



**Department of  
Political Science**

**CENTRAL  
EUROPEAN  
UNIVERSITY**

## ***Policy on MA Thesis Writing, Submission, and Assessment***

**Adopted date:** September 11, 2014

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### ***1. Supervisor choice***

All students choose an MA thesis topic and two potential supervisors by the specified deadline of their program. Students must submit the relevant form electronically to the Department by the given deadline: MA students: end of January (exact date is specified in the departmental calendar); MA2/1 students: mid-March (exact date is specified in the departmental calendar).

Students are recommended to check out the personal faculty websites for information on their research activities and topics they might be interested in supervising and sign up for office hours to discuss their choice. The individual research and supervision interests of the faculty members are listed on the departmental website. All professors in the Political Science department are potential supervisors. In exceptional cases, but only after consulting with the head of department, a student's secondary supervisor can be chosen outside of the Political Science Department.

The department will do its best to allocate each student the supervisor of her/his choice. To assist in this process, students will be asked to indicate both a first and a second choice of supervisor when filling out the thesis questionnaire form. Should the first choice supervisor be unavailable, the second preference will be invited as supervisor. However, in the interest both of students and faculty, the department can limit the number of supervisees (the maximum is usually six) per faculty member. It might therefore be necessary to rearrange the allocation of supervised students per faculty. None of these supervision decisions will be done without prior consultation of the students concerned.

Students are expected to work closely with their approved supervisor during their academic career at CEU. For reasons of fairness (and workload), each MA student will have only one supervisor and while students are welcome to seek out a second opinion about their research, this will depend on the availability of faculty members. However, no student can expect that a faculty person who is not his/her supervisor will read all his/her drafts.

When the Department sends out the list of MA supervisors to the students, it becomes the students' responsibility to coordinate their work with their assigned supervisor.

### ***2. Thesis writing***

While MA student primarily concentrate on courses until the end of March, they are required to start working on the thesis already during the Winter semester. Students are advised not to take more than four courses during their Winter Term in order to be able to concentrate on

writing their thesis. MA2/1 students should start working on their thesis as soon as possible, latest by the Spring semester of their first year.

All deadlines for thesis and thesis draft submissions are marked in the departmental calendar, available to all students. It is very important that students meet all deadlines in the thesis writing process in order to make progress towards satisfying degree requirements. Failure to meet the deadlines for submission of thesis proposals and drafts specified by the departmental policy might result in failure to advance to the defense phase of the thesis and/or will affect the final grade of the MA thesis.

Before submitting any drafts, students are required to consult with a member of the Center for Academic Writing on their work to eliminate fundamental structural and stylistic problems. The Academic Writing instructors need to be contacted in a timely manner, as they will not be able to support all students in the last minute.

### ***3. Stages of submission***

Students are advised to start working on their MA thesis as soon as possible and continue developing their draft throughout their stay at CEU. Students must meet all stages of thesis writing and submission.

#### **3.1 Thesis Topics**

After the departmental announcement of supervisors, students should prepare a 300- or a 500-word thesis topic and justification to be submitted within two weeks of the announcement. Students should discuss their choice with their supervisor and thesis topics must be accepted by the designated supervisor before submission.

#### **3.2 Thesis Proposals**

As next step, all students should prepare a thesis proposal to be presented in a series of thesis writing workshops. This proposal should to the extent possible identify and situate the topic and the research question within the broader field, with reference to appropriate theory; show a plan of the investigation that the thesis will employ to answer the research question; indicate and justify the methodology as appropriate; and preferably indicate, if this is possible in advance, the overall argument of the thesis.

MA: students must hand in a formal research proposal of approx. 1,000-1,500 words for their MA thesis (see the departmental calendar for the exact date). The proposals should incorporate feedback and comments from their supervisor.

MA2/1: students must submit a supervisor approved detailed thesis proposal of approx. 2,500 words that includes the milestones/deliverables that have to be prepared by particular deadlines by the beginning of May (see the departmental calendar for the exact date).

#### **3.3 Thesis Writing Workshops**

The Thesis Writing Workshop takes place in March (see the departmental calendar for the exact date) and is mandatory for all Political Science MA students.

MA students have to present their thesis proposals at the thesis writing workshops.

MA2/1 students have to participate in the March workshops without presenting in they have to deliver a presentation about their introductory/theory chapter at the Thesis Writing Workshop for MA2/1 students taking place in June.

MA2/2 students have to present the most original part of the thesis (the selling point) at a thesis writing workshop.

For the purposes of the Thesis Writing Workshops, students are distributed into different panels based on their thesis topic. Teaching Assistants chair the panel and faculty will be present to provide feedback. Students must attend and participate actively in all meetings of their assigned group in order to obtain the pass grade. MA and MA2/2 students have to give a 10-minute presentation about their proposal/draft, and each student should act as discussant of one of their colleagues in the panel. The discussant is scheduled for approx. 5 minutes, and open-floor discussion is planned for approx. 5 minutes. Students are asked to submit questions and suggestions on the research proposals presented in the group, and send these 24 hours prior to all participants: the presenter, the panelists, the faculty, as well as the TA chair.

The June Thesis Writing Workshops will be organized in a similar way.

Regarding the presentation, it is advised to be brief and clear-cut. The thesis outline would be a good starting point. PPT presentation is recommended only in the case of an indispensable table/graph, otherwise students are encouraged to have only a brief talk about their thesis.

The following elements should be included:

- the overall puzzle/research question;
- the sub-questions guiding the empirical analysis;
- brief theoretical framework situating the research in a certain field/sub-field/theoretical perspective;
- case studies and units of analysis (where to find the data?);
- methods in details (why the specific methods fit best?);
- hypotheses/expected results (what to expect to be found in the field? Remember a hypothesis is an anticipated answer, an intended line of argument to the proposed questions.);
- question marks and doubts that the audience is to address/help to solve (this is an exercise of collective thinking. Share doubts and problems!).

Supervisors and students have to meet and discuss the research proposal and the feedback received after the workshops concluded.

### **3.4 First draft of theory/introductory chapter**

MA and MA2/1 students are required to submit an at least 5,000-word long first draft of a theory/introductory chapter by the dates specified in the departmental calendar. This chapter should situate the work in the larger theoretical field and concentrate on the main theoretical aspects that will be used for the overall argument of the thesis. Handing in brief introductory statements or literature reviews beforehand is welcome, but cannot be accepted as a substitute for satisfying the above requirement.

MA: Deadline for submission of the first draft is mid-April (see the departmental calendar for the exact dates).

MA2/1: Deadline for submission of the first draft is late May/early June (see the departmental calendar for the exact dates). Students will have to present the revised version of their first draft of a theory/introductory chapter in a series of Thesis Writing Workshops for first year students organized in June (see the departmental calendar for the exact dates).

### **3.5 8,000-word draft of thesis**

Students in the two-year MA program must register for Thesis Writing in the second year of their study. The Fall Thesis Writing class will help them with their second draft of the thesis. They must submit an approximately 8,000-word draft of their thesis in beginning of October, and participate in a seminar organized by departmental faculty member(s) to present and discuss these drafts.

The thesis draft should be the first write-up of the students' fieldwork or analysis and present preliminary findings and/or difficulties encountered during the fieldwork or the data analysis/theory testing. Students should reflect on how their preliminary results affect the overall argument of the thesis. Handing in rewritten introductory chapters/literature reviews cannot be accepted as a substitute for satisfying the above requirement.

### **3.6 2/3 draft of thesis**

MA students must hand in a 10,000-word draft by mid-May and MA2/2 students must submit an approximately 12,000-word thesis draft in the fourth teaching semester (see the departmental calendar for the exact dates). This draft should present about 2/3 of the thesis, it should contain the already revised theoretical/introductory chapter as well as the revised analytical chapter(s) submitted earlier together with new material written. Second-year students will present the most interesting part of their 12,000-word draft at their second Thesis Writing Workshop (for guidelines see Thesis Writing Workshop section).

Supervisors evaluate each draft either all right or problematic by the deadline given in the Departmental Calendar. Supervisors are to send a one paragraph length assessment of the thesis draft both to the student and the departmental address, justifying their evaluation based on departmental guidelines. If a draft is considered problematic, the supervisor should outline an action plan and a set of deadlines for the student to catch up with thesis writing. Deadlines for resubmission should be set within a maximum six weeks period of the initial submission, and the resubmitted draft needs to be re-evaluated by the supervisor.

In case a student has been evaluated twice as having problematic progress with the thesis, the department will issue an official warning to the student that s/he needs to improve her/his work to meet academic standards. Failure to meet these standards will result in automatic suspension of student status. Once on suspension, student failure to progress with the thesis draft will lead to automatic termination of student status.

### **3.7 Full draft of thesis**

An approximately 13,500-word full draft of the thesis has to be handed in by all MA students. MA2/2 students are required to turn in an approximately 15,000-word draft. Students must meet the submission deadline of their respective program. This deadline is to make sure that students finish their thesis in time and to make sure that they still have time for some minor corrections (style, obvious mistakes, clarification etc.) before they submit the final version of the thesis. Failure to meet the deadline will automatically disable progress to the defense stage.

Students should not expect substantial feed-back on the final draft of the thesis. In some exceptional circumstances, some professors might still point to minor issues they would like you to change, but this really exceptional.

Supervisors can only decide whether students is ready for defense in June based on a full draft of the thesis. Decision is made by the supervisor via email to both the student and the departmental address. Students who are not allowed to pass to the June defense phase can appeal, in writing, to the Head of the Department for reverse judgment. An ad-hoc departmental committee will evaluate appeals. It is to be understood that only under the most exceptional circumstances can such an appeal be heard favorably. Failure to submit a full thesis draft according to departmental regulation by the deadline means an automatic late submission with a grade penalty in line with departmental guidelines.

Deadline for submitting the final draft thesis (see the departmental calendar for the exact date):  
MA students: beginning of June, MA2/2 students: beginning of/mid-May

### **3.8 Final MA thesis submission**

MA students must submit their final thesis of approx. 15,000 words, while MA2/2 students are required to hand in approximately 18,000-word final theses by the deadline specified in the departmental calendar.

The MA thesis is considered submitted when the program coordinator receives the printed copies, the electronic files, and the thesis is uploaded. Students have to submit three identical hard copies of the thesis, two properly bound and one loose. Students must submit an electronic copy in Word for Windows or Rich Text format AND another copy in PDF format together with the paper copies. All MA theses must be also uploaded to the CEU Library's Electronic Thesis Database (ETD), according to the specified requirements. Students must make sure the format of their thesis is compliant with the Thesis Writing Guideline which is available on the departmental website.

Oral defense is scheduled to take place after thesis submission. Each thesis is assessed by at least two faculty members, and the thesis grade will be given based upon the written evaluations by the faculty and the oral defense. The thesis will be graded according to the grading scheme of the university. A minimum grade of C+ is required in order to receive the MA degree, subject to having completed all other requirements of the degree. The Master's thesis represents 8 credits in the one-year MA program and 20 ECTS in the two-year MA program, and it counts towards the GPA of the student accordingly.

### ***4. Written Assessment of Final Thesis***

Prior to the MA defense, the supervisor and the second reader both submit electronically an approximately 300-500-word (one-or two-page) long free-text report about the thesis to the department and fill separate MA Thesis Evaluation Forms. The defense cannot take place if these documents are not submitted in advance. The free-text MA Thesis Reports must include a discussion of the main strengths and weaknesses of the thesis, focusing especially on the formulation of the research question and how answers are derived in the thesis; and formulate at least two questions that should be raised during the oral defense. The thesis reports must explicitly and specifically comment on the mastery of the relevant theoretical material, the quality of analysis and arguments, and the structure and clarity of the presentation. The MA Thesis Reports will be shared with the students after the defense and therefore should not suggest a grade.

The following criteria may be viewed as a broad guideline on how theses are evaluated.

### 1) **Subject of research:** puzzle, research question, problem definition

Justification of choosing this subject | Problem definition | Social and scientific importance of the research question and approach | Defining the limitations of the research | Originality, clarity, and novelty of the approach |

### 2) **Theoretical frame and use of literature**

Relevance and justification of the theoretical approach | Definition of key concepts | Elaboration of the research hypothesis | Knowledge of the field and familiarity with the literature | Comprehensiveness and relevance of the bibliography

### 3) **Research design and analysis**

Suitability for the problem studied | Justification of sources and methods | Consistence, accuracy and depth of analysis, use of evidence | Suitability of data, case selection and research method for testing the hypothesis | Extensiveness and structure of material | Scholarly level and sophistication of the analysis

### 4) **Inferences, argumentation and discussion**

Clarity and consistence of argumentation | Linking of results to prior research | Synthesis of the argument and of the central thesis (claim) | Connecting conclusions to the problem studied | Critical evaluation of the research process and findings: strengths and weaknesses | Scientific value, practical importance and policy relevance of the results and opening up to further questions

### 5) **Structure and language**

Clarity and consistence of structure | Scholarly level of argumentation and presentation of the findings | Linguistic clarity | Readability, grammar and spelling | Intellectual maturity and consistency | Accuracy and rigor in using references

The following criteria may be viewed as a broad guideline on how overall grades for theses are determined based on the above categories:

Excellent – A – the thesis shows originality and a high degree of conceptual sophistication in its critical examination of theoretical and empirical knowledge and promises to contribute to the existing literature in the field; it has a clear and well-developed structure and writing style; demonstrates sophisticated understanding of the relevant theories; and, in the case of empirical research, uses appropriate means of generating and analyzing data.

Outstanding/Good – A-/B+ – the thesis demonstrates good analytic ability and a mastery of the subject matter and relevant theoretical material; in the case of empirical research, applies standard data analysis techniques in a correct manner; and presents its findings and arguments in a clear structure and style;

Satisfactory/Acceptable – B/B- – the thesis shows adequate rather than excellent level of mastery of the subject matter and relevant theoretical material; the structure of presentation contains some weaknesses; and, in the case of empirical research, the data analysis remains underdeveloped or partially flawed;

Acceptable/Needs more work – C+ – the thesis presents ideas unclearly, suffers from several weaknesses and misunderstandings regarding the relevant literature, leaves the argumentation insufficiently developed; and presents empirical analyses with severe flaws and/or at a trivial level;

Unsatisfactory – F – the thesis lacks a satisfactory knowledge of the subject matter and the academic literature. It does not demonstrate any analytic ability and/or suffers from major errors in applying research methods or theoretical knowledge.

*In case of plagiarism offences the thesis is graded as fail (F), without the possibility of resubmission, and no degree is awarded.*

### **5. MA thesis defense**

The defense (exact date is specified in the departmental calendar) is open to the public and the procedure is the following:

- 1) The supervisor welcomes the candidate (and the public). S/he opens the defense and asks the candidate to summarize his/her thesis (max 10 minutes).
- 2) The Defense Committee (i.e. the supervisor and the second reader) makes comments and asks questions, and the candidate responds to the questions and comments (max 10-15 minutes).
- 3) As part of the final exam, candidate also answers the question drawn ten minutes prior to the defense.
- 4) The candidate and the public leave the room, while the Committee discusses the defense and decides that the thesis has been successfully defended and announces a grade upon departmental confirmation. The candidate gets back to the room and is informed if s/he has successfully defended the thesis.

The defense committee may decide that the thesis has been successfully defended and the grade will be announced through Infosys only after the departmental grading meeting, which also tries to ensure the comparability of grading across the department. In case of a fail grade, the student has the right to ask for a permission from the Head of Department to write a new thesis. The grade of resubmitted theses can be a Retake Pass (RP in the value of C+). In case of a failed thesis, the student receives a transcript of studies but no MA diploma.

### **6. Thesis supervisor evaluation**

The Department would like to assess supervision, which should provide background information about the level of students' satisfaction with the Master thesis supervision. Thus, students are required to fill in a supervisor evaluation form and submit it online after the defense. The assessment is kept confidential until the student concerned defended successfully her/his thesis. Only the head of department and the supervisor concerned will get the personal file, never for a given year but rather for several years together to protect the anonymity of the students. Faculty will get a summary report on supervision at the department.

### ***7. Late submission***

Students who are not allowed to defend in June have two more years to submit and to defend their thesis. If they submit their MA thesis before October 1 of the same year, their grade will be lowered with one grade point. The grade of those who defend the thesis later, within the two year period granted by university rules, will be lowered with two grade points (best grade is B+). All MA theses, including late submissions need to pass an oral thesis defense in front of a defense committee that will comprise an external (to the department) member. If a student cannot be in Budapest, the department will organize an online thesis defense.