

# Writing a Master Thesis in European Union Studies

## General Information on the Master Thesis

A master thesis is an academic paper, which demonstrates that the author is capable of the independent development of a research question and is able to deal with the selected topic in a methodologically sound manner. The thesis accounts for 20 ECTS, which is equivalent to 500 hours or 55 working days. The master thesis can be submitted in English or German, depending upon agreement with the respective supervisor.

The master thesis has to be written in one of the three core disciplines of European Union Studies: political science, law or economics. In order to master the methodological challenges students are required to complete the advanced methods course in the respective discipline, which they selected for their thesis. Further support during the writing process is provided in the supervision seminar and in the interdisciplinary master seminar.

## Selection of Topic and Supervisor

A list of supervisors is provided at the SCEUS webpage. Please consult this document in order to decide, which supervisor can support you with your chosen topic.

**Before** addressing a supervisor, please prepare a brief research outline. This should include:

- **Research question:** Which research question do you want to answer in your work? Ideally, you have *one* question (not many), which is *concise* (not too broad) and can be answered *realistically* (i.e. workload and page size). Moreover, the question should not only aim at a description, but analysis / explanation.
- **Relevance** of the research question: Why is the research question exciting / puzzling / important? A research question can be relevant for different reasons: it can address a current political problem, focus on a previously unexplained empirical observation or address controversies between competing theories, etc. ... Even if it may seem obvious to you that your own topic is particularly relevant – for others this may not be the case and therefore good and explicit reasons are required to convince other readers of the relevance!
- **Theory / Hypothesis:** Which theory / theories could you draw on to answer your research question? What is the expected answer (hypothesis) to your research question? After formulating a relevant research question, consider what would be possible answers and how they could be justified theoretically. To do this - not as an end in itself, but to help answer your specific question (!) - consult political science theories and derive one (or more competing) expectations from them.

In law, you should do some preliminary research on relevant case law by EU or national jurisdictions as well as scholarly writing. Please have in mind that a legal research question is not about what the rule should be (that's for the legislator to decide) but how to interpret the existing legal framework.

- **Empirics / Method:** Which cases do you want to analyse with what kind of empirical data to answer your question / test your hypothesis? Which method do you want to use? In your proposal, consider and explain in particular why the selected cases and the methodological approach are suitable for actually answering your question. Also, be realistic about how feasible the empirical analysis is, e.g. regarding the availability of the data and the expected workload.

In law, this part can be rather short, as your proposal will be based on the classical methods of legal analysis and will be based on research in legal literature and case law.

- **Structure:** How do you plan to structure your work? The outline should show how many chapters your work is likely to have; the order of the chapters should make sense and the headings should be as meaningful as possible (as always: the more specific, the better - not just "introduction - main part - conclusion" or "theory - empirics - conclusion"), but the chapter headings already refer to the specific question / content!).
- **Literature:** Which strands of literature have you already identified that could be useful for your work? Your proposal needs to include a preliminary bibliography – the length depends on how advanced you already are, but at least you should start with 3-5 scientific texts, which you have already read to familiarize yourself with the topic and existing research on it.
- **Open questions:** Where do you see the greatest need for discussion yourself? On which aspects of your plan would you welcome constructive suggestions in particular? As mentioned above, no proposal will already be able to address all of these points satisfactorily and so it is completely legitimate to also address issues where you still see room for improvement and hope for constructive suggestions.

This research outline should be submitted to the prospective supervisor and is the basis for discussion at the first meeting.

### **Registration of your Master Thesis**

Register your master thesis after your first meeting with your supervisor.

- You have to register your thesis in PlusOnline (Business card at Diplom-/Masterarbeiten - PAAV)
- Your supervisor and then the dean of the faculty have to approve your registration

After the Master thesis has been approved, it will appear on PlusOnline as “approved”. Now the following entries have to be made on PlusOnline (at the latest before handing it in):

- Abstract of the thesis in German or original language
- Abstract of the thesis in English
- At least 3 keywords
- OESTAT-categories (given in the online form to choose from)

### **Regular Meetings with Supervisor**

Please take into account that not only writing, but also reading a master thesis takes time. Work with your supervisor on a time-plan, also concerning submission of parts (chapters) of your thesis and further meetings for feedback.

The **supervision protocol** (which has to be uploaded together with the final version of your thesis) should be used as a tool to record the meetings with your supervisor.

### **Submission of Thesis and Registration for Master Exam**

The thesis has to be submitted

- via Plusonline-PAAV
  - complete the supervision and upload the thesis

- then your supervisor will initiate a plagiarism check. Only after this check and approval of the result by the supervisor, the thesis can be submitted in printed form.
- The printed thesis and the following documents must be handed in at the examination office of the KGW faculty:
  - 3 hardback copies of the Master thesis; ring binding is not allowed! (the cover sheet has to contain all the information on the study programme, the candidate, the supervisor – see check list on the homepage of the examinations office)
  - 1 copy saved as PDF on CD-ROM in solid cases. On the CD-ROM the name of the author and the semester of handing in have to be written, on the case additionally the thesis title. There must not be any copy or reading protection on the CD-ROM. (the Printcenter is happy to assist you with the hardcopys and the CD)
  - Last chance to hand in the Prüfungspass (**better do it earlier** – see guide on finishing the MA)

**Attention:** Your thesis can only be accepted if you fulfil the requirements mentioned above and if your documents are complete! The documents will be checked and your thesis will be sent to the examiner by the examinations office. When the examiner receives the copy he or she will read the thesis and write the review. **The deadline for the assessment is 2 MONTHS (NOT weeks!!) and will only shorten if your supervisor explicitly allows it.**

The professor's review is the last document you need to register for the Master Exam. (See details in our guide on finishing the MA).