

THE DEVELOPMENT OF A MANUAL ON DISSERTATION WRITING FOR AGRICULTURAL UNDERGRADUATES

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Undergraduates experience difficulties in dissertation writing, during their final year project period, as available literature on technical and scientific writing fails to satisfy students' needs due to their cost, non-availability or due to their failure to meet the specific needs of the agricultural undergraduates. In the study 83% of the senior staff members stated that less than 25% of the undergraduates use any guide on technical writing during the project period. Thus, the objective of this study was to develop a relevant and low cost manual on dissertation writing for agricultural undergraduates.

The method adopted was: (1) Determining the target group, (2) conducting the needs assessment, (3) determining the specific contents, (4) determining the format, (5) preparation, (6) pre-testing, and (7) editing. The target population was the final year (4200 Series) agricultural undergraduates. The respondents for the need assessment were a stratified random sample of 45 senior and junior academic staff members from the Agriculture Faculty. Almost 95% of the senior staff and 100% of the junior staff stated that there is a need for a manual of this nature. Specific contents included in the manual were based on findings of the needs assessment. Information was presented under the following nine chapters. (1) Introduction, (2) Parts of a dissertation, (3) Writing the dissertation, (4) Abbreviations, numbers and footnotes, (5) Spelling and punctuation, (6) Tables and illustrations, (7) List of references, (8) How to handle the language, and (9) Format of the dissertation. The manual included 80 pages, five figures and has five cartoon figures. The manual was pre-tested with 40 respondents from the target group. According to the feedback 92%, 97%, and 95% of the respondents ranked the manual as either excellent, very good, or good, on its format, quality of information, and comprehension, respectively. Hundred percent (100%) of the respondents stated that they would recommend the manual for use by agricultural undergraduates. Some appropriate suggestions were used to improve the manual.

The manual is recommended for agricultural undergraduates as a basic guideline for dissertation writing. Developing an electronic version such as a CD-ROM is recommended.