curriculum Challenge" competition (refer Entwistle, 2003). A presentation on this theme was also made by the author at a plenary session of the 2002 American Accounting Association Annual Meeting in San Antonio. This theme builds on earlier calls to bring accounting research into the classroom such as Dopuch (1989) and Murphy (1992).

<sup>2</sup>The author of this paper oversaw the development of this course since its inception and has delivered the course in all but one year (in 2006).

<sup>3</sup>Refer Appendix 1 for a list of the original and current MPAcc courses.

<sup>4</sup>Students enrolled in this program typically obtain their undergraduate accounting degrees from universities across Western Canada (Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia) and are aspiring to become Canadian Chartered Accountants (CA's). Students take their course work in the program over two consecutive four month

course was one of a set of courses offered in the first term of the program. This course has evolved considerably since that time and its evolution can be divided into three phases.

## **COURSE EVOLUTION**

### **Phase 1 – Year One**

The first offering of the Research Project course, was, in retrospect, ambitious. For at least 20 years prior to the start of the MPAcc program, the Accounting Department had been offering a Master of Science in Accounting program (the MSc) which was thesis-based. MSc students took a set of five research oriented courses: one each in financial accounting, management accounting, and auditing; a research methods course; and a special topics course. Upon completion of the coursework, students completed a Masters thesis, including a formal proposal defense and a final thesis defense complete with external examiner. This program generally took two years to complete, with many of the graduates using the program as a stepping stone to a PhD.<sup>6</sup> The initial design of the Research Project course was heavily influenced by the department's experience with the MSc program.

Specifically, the MPAcc research course consisted of three parts. The first part was a two-day intensive study of research methods covering the various aspects of the research process (e.g., research questions, literature review, statistical testing, reliability and validity, archival data, field based (i.e., interview) study, and survey design). The second part required students, working in teams of two and mentored by various MPAcc faculty selected for their relevant functional research expertise, to develop a research proposal. This proposal was due for submission two months into the course and was to consist of a relevant research question, support for why the question would be of interest to the profession, a review of the existing literature, an outline of the proposed research design (interviews, surveys, secondary data), and an estimated timeline for the data collection. Feedback was provided and any necessary refinements to the proposal were made. Students then moved on to data collection and data analysis, with the final draft also to contain such expected sections as contributions to the literature, limitations of the study and areas for future research. Completed projects were due three weeks prior to the end of the second semester of the program with presentations (i.e., defenses) during the last two weeks of the program. Notably, and even with hard work and good intentions on the part of students and faculty, at least half of the class (six

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periods (May to August) with both periods being preceded by a work term. Graduates of the MPAcc program are granted significant exemption from a set of professional courses required to be taken by other CA students offered through the Chartered Accountants School of Business (CASB). To become a CA, students in both the MPAcc and CASB programs are required to write the Uniform Evaluation exam (the UFE) as well as obtain the necessary work experience within an approved training office.

<sup>5</sup>There were 17 students in the MPAcc program in 1998. Enrollment for 2011 was capped at 84 students with a large number of students on the waiting list.

<sup>6</sup>One of the MSc projects was published in *Contemporary Accounting Research* (Entwistle and Lindsay, 1994). Due to the significant resources committed to the MPAcc program, upon its inception the accounting department discontinued offering the MSc program.

groups of two), had not completed their projects as of the last day of class in August 1999. It took a number of additional months until all of the students completed the projects.<sup>7</sup>

Looking back, this first offering of the research course had unrealistic expectations. Enrolled in a professional program where the other course work was professional in nature, students were being asked to not only design but successfully undertake and complete a major academic research project. Further, the standards for the final project were significantly influenced by the department's MSc experience; in essence requiring a slightly scaled down version of an MSc thesis. From a course design perspective, the major takeaway was to create a more manageable research experience for the students. It was also decided that engaging a variety of faculty members as project supervisors, while beneficial from a discipline perspective, added an additional layer of administrative complexity and in many cases led to different expectations for the final research projects. These issues were addressed for Phase 2 of the course.

### **Phase 2 – Years Two to Four**

With the challenges from the first offering clearly in mind, the design of the course was changed in three ways. First, while the students would still work in teams of two, the direct supervision for all the research projects would reside solely with the research course instructor. The role of other faculty was now one of expert adviser, for example, advising students on pertinent research articles based on their research questions. Second, and significantly, the research study undertaken by the students would end at the research design stage. That is, the students would not be required to engage in data collection. Consequently, they would substantively complete only the first three phases of a research study: identifying the research question, reviewing the literature, and designing the research study. Their completed projects were also required to include potential limitations and areas for future research, and each group was to present their finished projects to the full class at the end of the first four month term of the program. Third, specific dates (or milestones) were identified for the three main phases of the project: i) for submission of the research question (three weeks into the course); ii) the literature review (one month later); and iii) the research design (an additional month). Extensions would not be given, and grades of zero would be assigned for work not submitted by the required date. Timely feedback on each of the three parts would be provided to students, with suggestions expected to be incorporated into the subsequent submission.<sup>8</sup>

The new design essentially eliminated the risk of student incompleteness, albeit at the cost of the “lost learning” from not having engaged in formal data collection. This tradeoff, however, was considered appropriate. Academic rigor was still expected in each completed project, including in the most challenging phase of research design. The students were also exposed to a variety of different designs, research questions, and literatures during the formal presentations. The experience over this three-year period was that the new course design was meeting its objective of providing students an appreciation for, and understanding of, the research process. At the same time, however,

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<sup>7</sup>Between the first and second terms of the program (i.e., the January to April period) the students returned to their respective public accounting firms and hence were unable to make significant progress on their projects. They also returned to their firms after writing the final CA exams in September and completed the research projects while working full time.

<sup>8</sup>As part of the course design, three days were spent at the beginning of the course introducing students to issues of research design and providing discussion of course logistics.

the course instructor was facing a significant challenge in supervising multiple research projects.<sup>9</sup> Given an expected increase in student enrollment to 50 students for year five – or 25 separate projects – a second major rethink of the course delivery ensued.

### **Phase 3 – Years Five to Fourteen**

The fifth year of the MPAcc program saw a significant increase in student numbers from a then high of 23 to an incoming class of 50. Given the time intensive nature of the existing mode of delivery, the need, but also the opportunity arose to envision a “new” approach for teaching the course. This “new” approach, with only minor variations, is still being used in the current offering of the course. It is grounded in the following guiding principles. First and foremost was the need to remain true to the overall course objective of providing students with an understanding and appreciation for the research process. Second, was the importance of exposing students to the different types of designs used in academic accounting research. Third, and relatedly, was making students aware of the breadth of research being done within the accounting discipline.<sup>10</sup> Fourth, and perhaps most uniquely, was a desire to fashion for the students a feel for some of the real world experiences of an actively engaged academic. Finally, was the overarching need to ensure the course delivery was manageable with a large class size. The resulting course, described below, was offered for the tenth time this past Spring of 2011.<sup>11</sup>

#### *Part 1 – Course Introduction*

The first part of the course, naturally, is a course introduction. A four-hour session, preceded by a required set of pre-class readings<sup>12</sup> and questions<sup>13</sup>, is sufficient for this first session. The larger class (this past year being 84 students) is split into two sections and is delivered separately to each section, thus enabling increased engagement in the class discussion. The primary material of examination is an archival research study (Entwistle et al., 2005) on pro forma (or non-GAAP) earnings which is “deconstructed” in class using an article overview template provided to students

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<sup>9</sup>In the third year of this design there were 12 different projects being supervised.

<sup>10</sup>A list of the articles used in the 2011 offering of the course is contained in Appendix 3. The articles are drawn from a broad set of journals, employ various research designs, and include articles in financial accounting, auditing, and professional practice. Generally two to three different articles are selected each year. The articles are all provided to the students prior to the first class.

<sup>11</sup>The most recent course outline (for Spring 2011) is included as Appendix 2. The nature of the course tends to make it a unique learning experience for students different from any previous university courses. Minor exceptions include a few students who have completed an honors thesis prior to beginning the MPAcc program and have had some experience reading academic research. Nevertheless, even these students have rarely “deconstructed” individual articles as is done in this course.

<sup>12</sup>Refer the “Course Introduction” articles in Appendix 3.

<sup>13</sup>For example, the students are asked how they would measure (or operationalize) such things as intelligence, beauty, or company “size”, or what is meant by a statistically significant difference? These questions are available from the author.

prior to class.<sup>14</sup> This deconstruction covers the various aspects of the research endeavor, including motivation for the research, research questions, hypothesis development, literature reviews (and gaps in the literature), data selection issues, reliability and validity concerns, data analysis, statistical testing, limitations and areas for future research.

While the article deconstruction is the main learning tool in the first class, a set of additional complementary articles are assigned as pre-readings. These include: i) the research guide article by Gordon and Porter (2009) which provides an additional structured means for accessing academic writings, ii) an article on accounting research networks (Wakefield, 2008) used to illustrate both the breadth of accounting research and the related concept of academic journal ranking<sup>15</sup>, and iii) a 2002 working paper (Entwistle, 2002) written as a pre-cursor to the 2005 archival study. This working paper is used to illustrate the iterative (and often lengthy) process involved in carrying out academic research.

Essentially, this first session is used to get the students to begin thinking and talking like academics, as well as to discuss the logistical design of the course. Experience also suggests that one of the most significant fears students have in reading academic research is in dealing with statistics. Hence, particular attention is paid in the first class to examining the results of the various statistical tests presented in the tables in the Entwistle et al. (2005) paper. In particular, the discussion covers the difference between univariate and multivariate testing, the makeup of a regression model (dependent versus independent variables, variables of interest versus control variables, explained versus unexplained variance), parametric versus non-parametric tests, the concept of statistical significance and its different levels of .01, .05, and .10, and the difference between statistical and economic significance. By talking through what each statistical test is trying to do and showing how the findings are expressed in the tables, the student's fear of the statistics side of research are significantly dampened. It also makes their reading of future papers much more efficient and effective.

### *Part 2 – The In Office Session (30% of the course grade)*

The second part of the course – the “in-office” sessions – takes place two weeks after the course introduction. For this part, students are placed into groups of three and assigned one of two papers, either an experimental paper on non-sampling risk (Johnston et al., 2003) or a survey design paper on lease accounting (Durocher and Fortin, 2009). Three days prior to the beginning of the in office sessions, each group is required to hand in a critique of their assigned article. This critique consists of two parts. In the first part, the students provide an overview of the article using the article overview template. In the second part, the students are asked to identify how the study might have been improved in any aspect of the research process, from its title through to the limitations section. These critiques then form the basis of the discussion during the in-office sessions.

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<sup>14</sup>Refer the bullet point guidance provided in Part 1 of the Written Critiques section of the course outline (Appendix 2).

<sup>15</sup>In this first class, it is pointed out to the students that the four research designs used in this course, while commonly seen in accounting research, do not represent the full range of available methods. For example, Bouillon and Ravenscroft (2010) identify a set of designs used in dissertation methodologies including literature reviews (e.g., meta-analyses), simulations, analytical modeling, and observation. Oler et al. (2010), in their historical review of accounting research, also identify a “normative” research design.

The sessions take place in the instructor's office and last for one hour. Prior to the session, the students are informed that they can be expected to be challenged not only on their understanding of the research paper as evidenced in their written critiques, but also on any technical aspects underpinning the research. For example, students assigned the Johnston paper should not only have thought about how the experiment was carried out, but also whether non-sampling risk is still an issue in the audit process, or how non-sampling risk ties into the audit risk model. Similarly, students assigned the lease paper need to be prepared to discuss not only the sample selection process used in the study, but also how lease accounting works in practice, and whether changes to lease accounting are under consideration by accounting standard setters. In this way, students begin to see the links between research and practice. The technical discussion also provides an opportunity for important learning or review to take place on auditing and accounting issues which may be tested in other MPAcc courses or in future professional exams. It is also made known that each student in the group could be called upon to answer any questions posed by the instructor. As well, the students are aware that they will receive a group mark based on the group's overall performance. The students consequently ensure that both individually and as a group they are well prepared for the session. This both increases learning while also reducing the potential for free riding.

Experience with the in-office sessions is that a significant amount of learning about the research process can be achieved in one hour in a small, Oxford-style learning setting, and that the sessions constitute a unique learning experience for the students. For most of the students, it is also their first such exposure to this mode of delivery, and while they tend to be anxious prior to the session, upon reflection they find the session to have been extremely helpful in their learning about research. The in-office sessions run continuously throughout the day for a four day period, with seven sessions scheduled each day with half hour breaks between sessions. To maintain the confidentiality of the sessions, each group is asked not to reveal the nature of the discussion. Experience has been that such confidence is maintained.

### *Part 3 – The Boardroom Session (30% of the course grade)*

The third part of the course – the “Boardroom” sessions – takes place two weeks later and are held, not surprisingly, in the main boardroom in the Business School.<sup>16</sup> In contrast to Part 2 of the course, the students now work in groups of six, each containing one three-person group assigned to the experimental paper, and a three-person group assigned to the survey paper. The new article of examination is Gendron and Spira (2009) which uses interviews as its methodology, a new design for the students. Consequently, by the end of the boardroom session, each six-person group will have students exposed to the main four research designs in the course: archival (from Part 1), experimental and survey (from Part 2), and interviews (from Part 3).<sup>17</sup> As each student in the six-person group will have been formally exposed to only three of the four designs, the group members are asked to share their survey or experimental design knowledge with their other group members. The questioning during the boardroom session also requires the experimental students and the

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<sup>16</sup>As with the in office sessions, there are seven sessions each day separated by a half hour break. Due to the increased group size (from three to six students), the boardroom sessions are completed over two days.

<sup>17</sup>Three of the students in each group will have been directly exposed to the design used in the team's assigned article at the research conference (discussed in Part 4).

survey students to re-examine the Gendron and Spira interview article from their respective design perspective. Both of these approaches promote shared learning within the group.

In formal preparation for the session, each group is asked to analyze the new research paper using the article overview template. While a written submission of this overview is not required, two days prior to the sessions, a one- to two-page submission containing their suggestions for improvement on the paper must be handed in. These suggestions are then discussed during the session. In terms of the overall course design, it is recognized that the intimacy – and potentially some of the learning – achieved from the in office session is lessened when moving into a boardroom and to six-person teams. However, the remained expectation of full group participation, the assignment of a group mark, and the knowledge that the final exam is individual and draws on each article in the course, motivates each student’s learning. The setting – in this case a boardroom – also remains distinct enough to build student engagement in the learning process.

#### *Part 4 – The Research Conference (20% of the course grade)*

The fourth part of the course is a “Research Conference” which takes place over a two-day period at the end of the course.<sup>18</sup> This part of the course attempts to mirror to the extent possible an actual academic conference. Of particular note are the two invited luncheon plenary speakers. One speaker, an academic, typically presents a working paper and discusses some of his/her other research projects, both past and present. These speakers also relate their own path to becoming an accounting academic and encourage the students to consider such a possibility.<sup>19</sup> The second speaker is either a standard setter, regulator, an industry representative, or someone from the accounting profession, and the presentation varies depending on his/her profile.<sup>20</sup> They are, however, asked to identify some questions they would like academics to examine and which would help them in better fulfilling their role. This helps further promote in the students – all aspiring accounting professionals – a sense of partnership between academia and practice. A list of the speakers who have taken part in the research conference is provided in Appendix 4.<sup>21</sup>

For the students, their role at the conference is as follows. Most formally, and working in the same six-person team as in Part 3, they are assigned to one research article where they take on the role of either authors or discussants. The authors present the research article using the now well-known article overview template, while the discussants assess the article’s strengths and weaknesses. An open-ended question period then takes place on each article involving the instructor, presenters, discussants and other students. As seen in the list of articles for the conference (refer to Appendix 3) each of the four main research designs are covered. Prior to the conference, the students are expected to have read all four papers, as well as the plenary speaker’s paper, with each paper being

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<sup>18</sup>Earlier versions of the conference were run over a three day period using a slightly different configuration.

<sup>19</sup>Partially inspired by this course, a number of MPAcc students have pursued a doctoral dissertation, including three students who are now members of our accounting department.

<sup>20</sup>On a few occasions two academics have been invited as plenary speakers.

<sup>21</sup>Note that two of the speakers have come from other disciplines (human resources and marketing).

testable on the final exam.<sup>22</sup> Of note is that the class is divided into two sections for the conference, with the same four research papers being presented and discussed each day. Each student, consequently, attends the conference for one full day, but is required to attend both luncheon plenary sessions.<sup>23</sup>

*Part 5 – Final Exam (20% of the course grade)*

The final examination, written individually, is held at the end of the second day of the research conference. It examines the full range of learning expected in the course. The most recent exam was broken into two parts.<sup>24</sup> The first part, worth 40% of the final exam grade, was “general research design” questions. For example, students were required to contrast the strengths and weaknesses of any two of the four research designs in the course. They were also asked to identify a research question they felt needed examining and to outline an appropriate research design. Questions for the second part of the exam, worth the remaining 60%, were drawn specifically from the research papers covered in the course. Students were able to bring the research papers into the exam, along with any other materials they felt were relevant. They were not allowed access to the internet. The questions were set at a level where the students needed a solid understanding of the paper and its design. For example, they might be asked to identify the primary variable of interest used in the paper’s regression analysis, or be asked to describe how the variable was measured. Given that the final exam had an element of time pressure, students had to be able to quickly access the appropriate part of each paper.

### **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

Every year accounting academics carry out a significant amount of accounting research. This research explores a broad range of accounting topics and utilizes a variety of research designs. Exposure to this research has much to offer accounting students. This includes its ability to not only educate on technical issues (e.g., accounting and auditing standards, management accounting tools, tax rules, statistics), but perhaps more importantly to develop the capacity to think critically and to examine issues using a logical structure of analysis. The research project course described in this article, being the product of fourteen years of testing and redesign, provides a template professors could effectively employ in bringing accounting research into their classrooms and, hence, in developing these capacities in their students. The course pedagogy, including its varied set of teaching settings, also presents opportunities for faculty to enhance their students’ written, verbal and presentation skills, all of crucial importance for success as a future professional accountant. The favorable course evaluations, strong student performance in the course, and the positive feedback from invited conference speakers, are testament to the course having helped develop these capacities and skills in the students. A greater appreciation for the value of academic research by these future practitioners is an additional, albeit a more hoped for, outcome from the course.

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<sup>22</sup>Given that the plenary speaker’s academic paper is also testable on the final exam, this increases the likelihood of engaged questioning during the plenary presentation.

<sup>23</sup>Lunch is provided for all the students as well as for other faculty members in the Accounting Department and Business School who choose to attend the plenary presentation.

<sup>24</sup>The most recent final exam is available upon request.

**APPENDIX 1**  
**List of MPAcc Courses**

<u>Course List - 1998<sup>25</sup></u>	<u>Course List - 2011</u>
● The Business Environment*	● The Business Environment and Strategy*
● Corporate Financial Management: Policies, Strategies and Decision Making*	● Corporate Financial Management: Policies, Strategies and Decision Making*
● Financial Reporting and Accountability*	● Financial Reporting and Accountability*
● Strategic Management Accounting*	● Strategic Management Accounting*
● Managing the Modern Business <sup>26**</sup>	● Advanced Financial Reporting**
● Auditing the Modern Business, Government and Not-for-Profit Organizations**	● Auditing the Modern Business, Government and Not-for-Profit Organizations**
● Information Systems, Design, Control and Audit**	● Information Systems, Design, Control and Audit*
● Taxation**	● Taxation**
● Entrepreneurship and Small Business Management**	● Entrepreneurship and Small Business Management**
● Professionalism, Skills, Application and Integration***	● Professionalism, Skills, Application and Integration***
● Research Project <sup>27</sup>	● Research Project

\* Taught in the first semester of the program.

\*\* Taught in the second semester of the program.

\*\*\* Taught over both semesters of the program.

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<sup>25</sup>The first four offerings of the MPAcc program began with a Fall semester followed by a Spring/Summer semester. Since 2002 the program has operated on a model of two consecutive Spring/Summer semesters.

<sup>26</sup>In 2009 the Human Resources course “Managing the Modern Business” was replaced with a second financial accounting course entitled “Advanced Financial Reporting”. This decision was precipitated by the expansive nature of the material in this area affected by the introduction in Canada of International Financial Reporting Standards, changes in other domestic standards, and to an overall increase in financial reporting regulation. Some of the material originally offered in the HR course is now offered as part of professional development seminars offered to the MPAcc students.

<sup>27</sup>The level of comfort the students gain in reading academic research during the research project course complements a number of the other courses in the MPAcc program where the course materials include academic articles. For this reason, it is important that the research course is taken at the beginning of the MPAcc program.

**APPENDIX 2**  
**Course Outline**

**MPAcc 992 - RESEARCH PROJECT – SPRING 2011**

**Instructor:** Gary Entwistle, PhD, CA  
Professor of Accounting  
Sutherland Scholar in International Business  
Current Past President, Canadian Academic Accounting Association

**Office:** 285 ESB

**Phone:** 966-8403

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**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

This course provides you with an opportunity to develop insights into, and an appreciation for, the academic research process. Working in groups, you will examine a number of academic research papers encompassing topics in financial accounting, auditing, and professional practice. You will demonstrate your understanding of the research papers through a combination of a written submission, discussions, presentations and a final exam.

**COURSE OBJECTIVES**

The primary objectives of this course are:

- To make you a more informed and critical consumer of written materials, both academic and professional.
- To develop an appreciation for the academic research process, including various issues of research design.
- To provide an opportunity for you to refine your written, verbal, statistical, presentation, and critical thinking skills.

**COURSE PREREQUISITES**

There are no prerequisites for this course beyond those required to enter the MPAcc Program.

**COURSE MATERIAL**

Any necessary course materials will be provided throughout the course. Students will be expected to access necessary reference materials on an as-needed basis, both with and without guidance from the instructor.

**COURSE DELIVERY**

The course consists of five main parts:

**Part 1**

An in class session which will provide an overview of the course. This session will include the discussion of an assigned research paper and other materials provided to you.

**Part 2**

In groups of three you will:

- 1) Prepare a written critique of a research paper.
- 2) Engage in an oral defense of the written critique with the course instructor. This defense will take place in the instructor's office.

Additional information regarding the written critique is provided at the end of the course outline.

**Part 3**

In groups of six you will engage in a boardroom discussion of a research paper. More information will be provided at a later date.

**Part 4**

Additional information regarding the Research Day (Conference) will be provided at a later date.

**Part 5**

Additional information regarding the Final Exam will be provided at a later date.

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

Note 1: Students will be randomly assigned to groups.

Note 2: This course will conform to the rules on Academic Misconduct:

[http://www.usask.ca/university\\_secretary/honesty/StudentAcademicMisconduct.pdf](http://www.usask.ca/university_secretary/honesty/StudentAcademicMisconduct.pdf)

**DATES AND MARK ALLOCATION**

<b>Description</b>	<b>Relevant Dates</b>	<b>Course Weight</b>
<p><b>Part 1</b> In class session</p>	<p>Tuesday May 3<sup>rd</sup>, 8:30am-12:30pm (01); 1:30-5:30pm (03), Room 103</p>	<p>-</p>
<p><b>Part 2</b> Written Critique and Oral Defenses</p>	<p>Due Friday May 13<sup>th</sup>, 6:00pm  Monday May 16<sup>th</sup> to Friday May 20<sup>th</sup>  Assigned groups, times, and research papers to be provided</p>	<p>30%  (Combined mark on written critique and oral defense)</p>
<p><b>Part 3</b> Boardroom Discussion</p>	<p>Wednesday June 1<sup>st</sup> and Thursday June 2<sup>nd</sup>  Assigned groups, times, and research paper to be provided</p>	<p>30%</p>
<p><b>Part 4</b> Research Day (Conference)</p>	<p>Tuesday June 28<sup>th</sup> and Wednesday June 29<sup>th</sup>  Assigned, groups, times, and research papers to be provided  Note: All students must attend the luncheon speakers sessions on June 28<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup>  Lunch will be provided on both days</p>	<p>Presentations 20%</p>
<p><b>Part 5</b> Final Exam</p>	<p>Wednesday June 29<sup>th</sup></p>	<p>20%</p>

## **Written Critiques**

An effective critique accomplishes two main objectives:

### **1. Provides an overview of the research paper**

This part describes what the author(s) attempted to accomplish with the study, how the study was carried out (i.e., the research design), the main findings of the study, and any identified limitations and future research opportunities. The framework below should provide you with some guidance in structuring the overview.

- Formal description of the paper: title, authors, journal, date, acknowledgements, etc.
- Main research question(s) being examined.
- Motivation for the study: Why was the study carried out?
- Description of any underlying theories (e.g., agency theory) or concepts (e.g., conservatism, decision usefulness) being examined. Such theories or concepts may be specifically stated or may be implied in the paper.
- Description of any formal hypotheses being tested.
- Literature review/references: How was the literature presented (i.e, what purpose(s) did it serve) in the study? What type of articles were used (e.g., academic, practitioner, technical materials)? What was/were the key article(s) used in the study?
- The research method or research design. Describe how the study was conducted: interviews, archival (secondary) data collection, surveys, experiment?
- The data analysis: How was the data presented and analyzed?
- Conclusions/Findings: What were the main conclusions/findings?
- Contributions of the study: How did the study contribute to academic knowledge and/or to management knowledge?
- Limitations of the study.
- Areas for future research.

### **2. Provides suggestions for improvement**

Recognizing that given additional constructive feedback that even published articles could have been improved, this second part contains your group's thoughts on how the study might have been improved in any or all areas of the research process.

## **Points to Note**

- The critique length is flexible; 3-5 pages (single-spaced) would be appropriate.
- The suggestions for improvement should be provided in a separate section following the overview of the research paper.
- The oral defences will be held in the instructor's office and will take approximately one hour. Each group member must be fully prepared to answer any questions – technical or otherwise – posed by the instructor.

**APPENDIX 3**  
**List of Articles**

<b>Session</b>	<b>Authors</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Research Design</b>	<b>Journal Year</b>
Course Introduction	Gordon and Porter	Reading and Understanding Academic Research in Accounting: A Guide for Students	Descriptive	GPAAE 2009
Course Introduction	Wakefield	Networks of Accounting Research: A Citation-Based Structural and Network Analysis	Archival	BAR 2008
Course Introduction	Entwistle	Net Income, Pro Forma, and the Earnings Quality Quagmire	Archival	Working Paper 2002
Course Introduction	Entwistle, Feltham and Mbagwu	The Voluntary Disclosure of Pro Forma Earnings: A U.S.-Canada Comparison	Archival	JIAR 2005
In Office Session	Johnston, Lindsay and Phillips	Undetected Deviations in Tests of Controls: Experimental Evidence of Nonsampling Risk	Experiment	CAP 2003
In Office Session	Durocher and Fortin	Proposed Changes in Lease Accounting and Private Business Bankers' Credit Decisions	Survey	AP 2009
Boardroom Discussion	Gendron and Spira	What Went Wrong? The Downfall of Arthur Andersen and the Construction of Controllability Boundaries Surrounding Financial Auditing	Interviews	CAR 2009
Research Conference	Hatfield, Houston, Stefaniak and Usrey	The Effect of Magnitude of Audit Difference and Prior Client Concessions on Negotiations of Proposed Adjustments	Experiment	TAR 2010
Research Conference	Dykeman and Entwistle	The Life and Death of the Canadian Contingent Gains and Losses Accounting Standards Project	Archival and Interviews	CAP 2004
Research Conference	Daugherty and Tervo	PCAOB Inspections of Smaller CPA Firms: The Perspective of Inspected Firms	Survey	AH 2010
Research Conference	Li	Does Mandatory Adoption of International Financial Reporting Standards in the European Union Reduce the Cost of Equity Capital?	Archival	TAR 2010

AP – *Accounting Perspectives* (formerly *Canadian Accounting Perspectives*); AH – *Accounting Horizons*; BAR – *British Accounting Review*; CAP – *Canadian Accounting Perspectives*; CAR – *Contemporary Accounting Research*; GPAAE – *Global Perspectives on Accounting Education*; JIAR – *Journal of International Accounting Research*; TAR – *The Accounting Review*

**APPENDIX 4**  
**List of Research Conference Speakers**

<u>Academic Speakers</u>	<u>Professional Speakers</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Michelle Chwastiak, University of New Mexico</li> <li>• David Cooper, University of Alberta</li> <li>• Gary Entwistle, University of Saskatchewan</li> <li>• Yves Gendron, Laval University</li> <li>• Michael Gibbins, University of Alberta</li> <li>• Sandy Hilton, University of British Columbia (Okanagan)</li> <li>• Ole-Kristjan Hope, University of Toronto</li> <li>• Theresa Libby, University of Waterloo</li> <li>• Murray Lindsay, University of Lethbridge</li> <li>• Chima Mbagwu, Wilfrid Laurier University</li> <li>• Barb Phillips (Marketing), University of Saskatchewan</li> <li>• Fred Phillips, University of Saskatchewan</li> <li>• Dionne Pohler (Human Resources), University of Saskatchewan</li> <li>• Vaughan Radcliffe, University of Western Ontario</li> <li>• Linda Thorne, York University</li> <li>• Stephen Zeff, Rice University</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arnie Arnott, President, Institute of Chartered Accountants of Saskatchewan</li> <li>• Paul Cherry, Chair, Canadian Accounting Standards Board</li> <li>• Glenn Feltham, Dean, University of Manitoba</li> <li>• Steve Glover, CEO, Institute of Chartered Accountants of Alberta</li> <li>• John Gunn, CEO, Chartered Accountants School of Business</li> <li>• Harvey Naglie, President, Financial Executives Institute of Canada</li> <li>• Patricia O'Malley, Member, International Accounting Standards Board</li> <li>• Fred Snell, Chief Accountant, Alberta Securities Commission</li> <li>• Gord Fowler, Chair, Canadian Accounting Standards Board</li> </ul>

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