AFIN/ACST 450
Research Seminar

2012

Department of Applied Finance and Actuarial Studies

1 Version 2.0, Feb 2012
Students in this unit should read this unit guide carefully at the start of semester. It contains important information about the unit. If anything in it is unclear, please consult one of the teaching staff in the unit.

ABOUT THIS UNIT

AFIN/ACST450 Research Seminar is a unit based on the first semester Research Seminar Series of the Department of Applied Finance and Actuarial Studies. The actual seminars are held during selected teaching weeks in first and second semesters on Fridays at 11am. The seminars typically range over a variety of areas and topics, and may be presented by local, interstate and overseas academics and researchers. Academic staff in the department, and occasionally interested people from outside the department attend the seminars. Generally the seminar is a forum for the researcher to present a working paper, and to obtain feedback and constructive comments prior to finalising the paper for submission to a journal.

Using the research seminars as a basis, you will learning some of the nuts and bolts of doing and participating in research in finance and actuarial studies. The aim is to make you an active participant and contributor to the research culture. Active participation and contribution includes reading and critically appraising papers and giving feedback to presenters of the same. You are expected to gain an enhanced appreciation of what constitutes scholarly research and in particular good academic research. You will also gain experience in presenting your own work within the framework of a seminar environment and the latest published research and receiving feedback from others.

In addition we will survey and discuss the tools and habits of successful academic researchers.

TEACHING STAFF

- Dr Egon Kalotay  
  Office E4A 513, Ph: 9850 8490, email: egon.kalotay@mq.edu.au

- Professor Piet de Jong  
  Office E4A 611, Ph: 9850 8576, email: piet.dejong@mq.edu.au
CONTACTING STAFF

Friday 1:30pm – 3:30pm (Kalotay) or by appointment (Semester 1)
Moday 2:00pm - 4:00pm (De Jong) during teaching weeks or by appointment

CLASSES

For this course you must:
1. Attend all “pre-seminar” classes (Fridays 9:00-11:00) during teaching weeks
2. Attend all seminars (Fridays 11:00am-1:00 pm) during teaching weeks

REQUIRED AND RECOMMENDED TEXTS AND/OR MATERIALS

• Semester 1, 2012 seminars papers downloadable from the Research Seminar website
• King, G “Publication, Publication” http://gking.harvard.edu/files/paperspub.pdf
• Cochrane, J.H “Writing tips for Ph.D. students” http://faculty.chicagobooth.edu/john.cochrane/research/papers/phd_paper_writing.pdf
• Russell, B. “How I Write” http://www.davemckay.co.uk/philosophy/russell/russell.php?name=how.i.write
• Any text indicating the relative merits of using Latex/Bibtex as opposed to a word processing program
• Access and familiarity with Google Scholar and ssrn.com
• Access and familiarity with a program to put together an effective and authoritative scholarly presentation

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Reading papers on a range of topics will provide you with perspective on the work of researchers in applied finance and/or actuarial studies. Evaluating strengths and weaknesses in the work of others will help you think more deeply and clearly about your own work. The specific objectives of this are:

1. Understanding of the finance/actuarial research environment.
2. Skill in evaluating and assessing research.
3. Ability to identify research opportunities and potential obstacles and pitfalls.
4. Understanding of the steps involved in research and bringing research to a successful published conclusion.
5. Written and presentational skills through articulation of your thoughts, ideas and comments on current and your proposed research.

GRADUATE CAPABILITIES

In addition to the discipline-based learning objectives, all academic programs at Macquarie seek to develop the capabilities the University's graduates will need to
develop to address the challenges, and to be effective, engaged participants in their world.

This unit contributes to this by developing the following graduate capabilities:

1. Discipline Specific Knowledge and Skills*
2. Critical, Analytical and Integrative Thinking
3. Problem Solving and Research Capability
4. Creative and Innovative
5. Effective Communication

**LEARNING AND TEACHING ACTIVITIES**

1. Where a paper is available, arrive at the pre-seminar class having read and reviewed the seminar paper.
2. Attend and actively participate in “pre seminar” classes and seminars as discussed below.
3. Attend and participate in all seminars from 11:00 am onwards and
4. Towards the end of the semester, give a 20 minute presentation to the class in the 9:00-11:00 am time slot:
   a) Outline your proposed area of research
   b) Outline one or more recent articles to which your proposed area of research is most intimately related or on which it is based.
   c) Critically evaluate the recent literature including the recent articles in b) indicating the shortcomings you are addressing or the extensions you are proposing.
5. Give concrete verbal and written (email) feedback to your fellow students regarding their proposal, presentation content and style after their presentation. Outline both positive and negative points in a constructive, supportive fashion. Use dot points with headings “positive” and “negative.”
6. Complete the final exam in June 2012 as described below.

The pre-seminar classes are organized as follows:

If a paper is not available, one of the teaching staff will discuss research with particular reference to the readings listed elsewhere in this unit outline. You are expected to read and familiarize yourself with the readings in the first week of classes.

When a paper is available, Friday “pre-seminar” classes from 9:00am to 11:00 am are used to discuss and evaluate the seminar paper to be presented from 11:00 am onwards. The structure of these “pre-seminar” classes is:

1. Prior to each class download, read, and critically evaluate the paper. Fill out a “Seminar Paper Review” form (see below) detailing your evaluation. A copy of this form is handed to the class facilitator at the start of the class as further discussed below.
2. At the start of each class students are randomly assigned to a group for the
duration of the class. Students in each group submits copies of the individually completed Seminar Paper Review Forms to their group. The forms submitted at the commencement of the class serve as a record of individuals' preparation and personal contribution to the substance of their group's discussion. Please record your assigned group number on the seminar paper review form you submit at the start of each class. Failure to record this information on your submitted work leads to a mark of zero.

3. The facilitator assigns to each group one aspect of the paper to present and discuss based on the sections of the Seminar Paper Review Form. Each presentation should take no more than 5-10mins. Other members of the class are requested to make contributions to the discussion. The facilitator will keep the discussions focused.

4. At the conclusion of the presentations the facilitator will synthesize the classes view of the contributions of the paper, what has been learned, and a summary of suggestions for improvements. The class will try to answer the question as to the impact of the paper in terms of “Whose mind is going to be changed about what?”

5. Each group's contribution will be graded on a scale of 1-10. This score is averaged with an individual contribution score of 1-10 to arrive at the individual’s overall score for the class. A further mark may be awarded for positive contribution to the overall class discussion. An individual’s contribution is based on both the written pre class contribution and the in class verbal contribution.

6. The format of pre-seminar classes is expected to be reasonably consistent,. Facilitators may vary according to the research area of the paper to be presented. In this way you will benefit from the expertise of a range of Faculty in the department.

Toward the end of the semester each student is required to make a presentation to class of their proposed research. Please ensure you schedule your presentation as soon as possible. It is your responsibility to find an appropriate time slot. The presentation must be structured as follows:

1. The presentation must not exceed 20 minutes. This means you will have to be very selective in what you put in and what you leave out. Overtly long presentations not focussing on the main points are not valued.

2. Indicate the substantive problem in your field of interest outlining one or a few clear points. Indicate “Whose mind you are proposing to change about what.”

3. Your presentation must reference and broadly evaluate of at least one article published in the peer reviewed scholarly literature, preferably in the last few years. Better articles in better journals written by more prominent authors are the best.

4. Indicate the shortcomings in the recent literature your research proposed research aims to address. Indicate how your proposed research will add to the body of
scholarly knowledge.

Towards the end of the semester we may be short of class time. Hence we may need to start prior to 9am. If this may be a problem for you (ie an early start), please advise immediately.

**RESEARCH AND PRACTICE**

- This unit uses research by Macquarie University researchers
- This unit uses research from external sources

**RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ASSESSMENT AND LEARNING OUTCOMES**

Your final grade will be determined by your performance in each component of assessment as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment</th>
<th>Task 1</th>
<th>Task 2</th>
<th>Task 3</th>
<th>Task 4</th>
<th>Task 5</th>
<th>Task 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title/Name</td>
<td>Paper review - individual pre class</td>
<td>Paper review - in class group work</td>
<td>Paper review - in class participation</td>
<td>Honour's research proposal presentation</td>
<td>Honour's proposal emailed feedback to other</td>
<td>Final Exam - see below</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Weekly according to seminar schedule</td>
<td>Weekly according to seminar schedule</td>
<td>Weekly according to seminar schedule</td>
<td>Schedule with convenor</td>
<td>Weekly by 9pm on presentation day.</td>
<td>To be announced</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weighting</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Submission method</td>
<td>Paper review &amp; participation form</td>
<td>Paper review group form</td>
<td>Class discussion participation</td>
<td>Written (slides) and verbal presentation</td>
<td>cc any Email to <a href="mailto:piet.dejong@mq.edu.au">piet.dejong@mq.edu.au</a></td>
<td>Printed and emailed copy of review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback</td>
<td>Commented review form</td>
<td>Discussion in class</td>
<td>In class discussion</td>
<td>Discussion in class</td>
<td>Emailed reply to both parties</td>
<td>Comments on review.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estimated workload</td>
<td>4 hours per week</td>
<td>Part of Task 1</td>
<td>Part of class</td>
<td>8 hours</td>
<td>1/2 hour per presentation</td>
<td>to ensure 24 hour turnaround</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning outcomes</td>
<td>1-4</td>
<td>1-4</td>
<td>1-6</td>
<td>1-6</td>
<td>1-6</td>
<td>1-4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Task 5 indicates each student required to email to each presenter, by 9pm on the day of the presentation, his or her reaction to each presentation. Please cc piet.dejong@mq.edu.au in on this email. When you give your presentation make
sure you clearly display your email address so others can email you their reaction.

Each Assessment task is marked out of 10:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mark Range</th>
<th>Achievement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9-10</td>
<td>Outstanding - Excellent -</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-8</td>
<td>Good - Very Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-7</td>
<td>Just OK - Average</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-5</td>
<td>Below acceptable standard</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Your aggregate mark for ‘Paper Reviews and Participation’ component of the assessment will be an equally weighted average of your 4 best marks. Please be aware that seminars (and possibly pre-seminar classes) are at times subject to last minute changes. For example, seminars or pre-seminar classes may be cancelled due to the illness of a presenter. Sometimes presenters only make their paper available at the last minute. Please refer to the Research section of the Departmental web site for up-to-date information about the seminar series. However in all circumstances you are required to attend class at 9am on each Friday during the teaching weeks.

Slight variations to assessment may be required due to the unpredictability of the seminar schedule. If a variation becomes necessary, you will be notified in class.

**Paper Reviews & Participation.** Marks for paper reviews and participation is based on the Seminar Paper Review Forms submitted by students at the commencement of the class, and, for the content and quality of work presented to the class. An “Excellent-Outstanding” paper review is awarded for a review which:

- Succinctly summaries of the key features of research.
- Makes appropriate criticisms and constructive suggestions.
- Reflects reading or knowledge of related literature. Rarely (if ever) can you pick up a paper and read it in isolation without reference to related work.

A submission awarded “Excellent-Outstanding” is work that can be and will be (with your permission) sent to the author of the paper.

Weaker submissions typically:
- Just summarize the seminar paper;
- Make unsubstantiated criticisms or expressions of opinion
- Make little effort to make constructive suggestions;
- Lack clarity or coherence;

During the first week of classes you will be provided with the document ‘Guide to Preparing a Critique’ for further guidance, as well as a guide to doing and writing
research (aimed at PhD students, but very helpful at Honours level as well).

**Final Exam.** The final exam is a 24 hour take home exam. It is held after the final pre-seminar class; exact date to be advised. In general terms, the exam requires you to independently write an assessment of a specifically assigned research paper. You will be provided with details of requirements closer to the date of the exam. The assigned paper may or may not be one of the papers presented in the seminar series. Actuarial and finance students may be assigned different papers.

**ACADEMIC HONESTY**

The nature of scholarly endeavour, dependent as it is on the work of others, binds all members of the University community to abide by the principles of academic honesty. Its fundamental principle is that all staff and students act with integrity in the creation, development, application and use of ideas and information. This means that:

- all academic work claimed as original is the work of the author making the claim
- all academic collaborations are acknowledged
- academic work is not falsified in any way
- when the ideas of others are used, these ideas are acknowledged appropriately.

Further information on the academic honesty can be found in the Macquarie University Academic Honesty Policy at [http://www.mq.edu.au/policy/docs/academic_honesty/policy.html](http://www.mq.edu.au/policy/docs/academic_honesty/policy.html)

Please be aware that you can expect a zero tolerance approach to plagiarism or any other form of cheating in this unit. If you're caught, you will receive zero marks for your efforts and the matter will be pursued in accordance with University procedures.

**GRADES**

Macquarie University uses the following grades in coursework units of study:

- HD - High Distinction
- D - Distinction
- CR - Credit
- P - Pass
- F - Fail

Grade descriptors and other information concerning grading are contained in the Macquarie University Grading Policy which is available at: [http://www.mq.edu.au/policy/docs/grading/policy.html](http://www.mq.edu.au/policy/docs/grading/policy.html)
If, at the conclusion of the unit, you have performed below expectations, and are considering lodging an appeal of grade and/or viewing your final exam script please refer to the following website which provides information about these processes and the cut off dates in the first instance. Please read the instructions provided concerning what constitutes a valid grounds for appeal before appealing your grade.

http://www.businessandeconomics.mq.edu.au/new_and_current_students/undergraduate_current_students/how_do_i/grade_appeals

The University is committed to equity and fairness in all aspects of its learning and teaching. In stating this commitment, the University recognises that there may be circumstances where a student is prevented by unavoidable disruption from performing in accordance with their ability. A special consideration policy exists to support students who experience serious and unavoidable disruption such that they do not reach their usual demonstrated performance level. The policy is available at:
http://www.mq.edu.au/policy/docs/special_consideration/procedure.html

Macquarie University provides a range of Academic Student Support Services. Details of these services can be accessed at http://www.student.mq.edu.au.

Access to all student computing facilities within the Faculty of Business and Economics is restricted to authorised coursework for approved units. Student ID cards must be displayed in the locations provided at all times.

Students are expected to act responsibly when utilising University IT facilities. The following regulations apply to the use of computing facilities and online services:

- Accessing inappropriate web sites or downloading inappropriate material is not permitted. Material that is not related to coursework for approved unit is deemed inappropriate.
- Downloading copyright material without permission from the copyright owner is illegal, and strictly prohibited. Students detected undertaking such activities will face disciplinary action, which may result in criminal proceedings.

Non-compliance with these conditions may result in disciplinary action without further notice.
Students must use their Macquarie University email addresses to communicate with staff as it is University policy that the University issued email account is used for official University communication.