

Faculty of Law

LAWS480 Research Paper



If you have an area of research that you would like to focus on, then this can be done by way of a Laws 480 Research Paper. The general idea of these are that you will engage in independent research for a semester and produce an 8,000 word paper. The Faculty has recently formalised a policy in relation to these papers. They are for “students who have a genuine and developed interest” in a particular research topic.

Choice of Topic

The choice of topic is up to you, but there are some limits on this. The most obvious one is that because these are supervised, you need a supervisor. This means you will need to find a member of staff who has the time, expertise and willingness to carry out the supervision task. The particular topic you want to do will need to be one that requires legal research and one that can be suitably addressed within the word limit.

Another set of limitations arises from the taught courses on offer. You will not be able to do a LAWS480 which duplicates an existing course. For this reason, you may be asked to do a particular course before doing a related LAWS480. You can then develop an idea or topic from that course, to take it to the next level. Just as an example, there might be something that really interests you about defamation, but the Faculty would expect you to do Torts before embarking on a research paper. Of course, you might have an idea for some research which does not connect with any course we teach: there is no problem with that so long as you can find a supervisor willing to take you on.

Application and Enrolment

Because this paper involves independent research, you will need to first do LAWS398 to gain some research skills. The policy requires you to be “capable of undertaking independent research”. While there is no specific requirement that you do any research and writing assignments before doing a LAWS480, it is a good idea to do two or three.

A LAWS480 can be done in either semester one or semester two, at any time after second year law. In special circumstances, you might be able to do one in either of the summer school periods. The first is what the University calls the “1st Non-Standard period” or pre-Christmas summer school, which runs from mid-November to mid-December. The second is in the

normal summer school period, running from early in the new year until just before semester one starts. This would normally only be possible for a student who needs one last paper to get the degree finished and who has no other options. The number of supervisors available over the summer is going to be quite limited.

LAWS480 requires permission from the Faculty before your enrolment can be finalised. While you enrol in the normal way through eVision or having a Change of Course form signed off, you need to do some groundwork before enrolling. Start by writing a brief outline of your proposed research. You need to have a supervisor with whom you have discussed your proposed topic and who has agreed to supervise it. You and your supervisor will both need to sign the LAWS480 application form: once this has been received by the Faculty Office, your enrolment can be confirmed. This form can be obtained from and returned to the Faculty Office or can be scanned and sent to law.courseadvice@otago.ac.nz.

Supervision and Assessment

It is expected that your supervisor will do more than just assess the finished product. At the very least, your supervisor will guide you in formulating the scope of the research and consider a draft of the paper before final submission. Apart from that, it will be up to you and your supervisor to agree on the degree of supervision to be given.

The paper is to be approximately 8,000 words (excluding footnotes) and comply with the current version of the *New Zealand Style Guide*. It is to be completed by the last teaching day of semester unless your supervisor agrees otherwise.

The final paper will be marked by your supervisor and a second marker appointed by the Faculty.