

MASTER'S THESIS REGULATIONS

for the English-language Master's programmes

Also applicable to the Research Training Project

Article 1 General principles

1. These regulations apply to the thesis component of the English-language Master's programmes in a) Culture, Organization and Management, b) Political Science, c) Social and Cultural Anthropology and d) Social Research at the Faculty of Social Sciences of the VU University Amsterdam, to be referred to hereafter as: 'the Faculty'.
2. *The following sections of these regulations apply only to the Master's programmes in Culture, Organization and Management, Social and Cultural Anthropology and Social Research: Article 1, Paragraph 2; Article 2, Paragraphs 5, 6 and 7; Article 6, Paragraph 4; Article 7, Paragraph 4; Article 12 and Article 13. These sections are italicized.*
3. For the Master's programmes in Political Science (PS) and for the Master's programme in Social Research (MSR) the Master's thesis is worth 18 credits.
4. For the Master's programmes in Culture, Organization and Management, and Social and Cultural Anthropology, the thesis component consists of a research training project and a thesis. These two components together are worth 36 credits (COM and SCA) and 30 credits (MSR).
5. The aim of the Master's thesis is to provide an individual test of a student's academic skills within his or her own study programme.
6. The Academic and Examination Regulations state the conditions pertaining to the Master's thesis for each programme.

Article 2 Responsibilities

1. The teaching manager is responsible for the details of how thesis supervision is organized within the department. For the Master's in Social Research, the teaching manager organizes the supervision within the department according to the requirements of the Master's in Social Research. The teaching manager informs the Graduate Course Director of the supervision arrangements for MSR students within the department.
2. The thesis co-ordinator and/or research training co-ordinator is responsible for ensuring that proper procedure is followed when appointing research training supervisors and/or thesis supervisors and second assessors.
3. The supervisor is responsible for the academic level of the design of the research training project and the thesis, and for the supervision process and for the assessment, control of plagiarism included.
4. The student is responsible for:
 - a. his or her own progress and the quality of the definitive version of the thesis
 - b. the acknowledgement of sources in accordance with the thesis guide of his or her study programme in instances when the words or ideas of others have been incorporated.



5. *The student is responsible for finding a place for a research training project, for his or her own progress and for the quality of the research training project.*
6. *With regard to the research training project, the student is strongly advised to take out third-party liability insurance to cover any costs resulting from an incident for which he or she can be held legally liable.*
7. *In the case of a research training project abroad, the student is also obliged to comply with all requirements regarding visas and vaccination. He or she should also heed any official warnings issued about the dangers of travelling to a particular country. The student should also consult the thesis co-ordinator about the advisability of taking out additional insurance policies.*

Article 3 Supervision

1. Each Master's programme may:
 - a. provide one or more thesis working groups, organized in accordance with one or more of the themes from the department's research programme or programmes
 - b. form a thesis working group to which students are allocated if they have chosen a thesis topic which does not correspond directly to the department's research programme or programmes but which is clearly related to the discipline
 - c. provide thesis supervision on an individual basis.
2. Thesis supervision can be provided by:
 - a. the tutor of the thesis working group in the case of Paragraph 1a and 1b of this article
 - b. a thesis supervisor from the department which runs the Master's programme in the case of Paragraph 1c of this article
 - c. a thesis supervisor from a department within the Faculty other than the department that runs the Master's programme. This can be arranged at the student's request or on the initiative of the thesis co-ordinator and always in consultation with the relevant teaching manager.
3. For the Master's in Social Research, the thesis supervisor has to be:
 - approved by the Graduate School Assessment Board;
 - endorsed by the Graduate Course Director.
4. The supervisor has a limited amount of time available for group and/or individual meetings for every student. The guidelines in this respect are as follows:
 - a. ten hours per individual student for Political Science and Social Research.
 - b. a total of fifteen hours per individual student (for the research training project and the thesis) for Culture, Organization and Management, and Social and Cultural Anthropology.
 - c. In cases where two students work jointly on a thesis, as described in Article 9, the thesis supervisor will make time available for a total of fifteen sessions, lasting a maximum of one hour each, in which he or she will discuss the thesis with both students at the same time.
5. Discussions between the thesis supervisor and the student or students are conducted on the basis of written texts to be submitted one week in advance.
6. The thesis supervisor and the student keep a written or electronic record to ensure the progress of the thesis, including:
 - a. planning (starting date, planned deadline, interim adjustments to the schedule)
 - b. the appointments made
 - c. the dates of meetings and/or interviews.



7. Students should take their thesis supervisor's summer holidays into account during the months of July and August. They are only entitled to thesis supervision during this period if they have made individual arrangements to this effect with their supervisor.

Article 4 Allocation procedure for a thesis supervisor

1. In connection with the formation of thesis working groups and/or the allocation of a thesis supervisor, the student is required to submit a detailed request to the thesis co-ordinator. The request must include the student's name, address, telephone number, e-mail address and student number and must answer the following questions:
 - a. which subject within the theme does the student wish to address and what is the relevance of this subject?
 - b. what research problem does the student plan to define for the thesis?
 - c. what academic literature does the thesis draw on?
 - d. what research questions does the student intend to pose?
 - e. what research methods does the student intend to use?
 - f. where does the student intend to collect research data and what type of data does he or she have in mind?
2. The thesis co-ordinator makes sure that the detailed request complies with the format described in Paragraph 1.
3. If the detailed request is found to be unsatisfactory, the thesis co-ordinator will inform the student of the deviations from the prescribed format within five working days. On the basis of these instructions, the student will submit an improved request. If this second request is also found to be unacceptable, the thesis co-ordinator will invite the student for an interview.
4. If the detailed request meets the requirements of the format, the thesis co-ordinator will allocate the student to a thesis working group and/or a thesis supervisor within ten working days of receipt and will inform the student accordingly. At the same time the thesis co-ordinator will pass the student's detailed request on to the supervisor.
5. In cases where a thesis working group or a thesis supervisor already has too many students, the thesis co-ordinator will consult the department's teaching manager to find a suitable solution.
6. The thesis guide of the relevant study programme contains details of the period and deadline for application, in addition to other important matters concerning application for allocation to the thesis working groups and/or a thesis supervisor.
7. *This article does not apply to the Social and Cultural Anthropology and Culture, Organization and Management programmes, where allocation of a supervisor for research training and/or thesis takes place within the framework of the subjects Field Research Design (SCA) and Research Proposal (COM).*

Article 5 From detailed request to thesis outline

1. The student contacts the supervisor for the first meeting of the thesis working group and/or a first interview.
2. At the first meeting of the thesis working group and/or the first interview, the supervisor will inform the students about the measures taken by the university and the Faculty for the prevention of RSI. These can also be found on the VU website and in the thesis guide of the study programme.



3. In addition to the student's name, address, telephone number, e-mail address and student number, the thesis outline must include the following components:
 - a. a definition of the research problem, social and scientific relevance
 - b. an elaboration on the definition of the research problem to take in a theoretical framework and research questions
 - c. a research design
 - d. a research schedule
 - e. a bibliography.
 Further explanation and more details can be found in the thesis guide of the study programme in question.
4. Once the supervisor has definitively approved the thesis outline, he or she will inform the thesis co-ordinator. The co-ordinator will then appoint a second assessor within five working days. For the Master's of Social Research applies that in addition the MSR Scientific Assessment Committee (SAC) will monitor the supervision process. The MSR SAC is a standing committee consisting of three members appointed by the Graduate School Assessment Board for the duration of two years (renewable once). The MSR SAC is chaired by the Graduate Course Director.
5. The second assessor will pass on his or her comments on the thesis outline to the thesis supervisor within ten working days of his or her appointment. The supervisor will then inform the student within five working days. For the Master's of Social Research applies that the MSR SAC will comment on the thesis outline according to the same time path.
6. The student will then incorporate the second assessor's (and the MSR SAC's) comments on the thesis outline until the definitive version of the outline is approved.
7. Once the second assessor (and the MSR SAC) has approved the thesis outline, he or she will inform the supervisor, who in turn will inform the student.
8. The student can only begin to actually carry out his or her research and/or write his or her thesis once the thesis outline has been approved by the supervisor and the second assessor (and the MSR SAC).

Article 6 Requirements of the thesis (and the research training report)

1. Every programme has its own research training guide and/or thesis guide which states the requirements pertaining to the content and the form of the research training and the thesis. The student is obliged to comply with the instructions stated in the guide.
2. The Master's thesis and/or research training report must be written in English, unless the Examination Board gives permission for it to be written in another language.
3. All theses written within the Faculty must comply with a number of general criteria:
 - a. The research problem must be clearly defined.
 - b. The scientific and social relevance of the thesis must be accounted for.
 - c. Arguments must be presented to justify the concepts, methods and theories used.
 - d. The research data and the literature consulted must be of sufficient quality.
 - e. Research data and literature must be reliably presented.
 - f. The argumentation and presentation of evidence must be clear and consistent.
 - g. The summary and conclusions must be clear.
 - h. The thesis must be sufficiently creative and original.



- i. The design and layout of the thesis must be presentable.
 - j. The thesis must be clearly organized or structured.
 - k. The thesis must not contain grammatical or typographical errors.
4. *All research training reports written within the Faculty must comply with a number of general criteria:*
- a. *The report must contain a description of the field of research.*
 - b. *The report must contain a description of the research training process.*
 - c. *The report must reflect on the research training process.*

Article 7 Duration of supervision and progress

1. If a student fails to complete his or her thesis either within six months (for full-time students) or one year (for part-time students) of the start of the supervision process, the thesis supervisor will report this to the thesis co-ordinator. After consulting the student and the thesis supervisor, the thesis co-ordinator will then decide how the thesis should be completed. For the Master's in Social Research applies that the decision about the way in which the thesis will be completed is taken in a meeting attended by the thesis supervisor, the thesis coordinator and the Graduate Course Director after having received the advice of the MSR SAC.
2. Students who fail to honour agreements made and obligations undertaken with regard to the thesis working group or the thesis supervision process may be excluded from the existing group or supervision process. In such cases, the thesis co-ordinator will decide how and with whom the thesis supervision will proceed, after consulting the student and the thesis supervisor concerned.
3. At the request of the thesis co-ordinator, every thesis supervisor reports on the progress of his or her thesis students twice a year. In the case of students who have fallen seriously behind, the thesis co-ordinator and the thesis supervisor will discuss a follow-up procedure.
4. *With regard to the contents of Paragraph 1, a term of one year (for full-time students) and two years (for part-time students) applies within the Master's programmes Culture, Organization and Management, and Social and Cultural Anthropology.*

Article 8 Academic misconduct

In the event of academic misconduct or suspected academic misconduct, the relevant article of the Rules and guidelines for the Examination board will apply.

Article 9 Joint thesis

If students want to collaborate on a thesis, they have to ask permission in advance from the Examination Board of their programme. The rules for a joint thesis are as follows:

1. If the thesis involves research, it must be carried out jointly.
2. Each of the students is required to make an independent and clearly defined contribution.
3. Both students are personally responsible for a clearly identifiable part of the thesis and for the cohesion of the whole.
4. The part each author played in writing and working on the thesis must be stated in the thesis itself.
5. The size and/or the depth of the thesis should exceed those of an individual thesis.



6. The Examination Board must be informed in advance through the submission of a research proposal by both students, accompanied by a written statement by the thesis supervisor stating the reasons for the collaboration.
7. Each student will be marked separately for the thesis.

Article 10 Publication of the thesis

1. The copyright of the thesis belongs to the student.
2. In the case of cooperation between the student and the thesis supervisor, publication and reproduction of the results of the research carried out within the framework of the thesis will only take place on the basis of consultation between the student and the thesis supervisor.
3. In the event of a difference of opinion, the dispute will be submitted to the department's Management Team. The team will ask the advice of independent experts if necessary. The individuals involved may lodge an appeal against the Management Team's decision with the Faculty Board.
4. Theses which are awarded a 'satisfactory' grade are made publicly available via the VU University Library. The student submits a digital copy of the thesis into the UL database.
5. In cases where a student conducts research within a certain organization for the purpose of his or her thesis, the organization does not have the right to demand confidential publication since scientific knowledge must be accessible, verifiable and cumulative. An acceptable alternative for confidentiality of publication is the use of pseudonyms or other devices to render the work anonymous. If an organization does not consider an anonymous account of the research to be sufficient protection, but the research serves a scientific and/or educational purpose that cannot be achieved by other means, the student will be required to submit a request to the Examination Board of his or her study programme at the start of the thesis procedure asking that his or her thesis not be included in the library, stating the reasons why. The student's request must be supported in writing by the thesis supervisor. If the request is honoured by the Examination Board, the thesis will be submitted 'under embargo' into the database of the UL and will not be accessible for others. In this case the student is obliged to write a short summary of his or her thesis for the UL database.

Article 11 Disputes

1. In cases where disputes arise between a student and his or her supervisor, the co-ordinator of the thesis or research training will act as a mediator. If necessary, the co-ordinator can allocate the student to another supervisor.
2. In cases where a dispute arises between the thesis supervisor and the second assessor regarding the approval of the thesis outline, the thesis supervisor will report this to the thesis co-ordinator. The thesis co-ordinator will then appoint an independent third assessor who will issue a binding verdict on the matter. If the third assessor does not agree with the judgement of the thesis supervisor, the student can be allocated to another supervisor if desired. If the third assessor does not agree with the judgement of the second assessor, the student can be allocated to another second assessor if desired.
3. For disputes between the supervisor and second assessor about the assessment of the thesis, see Article 14, Paragraphs 4 and 5.



4. In cases where mediation by the thesis co-ordinator fails to resolve the dispute, the student can submit a complaint to the Examination Board if the dispute concerns the assessment or to the department head if the dispute relates to personnel. If the student is not in agreement with the verdict of the Examination Board, he or she can lodge an appeal with the university's Examination Appeals Board. If the student is not in agreement with the verdict of the department head, he or she can lodge an appeal with the Faculty Board.

Article 12 Remuneration for the research training project

1. *The Faculty will not reimburse expenses incurred during research training in the Netherlands.*
2. *There is a limited reimbursement available from the Faculty for research training outside of the Netherlands. The number of grants and the amount available per grant is set by the Faculty Board on an annual basis. Students can submit a request for reimbursement to the thesis co-ordinator for their study programme.*

Article 13 Assessment of the research training project

1. *Upon completion of the research training, the student will write a research training report in which he or she will reflect on the work carried out and, where applicable, will present the results of the research conducted. For the Master's in Social Research the research training project is organized in the 2nd year Course "Research Internship/Fieldwork"; the requirements of this course apply.*
2. *The research training project will be assessed by the supervisor within fifteen working days of receiving the research training report, using the assessment criteria laid down in the guide of the study programme in question.*
3. *The assessment will either be marked 'satisfactory' or 'unsatisfactory'.*
4. *If the student's work is assessed as 'unsatisfactory', the student will be given the opportunity to rewrite his or her report.*
5. *If the rewritten version of the report is still deemed 'unsatisfactory', the supervisor will submit the case to the Examination Board. The Examination Board will then appoint a second independent assessor. If the second assessor also deems the report to be 'unsatisfactory', the student will be required to rewrite the research training report once again.*

Article 14 Assessment of the thesis

1. The thesis supervisor (who is also the first assessor) and the second assessor will issue their assessments independently of one another, at the latest on the 15th of the month following the request for the final examination. They will each use an assessment form for this purpose. For the Master's in Social Research the assessment is performed by three staff members: (a) the thesis supervisor; (b) a member of the Faculty, (c) an external examiner. The three examiners are appointed by the Graduate Course Director based on a proposal by the department's teaching manager. The MSR thesis assessment is monitored by the MSR Scientific Assessment Committee.
2. The assessors will submit the completed assessment form within the period stated in Paragraph 1. The supervisor will determine the student's final mark on the basis of the two marks given and will enter this on a third assessment form. The supervisor will ensure that the comments are passed on to the student and will inform the student of the final mark he or she has been awarded. The supervisor



- will submit the three assessment forms to the programme secretariat within the period stated in Paragraph 1, so that they can be filed in the student's dossier.
3. The final mark for the thesis will be the average of the marks given by the first and the second assessor. For the Master's in Social Research, the grade will be the average given by the three evaluators.
 4. An average of the two marks will not be taken if:
 - a. there is a difference of two or more points between the assessment given by the first and the second assessor or
 - b. either the first or the second assessor fails the thesis.
 5. In the situation described in Paragraph 4a or Paragraph 4b, the thesis supervisor will report the matter to the chairperson of the Examination Board of the student's study programme. When reporting the matter, the supervisor will give the chairperson a clean copy of the thesis (i.e. free of comments) supplied by the student and a blank assessment form. The chairperson of the Examination Board will appoint an independent third assessor within three working days of the supervisor's report and will ensure that he or she receives the thesis and the blank assessment form. The third assessor will submit his or her assessment of the thesis to the chairperson of the Examination Board within five working days of receipt. This assessment is binding and represents the final mark awarded for the thesis. The chairperson of the Examination Board will inform the thesis supervisor and will ensure that he or she receives the assessment form. The thesis supervisor will inform the student of the third assessor's comments and the final mark. The thesis supervisor will submit the third assessment form to the programme secretariat within one day.
 6. If the final mark for the thesis is a pass, the student can go on to take his or her final examination.
 7. If the final mark for the thesis is a fail, the student cannot go on to take his or her final examination. The student and the thesis supervisor will then discuss the continuation of their working relationship, if necessary in consultation with the thesis co-ordinator.

Article 15 Evaluation

1. When applying for his or her final examination, the student will be asked to fill in an evaluation form and submit it in a sealed envelope.
2. The Education Office will distribute the evaluation forms among the teaching managers and the relevant teaching staff.
3. The teaching manager will discuss the evaluation results with the teaching staff concerned and will make arrangements for the improvement of the supervision process if necessary.
4. At least once a year, the thesis co-ordinator will issue a memo on the current situation to the Management Team of his or her department.
5. The Management Team will discuss the practical aspects of the thesis procedures at a staff meeting at least once a year and will take any measures deemed necessary.
6. Once a year, the Management Team will supply the Faculty Board with the data on thesis coordination and thesis supervision in the department's annual teaching report.

Established by the Faculty Board on 16 July 2004, having consulted the Programme Committees and the Joint Assembly.



These Regulations come into force as of 1 September 2004.

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