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BSc Hons Handbook — 2021

**ELCO489, CGRA489, COMP489,
and AIML487
(Individual Research Project)**

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The BSc Hons (COMP/ELCO/CGRA489 and AIML487) project courses consist of an individual or small group project done under the supervision of one (or more) academic staff. Some projects are also offered in partnership with industry - in which case supervision is shared with an industry supervisor. The underlying aim of the project is to develop your research ability and demonstrate your independent and critical thinking. The project will involve refining a project proposal, reviewing and analysing relevant literature, potentially developing an artifact, and evaluating the artifact or research problem. You will present a final written report, and conclude with an oral presentation.

1.1 Aims and Scope

The aim of this document is to provide a comprehensive guide to the BSc Hons project, for both students and staff. In particular, the document sets out the requirements of the course and clarifies the way in which student projects will be assessed and supervised.

1.2 Engineering versus Science

Many of the students in 400 level courses are doing ENGR489, that is an engineering project which is more about implementation and process, while this handbook describes the **research** projects.

Research projects at 4th year range from literature reviews and analysis, repeating existing published work, through to the testing of new artifacts, and creation of knowledge. The first part of the project is to define the scope of the project and questions that are being answered. If an artifact is created then there needs to be an experimental protocol to collect, analyse and interpret data. BSc Hons students are expected to demonstrate mathematical rigour (where appropriate), and use scientific experimentation to make critical observations. The literature survey for the projects will typically draw on research papers in journals and conferences.

NOTE: If unsure you should consult with their supervisor(s) and/or the course coordinator to ensure that the project is a research project.

1.3 Plan, Create, Test and Evaluate

A project can be thought of as planning, reviewing the research area, typically creating an artifact based on research, and evaluating the *artifact*. The term artifact refers to student

created software, theoretical framework, taxonomy, dataset or other work apart from than the report created as part of the project.

1.4 Project Timeline

The following provides a rough overview of the project timeline, and identifies the main points of interest.

Week 1	Students rank projects using project allocation system.
Week 2	Project allocation performed by course coordinator.
Week 3	Students meet with supervisor(s) and begin work.
Week 4	students submit project proposals and an IP forms on ECS submission system
week 5	Work continues; students meet regularly with supervisors.
...	...
Week 12	Students submit their progress report. Thus is worth 20% is it increases the final grade.
Mid-Year Break	Work continues around examinations. Students meet with supervisors where possible.
Week 1	Students give a presentation to their associated research group
...	Work continues; students meet regularly with supervisors.
Week 7 (end of)	Students submit a draft of their final report to their Supervisors.
Week 12 (end of)	Students submit final report.
T2 Exam Period	Students present their work during conference day.

Chapter 2

Project Allocation

The first stage of the BSc Hons project is the allocation of projects to students. This process attempts to allocate students to the projects they prefer. Indeed, it is in the interests of both students and staff that this is done as accurately, and quickly as possible. Once the allocation is complete, students must produce a project proposal in conjunction with their supervisor(s).

2.1 Choosing a Project

The online [Project Allocation System \(PAS\)](#) is used by both staff and students to register and rank projects. Prior to the start of Trimester 1, staff upload descriptions of the projects they wish to supervise. The PAS system contains only a brief description of each projects. During pick week students are encouraged to speak to potential supervisors to gain a better idea of what is involved.

The algorithm we use for matching students to staff and projects is a variation on the Deferred Acceptance Algorithm (DAA) – specifically we use a simplified version of the the North American Medical Placement system which allocates about 20 thousand students to internships every year. The nice thing about this algorithm is that it produces stable matches and is strategy proof - that is, misleading the system about your rankings (e.g., to try and get a better allocation) will only lead to you getting a worse outcome.

Once everyone's rankings are complete, we run the algorithm and we're done. Well, almost. Unfortunately there may be left over students and projects where the algorithm expended all the students choices without finding them a project (because the supervisors they chose were fully allocated to other students). In this case we enter what is called the *scramble* - which really means we just assign the remainders manually.

There are several important points to make about the PAS system:

- **Students cannot pick more than two projects (excluding the industry projects) from any given (primary) supervisor.** If you do this, you will get an error message and the system will not add your selection. If you wish to change your project selection, you will need to remove one of your previous choices first. This helps to ensure that student preferences are diverse, and do not single out specific supervisors. For example, without this restriction, a given student may only select projects from one supervisor, hoping to ensure they are allocated that supervisor. However, if several students adopt this strategy for the same supervisor, then a problem arises as each supervisor may only take on a limited number of students (typically 1 or 2 students).
- **Students must rank at least seven different projects** If you wish to alter your project

rankings (otherwise it is in order you added them to your list) just drag and drop the projects in your list to reflect your preference order. Once you have picked at least 7 projects you will be able to use the submit button to register your choices. If you pick less than 7, the submit button will not be displayed and when we run the algorithm, you will go directly to the scramble (see above). This means that everyone else will get their choices before you.

- **Staff rank the student-project selections.** Each primary supervisor for a project you have ranked, will in turn rank your selection against all other selections by other students. This ranking will include consideration into your suitability for any specific project, along with the supervisor's own preference for that project (we limit the number of projects a supervisor can be allocated, given those limits, they may prefer to have project widget allocated over project gadget).
- **Privacy** All student rankings and staff rankings are kept private. Academic staff will **not** see student rankings, and students will not see staff rankings. Therefore you can feel free to rank your most preferred projects without fear of offending a staff member.
- **Some projects have co-supervisors listed.** Depending on the particular staff involved, some supervisors will share equally in supervision, whereas others may choose to have a co-supervisor who can provide additional expertise for a project - but play a lesser role in the supervision as a whole. Usually, all administrative aspects of the project are the responsibility of the primary supervisor.
- **Industry projects.** Industry projects have an academic staff listed as either primary or secondary supervisor. However, the academic staff will be the student's first point of contact in relation to all aspects of the project.
A student can pick as many industry projects from a supervisor and are not counted as part of "**maximum of two projects**" constraint discussed above.

Please Note: If an BSc Hon student chooses an industry project, we must make additional checks that the project has a research focus.

Unfortunately, despite all of these recommendations, we cannot guarantee that every student will be allocated to a project they prefer. In the unlikely event of a student being allocated to a project that they believe is not suitable for them, they should immediately contact the course coordinator.

2.2 Proposal

Once the allocation of students to projects is complete, students are expected to meet with their supervisors and put together a *project proposal*.

NOTE: it is the student's responsibility to contact their supervisor and arrange an appropriate meeting time.

Students are required to submit a report (no more than four pages) for the proposal stage by the end of week 4. Generally, the report should include the following topics:

- An overview of the research problem being addressed by the project.
- A high-level summary of state-of-the-art techniques to this problem

- A statement of key motivations, including limitations or issues that the current/state-of-the-art methods have and this project is to tackle
- A statement of the overall goal and specific objectives, hypotheses, or research questions
- A statement regarding the proposed method to investigate to the problem.
- A statement regarding the proposed evaluation method, e.g. possible available data and the evaluation measures
- A discussion of any ethical considerations around the project.
- A statement, if applicable, regarding any budgetary requirements, including appropriate justification.
- A statement regarding any risks or hazards that the project poses (either in the development itself, or in using the final artifact).
- A discussion of any other requirements for the project to be successfully completed. This might be access to particular equipment or rooms, special IP issues etc.
- Provide a proposed project time line, in the form of a Gantt chart (or similar).

Proposal pages not included in the page limit:

- Title Page
- Table of Contents and Glossary
- References and Bibliography
- Project Gantt Chart

A small amount of funding is available for every project (the exact amount depends on the specialisation, and should be clarified by the course coordinator). The funding is primarily to help purchase items necessary for the project, although it can be used for other purposes (e.g. as koha for user-experiments or surveys). Students must justify their budgetary requirements in the proposal report.

For industry projects, it is a norm that the industry sponsor funds any related costs for the project. Any exceptions will need an approval from the Head of School.

2.2.1 Assessment Process

Constructive feedback should be given two weeks after the report submission deadline. The examiners are expected to read the report and give feedback to the supervisors.

The aim of this process is to identify: firstly, whether the project is viable and sensible for the given specialisation; secondly, whether there are any obvious issues which must be addressed. Where necessary, some comments will be communicated to the student by the supervisor.

2.3 Intellectual Property Agreement

All students working with industry partners are required to submit a signed intellectual property agreement along with their proposal report. The purpose of the intellectual property agreement is simply to identify those parties who are stakeholders in the project.

Chapter 3

Supervision and You

As this is likely your first experience with an individual supervised project, it can be difficult to calibrate your expectations against your supervisor's. This section aims to describe what you should be getting from your supervisor, and what your supervisor should be getting from you. If your experience under supervision differs widely from the guidelines given in this chapter, you should first discuss this with your supervisor and if it cannot be resolved to your satisfaction please bring your query to the BSc Hons coordinator. The earlier issues are identified and resolved, the better things will be handled. There is little we can do to resolve long standing problems a few weeks out from submission.

3.1 Supervisors Responsibilities

It is the responsibility of your supervisors to guide you through the academic requirements of your project. Supervisors will:

- meet with you regularly
- provide you with academic guidance and scholarly direction
- assess your progress and give you written feedback
- act as guides to University facilities
- make sure you comply with the University's administrative regulations.

3.1.1 Regular Meetings

It is expected that you and your supervisor will meet in person regularly and individually:

- For a project supervised by a VUW staff member we would expect the minimum to be a 30 minute individual meeting each week. You may agree with your supervisor to different arrangements that better suit the nature of the project, but the above should be considered a working minimum.
- For a project supervised by an industrial supervisor and VUW supervisor, we would expect a weekly supervision meeting with the industrial supervisor. The VUW supervisor would not be expected to attend every meeting, although may, but a combined meeting at least every fortnight should be considered a working minimum.

3.1.2 Academic Guidance

Your supervisors will provide guidance on a range of academic matters. These include:

- the standards required for an honours project
- planning your research
- skills you will need to acquire
- research resources
- methodology
- undertaking a literature review
- ethical, legal, professional and safety issues

Throughout, your supervisors will bear in mind the expectations of examiners.

3.1.3 Assessing Your Progress and Feedback

Supervisors will assess your progress and provide you with constructive feedback throughout your project. They will need to ensure that you possess the understanding and abilities to:

- carry out your project as envisioned
- complete your work on time, meeting the various deadlines for assessment.
- Provide prompt feedback on your work. The university guideline for feedback is 3 weeks, ECS aims for a 2 week turnaround.

3.1.4 Support

Your supervisor(s) is also there to support you. If you encounter problems of any kind, you should feel free to discuss them with them - especially if it could have an impact on your project work. The BSc Hons coordinator is also available to help and offer support in such situations, especially if you are not comfortable discussing matters directly with your supervisor. If they can't help, they will be able to direct you to various student support services run by the University – a guideline to these services will be linked from the course homepage.

3.2 Your Responsibilities as a Project Student

You will need to abide by the University regulations governing your degree.

3.2.1 Planning and Actively Pursuing Your Work

You have an obligation to devote sufficient time to your work, to complete each phase on time, and to avoid activities that interfere with your satisfactory and timely completion of the project. For the 30 point courses: CGRA489, COMP489 and ELCO489 they are 15 points per trimester, thus you should expect to spend on average 10 hours per week on your project, spread over the 30 weeks that the course runs (i.e. including mid-trimester breaks, and the mid-year break). For the 45 point course AIML487, you will likely have one semester with more work, thus in your busy semester you are likely to work 20 hours per week. It can be quite challenging to maintain steady progress and dedicate the time as course loads increase during the trimester, however, it is important that you manage your time well so that you can devote time each week to the project. You will get little benefit from your supervisor if you treat your project as a series of short term crunches. Certainly they will not be able to provide timely feedback or appropriate guidance in this situation.

3.2.2 Ethics

It is expected that you conduct your research in an ethical manner. All forms of academic misconduct will be treated very seriously. You must:

- where appropriate, discuss ethics with your supervisors
- familiarise yourself with the University's ethical guidelines
- obtain approval from the relevant ethics committee for work involving human or animal subjects.

The link to Ethics application process is available on the BSc Hons Wiki.

3.2.3 Safety & Health

The university's approach to health and safety is based on risk management. There is a significant strengthening of level of responsibility for students and supervisors. Students must discuss with supervisors and show in the project proposal report (due at the end of week 4) that they have identified safety risks and developed a plan to manage them.

Students are expected to be aware of the Health and Safety at Work Act 2015. See : <http://www.business.govt.nz/worksafe/hswa>.

Students need to discuss with their supervisors and fill out the health and safety plan available on the ECS Wiki. They need to fill 'ECS Project Information Form' and 'Project Description and Safety Plan'. A sample can be found on the Wiki.

Please Note: For any work that takes place off VUW campuses, the students need fill 'ECS Off Campus Activity Plan'. Please contact Roger Cliffe for the form.

ALL filled Health and Safety forms must be emailed to ecs-safety@ecs.vuw.ac.nz.

Chapter 4

Preliminary Report

At the conclusion of the first trimester, students are expected to submit a preliminary report which outlines the progress they have made, and identifies any outstanding issues where feedback is required. This report should be considered a first step towards the final report - including a good treatment of the introduction and related/background work. However, as a primary purpose of the preliminary report is to give the examination committee the opportunity to comment on the student's progress (and identify any areas of concern), it will also include sections on work done, requests for feedback, and a revised timeline.

Please Note: The preliminary report is used as part of the final grade if it helps increase the overall grade.

4.1 Suggested Organisation

A sensible outline for the preliminary report is as follows:

- **Introduction / Proposal Review.** This should briefly outline the project and if necessary reevaluate the original plan in light of what has been learned in the interim. In particular, any significant deviations in the research problem being addressed should be clearly highlighted and justified.
- **Literature review.** This should discuss any existing solutions to the given problem, and may reference academic papers, books and other sources as appropriate. Care should be taken to identify key differences between these solutions, and that being developed in the project.
- **Work Done.** This should discuss what progress has been made. In many cases, the evaluation proper will not yet have begun. However, it is important to demonstrate that sufficient thought has been given to the evaluation.
- **Future Plan.** This should highlight the main components which remain to be done, and provide a proposed time-line in which this will happen. In putting together a time line, students must take into account upcoming examinations, coursework deadlines and other disruptions.
- **Request for Feedback.** This should highlight any difficulties currently faced, and make specific requests for guidance from the examination committee. For example, a student may be unsure how best to evaluate their artifact, and would appreciate suggestions for alternative methods.

The report does not have to conform exactly to the above structure. For example, in some cases, students may wish to present preliminary experimental results, or include a more detailed literature survey.

NOTE: in the event of an aegrotat application, the preliminary report may be used (in conjunction with the snapshot submission) as a significant assessment item.

4.2 Getting help with writing

Students struggling with writing and presentation should seek help from the student learning support as early as possible. http://www.victoria.ac.nz/st_services/slss/.

4.3 Format

The following points clarify the main requirements of the preliminary report:

- The report should be written using the ECS report templates provided (available for latex and MS Word).
- The report is expected to be around 8 pages in length. As a rough breakdown, a page of introduction and three to four pages on background/related work. An additional page each on progress and future plans would be appropriate. Longer (or shorter) reports are permitted, but students are advised to ensure all necessary detail is provided.
- The report should be written in such a way that any 4th year student in your specialisation can understand. Since the report will be assessed by an independent examiner (i.e. not just the supervisor), it is critical that all examiners can properly understand what has been achieved.
- The report should include the original project proposal as an appendix.

Finally, the preliminary report must be submitted via the *online submission system* on or before the given due date.

4.4 Assessment Process

The preliminary report will be read by two examiners, one of which is the primary supervisor. Students are required to give a 5 minute presentation at a specialisation meeting of the primary supervisor. Constructive feedback should be given after the presentation. We may record the sessions, so students can reference feedback.

Chapter 5

Final Report

The final report constitutes the most important component of the individual project. This is where you will set out what exactly it is you have done, why you have done it and how it can improve things.

5.1 Format

The following points clarify the main requirements of the final report:

- The report should be written using the ECS report templates provided (available for latex and MS Word). Fonts should be no smaller than 11pt.
- The report must contain a table of contents.
- The report is expected to be between 10,000 and 15,000 with an absolute limit of 20,000 words and 40 pages (25,000 words and 50 pages for AIML 487) including diagrams. Reports which are longer than this will need to be justified to the supervisor and the course coordinator, or risk being penalised for excessive length.
- The report should be written in such a way that any 4th year student in your specialisation can understand. Since the report will be assessed by a panel of examiners (i.e. not just the supervisor), it is critical that all examiners can properly understand what has been achieved.
- Material from the preliminary report and/or project proposal may be used directly in the final report.

The final report must be submitted via the online submission system on or before the given due date. Extensions will be granted only in exceptional circumstances. These *must* be arranged in advance through discussion with project supervisors **and the course coordinator**. It is the students responsibility to ensure the course coordinator is informed of the extension request.

Take some care with the format of your final document. Remember that we often print the document and you can easily make that very hard for us. Here are some things to think about:

- We do not accept word files. Make a pdf for submission.
- Try to use vector graphics (ideally eps or pdf), rather than raster formats (jpg, png etc.). Not only will this look better it will produce a smaller file that will be easier to print.

- You do *not* need to use super high resolution graphics. Our printer can't reproduce them anyway, so anything greater than 300dpi or so is a waste.
- Don't use some strange printer driver.

5.2 Suggested Organisation

The structure of your report should be tailored to your project. However, a sensible outline for the final report is as follows:

- **Introduction.** The purpose here is to introduce the research question and motivate why it is a problem we should care about, and to outline process for finding a solution. *Remember:* the introduction is the first part of the report an examiner will read. If he/she finishes reading it without a proper understanding of the research problem or what has been done, then they will almost certainly struggle with understanding the remainder. You should attempt to make the research goals and associated specifications as clear and as quantifiable as possible. These goals and specifications should inform everything else that follows, so it is important to establish them in the examiners mind.
- **Background / Related Work.** The background should cover any important terminology and/or concepts used in the remainder of the report, and should demonstrate an understanding of previous works which are relevant. *Remember:* A good related work section does not just provide a list of previous works, accompanied with short summaries. Wherever possible it must extract real insight from these works, painting a picture of how they relate to each other and the project.
- **Methodology.** The aim here is to explain the process of the research.
- **Implementation (frequent).** What and how the artifact was created.
- **Results.** The results from experiment or analysis. Make liberal use of graphs and other figures. They are much more effective at communicating many results than are words.
- **Discussion.** What do the results mean?
- **Conclusions and Future Work.** Future work should *not* just be a list of things that you would have done if you had a little more time. Talk about new things that are possible now that you have finished your project. What projects could a '489 student tackle next year if they started from your end point?
- **Bibliography.**

5.3 Assessment

The primary purpose of the final report is to clearly and succinctly detail the design, implementation and evaluation of any artifact developed. The report should be written in a professional nature, as appropriate for the discipline and degree.

5.3.1 Process

The final report will be read by two examiners, one of whom is the primary supervisor. A third marker will be included if there is a significant divergence in the marks awarded. **Examiners must complete their marking in a timely fashion, so that the committee can meet and determine a final grade for the student.** In determining the final grade, the examining committee may take into consideration those (indicative) grades awarded for other assessment items.

5.3.2 Criteria

The final report will be assessed using the following criteria:

- **Quality of work.** This should include but not limited to
 - **Proposal** *Does the report clearly identify the problem being solved, and motivate the reason a solution would be valuable?* Emphasis is placed on connection with existing academic research problems.
 - **Context** *Does the report provide clear evidence of understanding the previous and current research?* This includes the coverage and justification for including previous research and the connection to the research question.
 - **Methodology** *Does the report clearly describe the process used to explore the research question ?* This section justifies and explains the process used to generate the results in a later section.
 - **Implementation (optional)** *Does the report describe the artifact created and relevant decisions relevant to the research?* This section is for students which create something to test a theory.
 - **Results.** *Does the report provide a clear set of results from the experimentation/evaluation?* This should report on the data collected and present it in a coherent fashion. This would likely include statistical tests and figures to help the reader understand the data.
 - **Discussion and Conclusion.** *Does the report provide discuss the importance and limitations of the results and experiment in general?* There should be both an evaluation of the results and a section on the limitations of the project. The Conclusion should include both a reflection on the overall meaning of the research and a future work section.
 - **Critical Thinking.** *Does the report provide clear evidence of critical thought?* This should be evident throughout the report, with an emphasis on the discussion section.
- **Presentation.** *Is the report written in an appropriate and professional manner, with due consideration given to presentation?* This includes, but is not limited to: overall report structure; spelling and grammar; consistent bibliography layout including all necessary information (e.g. journal/conference title, page numbers, year, author names, article title); presentation and layout of figures and tables; minimum requirements of written English.

These criteria are, by definition, subject to the examiner's individual interpretation. In any case where an examiner is uncertain regarding some aspect of the criteria or process, the course coordinator should be consulted.

Among the current BSc Hons, only AIML487 has 45 points, and its main difference from the projects with 30 points is the workload. With the additional 150 hours, the AIML487 students are expected to have more work done, and have some novelty and original contributions in the research project. Since the number of students in AIML487 is small in 2021, the project can be handled case by case. The course coordinator should be consulted if an examiner is uncertain regarding the grade.

Chapter 6

Presentation Day

The presentation day is an opportunity for students to demonstrate their oral presentation skills. The primary objective of the presentation day is to prepare students for the real-world, where presentations are an integral component of business. This will be a all day event which is usually scheduled on the last day of exams. There will be one or two Dean's sessions - to which industry will be invited, students will be selected for these sessions based on their presentations at the start of Trimester 2, and their submitted report. This is a serious opportunity for your work to be seen on a larger stage, and perhaps lead to some new opportunities.

6.1 Overview

The presentations will each be 15 minutes long in total. This should break down into around 10 minutes of speaking, 3 minutes for questions and 2 minutes for change over. Strict time-keeping will be followed, and presentations that run over the time limit will be cut short. This is highly undesirable and does not auger well for a good presentation grade.

You should expect to get through at most seven slides. Any more, and you will be speaking far too quickly to give an effective presentation. Make sure that you practice your talk several times to get the timing right.

The talk should cover all aspects of your project, including the motivation, problem statement, discussion approach, technical aspects of approach and experimental results. The following suggestion is one possible outline, though naturally you should vary the structure to suit the specifics of your project.

Slide	Title
Slide 1	Title, Name and Supervisor Name(s)
Slide 2	Introduction + Motivation
Slide 3	Problem Statement and Discussion of Possible Approaches
Slide 4	Overview + Justification of Chosen Approach
Slide 5	Experimental Results and/or Findings
Slide 6	Contribution
Slide 7	Conclusion

NOTE: The format for presentations should be either in PDF or powerpoint. Presentations will need to be submitted the day before, so we can make sure they're all loaded on the presentation machines. We will *not* check that your files work correctly, so you should do that yourself.

6.2 Demonstration

Most students will be able to provide a sufficient illustration of their project during the presentation. However, in some cases, a demonstration of the working artifact may be preferred. Think carefully about this; a demonstration may seem like a good idea, but they can easily break the flow of a talk and detract from the message being delivered. It is very easy to have the audience looking curiously at your project rather than listening to you speak! Videos of your project can be more effective for this reason - and are strongly recommended as live demonstrations are inherently high risk and it is not unusual for them to go wrong.

NOTE: The course coordinator and appropriate technical staff must be notified well before the presentation day if a student wishes to use a demonstration.

6.3 Assessment

The examiners will consider the presentations according to the following criteria:

- Motivation (i.e. was the project properly motivated?)
- Research Statement (i.e. was the problem being addressed clearly identified?)
- Methodology (i.e. how you conducted your research?)
- Implementation (i.e. was a sensible discussion of what has been done provided?)
- Evaluation Approach (i.e. was the approach being taken clearly identified?)
- Justification of Evaluation (i.e. was the evaluation approach justified?)
- Results (i.e. are results presented in a clear manner?)
- Professionalism (i.e. was the presentation of a professional nature?)
- Structure (i.e. was the presentation structured appropriately?)

NOTE: There is limited time within the presentation and, hence, we do not expect you will cover all of the above in detail.