University of Cologne

Department of Political Science

Master Thesis Guidelines

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The Master thesis in political science is an original research project in which students demonstrate the ability to apply the knowledge acquired during the course work to a final independent research project. The master thesis is supervised by an advisor who is also the first examiner of the thesis. In case you plan to write your thesis at the Department of Political Science under the supervision of Professors Basu, Bechtel or Proksch, please take the following guidelines into consideration:

Allocation of Master thesis supervision

The Department of Political Science uses a central system for the allocation of Master thesis supervision. You will receive an email with a link to a survey at the end of your second semester. The goal of this allocation system is to ensure a balanced distribution of theses to supervisors and to match students and supervisors. Please respond to this survey until the set deadline regardless of when you intend to start your thesis. If you already have a supervisor or have even already started writing your thesis, please also respond to the survey to indicate this.

In the survey, you are asked to submit a tentative research idea for your thesis (maximum 500 words). This does not need to be a fully worked out research design, but it should describe the research questions or areas you would like to focus your thesis on. Together with your preliminary research idea, you will need to indicate a ranking of 3 preferred supervisors for the thesis. It is strongly recommended that you have attended a seminar with the potential supervisors or one of her/his team members. It is advisable to indicate supervisors whose fields of expertise and interest fit to your project idea.

At the beginning of the third semester, the program director will inform you about the assigned supervisor. Both the allocation capacity of the professors as well as your indicated preferences will be taken into account. Please note that you may not receive your first supervisor preference. Please note that if you do not participate in the survey, you will nevertheless be assigned to a supervisor.

The allocation result will be communicated both to you and the assigned supervisor. We recommend that you contact your assigned supervisor soon thereafter during office hours to discuss your idea and your intended timeline for the thesis project (see below). Please note that the exact starting date of your thesis project will be when you agree on the exact final topic with your supervisor and when you register your thesis with the examination office.

A change of supervisors is possible before you register for the thesis examination. However, this requires a joint agreement between the current and future supervisor. If you intend to switch supervisors, please get in touch with the program director to discuss the procedure. Once you register for the Master thesis examination (starting the 6-month period for the thesis, see below), the supervisor is set as the first examiner of your thesis.

Special instruction for Double Degree Master students (Maastricht)

DMP students contact the program director at the end of their second semester in Maastricht together with their first-year research proposal from Maastricht and a preference ranking for a potential supervisor in Cologne. The program director and academic director will then assign the Cologne supervisor. DMP students need to organize a joint online meeting between the Maastricht and Cologne supervisors during the third semester to coordinate on the thesis proposal and research design. They are also required to take the respective Research Seminar of their Cologne supervisor (see below).

Preparing your Master Thesis Project

After the allocation, please sign up for office hours with your allocated supervisor to discuss your initial project ideas. To facilitate the discussion, it is best to prepare a draft research design (around 2-3 pages) with the following information and send this document a week before your appointment:

- Working Title
- Research Question: which question of research puzzle do you want to answer?
- Brief description of the state of the art
- Theoretical framework and working hypotheses
- Description of methods and data needed for the analysis

Attending the Political Science MA/MSc Research Seminar

You have to take part in the Political Science Master Research Seminar (each supervisor offers an individual course) after you have met in office hours with your allocated advisor and have discussed your research plans and project timeline. Participation is upon invitation by the thesis supervisor. The course registration in KLIPS is handled by the Department. Your supervisor will indicate whom to contact to get registered. As is the case with any other exam, students need to register for the exam on KLIPS themselves to receive ECTS for the course.

During the research seminar, you will practice your oral presentation skills by presenting your research plans. Regular participation in the Research Seminar as well as the presentation of your project in this framework are required. The Research Seminar is split into two parts: sessions hosted by your supervisor and researcher and guest presentations on Tuesday 2pm. You are expected to attend both.

The final thesis title must be registered with the examination office (see below). You will

then have 6 months to complete your research.

Please note the admission requirements as well as the processing deadlines in the respective examination regulations for WiSo 2015/2021 students

Registration of the MA/MSc thesis at the examination office:

After the explicit confirmation by the supervising professor of the thesis topic and the research design, the master thesis must be registered with the examination office. Please discuss with your supervisor, which academic staff member might act as a second reader and get her/his approval before registering the thesis. To initiate the registration process, please complete the thesis registration form on the Department website: https://politics.uni-koeln.de/en/academics/examinations/term-papers-and-degree-theses. The following information is required: your name, student ID number (Matrikelnummer), thesis title, first reader, and second reader. A registration form will be produced by Department staff for you and your thesis supervisor to sign. This signed registration form is then sent to the examination office by the Department. At the moment of registering your master thesis with the examination office the six-month writing period starts and your submission deadline will be communicated to you in writing by the examination office.

Mandatory consultation during thesis phase and progress documentation

In addition to your thesis, you are required to hand in an additional examination element of a "progress documentation" in which you document your work process and learning progress during the preparation of the master's thesis (maximum 4 pages).

A central element of the progress documentation is the reflection on a mandatory individual consultation between the student, the supervisor and/or the second examiner during the thesis writing period. The mandatory consultation, which receives a protocol and which can take place as part of the MSc research seminar, serves as the basis for the preparation of the progress documentation, which is the only element assessed alongside the thesis. Please clarify the details of the mandatory meeting with your supervisor before thesis registration. The progress documentation can be closely linked to the points made during a consultation. For example, it can refer to the conclusions drawn from the consultation minutes, the presentation used during the research seminar, and its revisions. If the use of AI was discussed in detail during the consultation, for example, references to this topic would also be expected in the progress documentation. The progress documentation can additionally follow the pattern of individual reflection on motives, procedures, milestones and results. References to independent work should be evident.

In general, the consultation has two objectives. It is intended to support students in their work process. Through joint discussion, they should receive suggestions on various aspects, such as the depth of their research question, the origin and scope of their sources, or the consistency, coherence and stringency of their argumentation. In addition, the consultation should give them the opportunity to clarify open questions in a direct conversation. From the perspective of the supervisor, the consultation also serves to check the independence

of the work and the guidelines and appropriate use of artificial intelligence. The aim is to encourage students to engage independently with their work during the discussion, for example by explaining the coherence between the structure and the research question in their own words. The discussion may also openly address the use, influence, opportunities and limitations of artificial intelligence in terms of scientific rigor. For example, students may reflect on how artificial intelligence can provide initial ideas for creating an outline or improve the wording of individual headings, and what needs to be considered in order to turn these ideas and formulations into an independent piece of work. The exact content of the consultation will be determined by the supervisor. In any account, the consultation will result in recommendations that the student can take into account in the further course of their work.

Important:

When you have registered the thesis, the title can only be changed with the approval of your supervisor.

Submission of the MA thesis:

The finished master thesis has to be submitted on time to the examination office. Theses that are submitted after the deadline has passed are graded as failed, without exception. **Please submit your thesis in electronic form via the WiSo-Inbox. Make sure to check the Website of the Examination Office regarding the submission of your thesis ahead of submitting:**
https://wiso.uni-koeln.de/en/faculty/managing-board/central-faculty-administration/examination-office/2015-2021-examination-regulations/final-theses**.**

Written confirmation of the submission of the thesis is not possible. The submission of the thesis is usually recorded in Klips within three working days at the latest and the thesis is then forwarded to the examiners for grading.

The submitted file may only contain the cover sheet, the text of the thesis and an overview of the resources used, in particular the literature sources used, as well as an appendix. If the topic proposer requires additional data on the work (e.g. tools used), these are to be sent directly to the examiners in consultation with them. Please refrain from submitting the thesis more than once. Only the version submitted first will be considered.

Writing the thesis / Formalities:

Always inform yourself on the pages of your examination office and in your study regulations about the exact formatting requirements. Information from the WiSo Examination Office on final theses including an updated sample declaration of consent can be found here.

Other formalia are:

- 1.5-fold line spacing
- 12-Point Font (Times New Roman or Arial)

- right margin: 2 cm
- left margin: 2 cm

The work must also contain:

- a list of tools used (bibliography)
- an affidavit (Eidesstattliche Erklärung) signed by you which you can find on the pages of the examination office.

In line with exam regulations, there is no binding minimum or maximum page limit. As the length of a thesis depends on the research design chosen, the Department provides no general recommendation in that regard. As a non-binding orientation: MSc theses at the Department are often between 22,000 and 24,000 words long, but feel free to discuss alternative plans with your supervisor.

For more information on formalities, citation and an introduction to the literature search, see the document Recommendations on Scientific Working Techniques of the Department of Political Science (Techniken des wissenschaftlichen Arbeitens).

Contact:

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