

# MASTER'S THESIS REGULATIONS

## Article 1 General principles

1. These regulations apply to the 'thesis' component of the following Master's programmes: (A) Policy, Communication and Organization, (B) Public Administration, (C) Communication Science, (D) Culture, Organization and Management, (E) Research Master's Societal Resilience, (F) Political Science, (G) Social and Cultural Anthropology and (H) Sociology of the Faculty of Social Sciences at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam.
2. The Teaching and Examination Regulations of the programme contain the scope of the Master's thesis (number of ECTS) as well as the conditions pertaining to the Master's thesis.
3. For each specific Master's programme, the conditions the student must meet in producing the thesis can be found in the Master's thesis manual.
4. The student<sup>1</sup> and the representatives of the programme involved in the Master's thesis will adhere to the instructions and deadlines set out in these regulations and the Master's thesis manual of the relevant programme.
5. If the programme offers the student the possibility to graduate with two specializations, the student will write two theses that both fall under the final qualifications of the programme.
6. Assessment is carried out by two examiners.
7. The requirements for examiners are included in the Regulations on appointing examiners, which are appended to the Rules and Guidelines of the Examination Board. A thesis supervisor from outside the Faculty of Social Sciences (FSS) cannot act as first or second examiner, unless the Examination Board gives its approval. A thesis supervisor from outside FSS is expected to have a social science degree or a comparable level based on competencies acquired elsewhere. The opinion of the external supervisor is taken into account in the final assessment of the thesis.

## Article 2 Purpose and responsibilities

1. The aim of the Master's thesis is to provide an individual assessment of a student's academic skills within his or her own study programme. This involves independently working on a research question and a research design, carrying out research, analysing data, integrating the results, describing the implications for theory and practice, reflecting on the role of the researcher, identifying the limitations of the research and reporting independently on the research.
2. The thesis supervisor is responsible for the supervision process. If the thesis supervisor is also an examiner, then he/she also acts as the first examiner. The student may be supervised by a supervisor who is not an examiner.
3. The first and second examiners share equal responsibility for the final assessment of the Master's thesis. The first examiner is responsible for the plagiarism check.

## Article 3 Procedure for assigning thesis supervisor and for thesis supervision

1. The Master's thesis manual details: a) how students make their choice of subject known and the deadline for this, b) information relevant to the allocation of a thesis supervisor or registration for and placement in a thesis working group, c) the procedure for assigning a first and second examiner, and d) what is expected of the student during the initial meeting and what information he/she must provide.
2. Supervision of the thesis process can be provided by a teacher from the programme, from FSS, or by a supervisor from outside FSS. The initial meeting between the student and the thesis supervisor is to cover at least the following, insofar as not included in the Master's thesis manual:
  - a) the form of thesis supervision: individual and/or in thesis working groups;
  - b) the subject of the Master's thesis;
  - c) agreements on supervision;
  - d) agreements on the documents to be submitted during the semester;
  - e) agreements about the student's obligations and the consequences if the student does not

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<sup>1</sup> Instead of student he/she/they can also be read

- keep to these obligations;
- f) the language in which the Master's thesis is written.
3. In case a supervisor from outside FSS is involved, the first examiner is present during an initial meeting with the external supervisor and the student. During the thesis trajectory, the first examiner will have regular contact with the student and the supervisor from outside FSW.

#### **Article 4**                      **Co-production**

1. If the programme permits students write a thesis together, they must obtain permission from the thesis coordinator beforehand. In that case the students submit their thesis outlines or research design to the thesis coordinator, accompanied by a written motivation from the thesis supervisor.
2. The rules for co-production are as follows:
  - a) if research is conducted, it must be joint research;
  - b) each of the students must make an independent, clearly defined and verifiable contribution;
  - c) the final product is in accordance with the guidelines in the study manual of the respective programme. This might be a joint thesis or separate theses. In case of a joint thesis, each student is responsible for a specified part as well as for the whole;
  - d) the introduction indicates which part each of the students had in the production of the thesis;
  - e) the scope and/or depth of the thesis should be greater than of an individually written thesis, to ensure that the achievement of each student is equivalent to that required of an individually written thesis;
  - f) each student receives a separate mark for the thesis on the basis of (2b), (2c) and (2d) of this article.

#### **Article 5**                      **Assessment of research design**

1. The first examiner assesses the research design, preferably in consultation with the second examiner, and informs the thesis supervisor, if the latter is not the examiner, of the assessment and any comments on the research design. The thesis supervisor will inform the student of the result of the examiners' assessment and any comments.
2. The choice of research method in the final thesis cannot be assessed as unsatisfactory if this choice has been previously approved.
3. If the first research design is assessed as unsatisfactory or if one examiner assesses the research design as 'satisfactory' and the other as 'unsatisfactory', then the student will be given the opportunity to submit an improved second version to the first and second examiner within ten working days, with a copy to the thesis supervisor (if this is not the first examiner). The first and second examiners assess the second version of the research design as soon as possible and communicate their findings as described in (1) of this article. If a student does not submit a research design, this is registered as a 'no-show' and counts as a first submission opportunity.
4. If the second submission of the research design is assessed as unsatisfactory or if one examiner assesses the research design as 'satisfactory' and the other as 'unsatisfactory', then the student will be given the opportunity to submit a third version. See further under (1) and (3) If a student does not submit a second version of the research design, then this is registered as a 'no-show' and counts as a second submission opportunity.
5. If one examiner assesses the third submission of the research design as 'satisfactory' and the other as 'unsatisfactory', then the thesis coordinator will appoint a third examiner. The third examiner then determines whether the research design is 'satisfactory' or 'unsatisfactory'. If the third examiner grades the research design as satisfactory, the student can continue its thesis trajectory. It is up to the programme to decide whether to replace the examiner who graded the research design as unsatisfactory. . If the third version of the research design is assessed as unsatisfactory, the student must discontinue the Master's thesis process. If the student does not submit a third version of the research design, then this is registered as a 'no-show' and counts as a third submission opportunity. In this event too, the student must discontinue the Master's thesis process. The student may try again in the following academic year, conditional to re-enrolment in the programme.

#### **Article 6**                      **Assessment of the thesis**

1. The assessment of the thesis is executed by the first examiner (generally also the thesis

- supervisor) and the second examiner. Both examiners must have a PhD.
2. The first and second examiner give their assessment independently and record it on an assessment form as included in the programme's Master's thesis manual.
  3. The programme's Master's thesis manual describes how the final grade of the Master's thesis course is established. In cases where the thesis is one of the constituent assignments that determine the final grade, the grade for the thesis component is rounded off to one decimal place.
  4. If the thesis is graded as satisfactory, the student is not given the opportunity to resubmit based on article 3.5 section 1.b of the Teaching and Examination Regulations. If the thesis is graded as unsatisfactory at the first submission opportunity, the student will be given the opportunity to re-submit the thesis.
  5. Both the grades of the first and second assessor as well as the final grade are rounded off to a whole or half point. A grade of 5.5 may not be given. A grade may be rounded to one decimal place only in the situation mentioned in (3) of this article. The submission and grading deadlines are shown in the table in Appendix 1.
  6. The second examiner forwards the completed assessment form to the first examiner. The first examiner determines the average final grade on the basis of the two grades. If the first examiner is not the thesis supervisor, the first examiner forwards the assessment form, his/her own comments and those of the second examiner, and informs the thesis supervisor of the final grade. The thesis supervisor informs the student of the assessment and ensures that the student receives the completed assessment forms.
  7. The thesis supervisor submits the two assessment forms in digital form to the Education Office, which then archives the assessment forms. The Examination Board screens the assessment forms for completeness.
  8. The grade for the thesis is the average grade of the assessments of the first and second examiner.
  9. No averaging will take place if there is:
    - a) a difference of two or more points between the assessments of the first and the second examiner;
    - b) an unsatisfactory assessment by one examiner and a satisfactory assessment by the other.
  10. If a situation as described in (9) arises, the first examiner reports this to the Examination Board. The first examiner will submit to the Examination Board an uncommented copy of the thesis provided by the student and a blank assessment form. The chairperson of the Examination Board appoints, if possible in consultation with the thesis coordinator, a third examiner within three working days after the notification and sends him/her, via the administrative secretariat, the thesis and the blank assessment form.
  11. The third examiner submits his/her grade for the thesis to the administrative secretariat of the Examination Board as soon as possible, but in any case within five working days of receipt, by means of the completed assessment form. If the grade of the third examiner is lower than the lowest of the two previous assessments, then the final grade is the lower grade of the two previous assessments. If the grade of the third examiner is higher than the highest of the two previous assessments, then the final grade is the higher grade of the two previous assessments. If the grade of the third examiner lies between the grades of the two previous assessments, then the grade of the third examiner will be the final grade.
  12. If, after a third assessment at the first submission opportunity, the thesis is given an unsatisfactory final grade, the student is permitted to improve and resubmit the thesis. In principle, the first and second assessor will remain the same, unless the thesis coordinator decides otherwise.
  13. The administrative secretariat of the Examination Board informs the first and second examiners of the final grade and attaches the third examiner's assessment form. The first examiner or thesis supervisor then informs the student of the third examiner's comments and the final grade.
  14. Once the thesis has been resubmitted, no further opportunities for resubmission can be granted.
  15. The administrative secretariat of the Examination Board submits the final grade and the assessment form of the third examiner to the Education Office, which then ensures registration of the final grade and archiving of the assessment form.

## **Article 7**                      **Publication**

1. Copyright for the thesis resides with the student.

2. Publication of the thesis and publication of the results of the research of the thesis (for example if the thesis is published as an article) will only take place following consultation between the student and the thesis supervisor.
3. In the event of any dispute, the matter will be submitted to the Programme Director, who will solicit advice from independent experts if necessary. The individuals involved may lodge an appeal against the Programme Director's decision with the Faculty Board.
4. Theses that receive a pass mark are made publicly available by VU University Library (UBVU). To this end, the student provides the thesis in digital form for inclusion in the university library's thesis database.
5. If a student carries out research within a particular organization for the purposes of his/her thesis, no assurances of confidentiality may be given to the organization in question, because scientific knowledge must be accessible, verifiable and cumulative. An acceptable alternative to confidentiality is the use of pseudonyms or other devices that render the work anonymous. If an organization does not consider the anonymization of the thesis to be sufficient, but the research carried out does serve a scientific or educational purpose, the student is to submit a substantiated application to the Examination Board of the study programme at the start of the thesis process, requesting that the thesis be included in the library under restrictions. The student's request must be supported in writing by the thesis supervisor. If the Examination Board approves this application, the thesis will remain 'under restrictions'. This means that it will be included in the VU University Library's thesis database but will not be visible to third parties. In such cases, the student writes a summary of his or her thesis for the VU University Library's digital database.

#### **Article 8 Academic misconduct, plagiarism and disputes**

1. The student writes the thesis independently. The student is not allowed to engage other parties to write (parts of) the text of the thesis. This is regarded as a form of academic misconduct or plagiarism. If the student is suspected of academic misconduct or plagiarism, the thesis supervisor and/or thesis coordinator are obliged to report this to the Examination Board. This is in accordance with the relevant articles of the rules and guidelines of the Faculty of Social Sciences Examination Board.
2. If disputes arise between student and thesis supervisor, the thesis coordinator acts as a mediator. If the thesis coordinator is the thesis supervisor, the Programme Director acts as a mediator. If the programme Director is the thesis coordinator or the thesis supervisor, the Portfolio Holder Education acts as a mediator. If necessary, the thesis coordinator, Programme Director or Portfolio Holder Education will assign another supervisor to the student.
3. If the dispute is not resolved to the student's satisfaction after mediation by the thesis coordinator, he or she may file a complaint with the Examination Board if it concerns assessment and with the Programme Director if it concerns supervision. If the student disagrees with the Examination Board's decision, he or she can lodge an appeal with the Examination Appeals Board. If the student disagrees with the verdict of the Programme Director, he or she can lodge an appeal with the Faculty Board.

#### **Article 9 Assessment of the thesis in relation to graduation**

1. Students who submit their thesis no later than the last Friday of period 6 at 5.00 PM will receive their grade no later than the date shown in the table in Appendix 1.
2. The second opportunity for submission is described in the programme's thesis manual. Students will then receive the assessment no later than the date stated in the table in Appendix 1.
3. If the thesis is graded with a pass on the first or second submission and the student has fulfilled all other obligations, he/she can proceed to graduate in the same academic year.
4. If, after the second submission, the thesis is not graded as a pass or if the thesis has not been submitted owing to special circumstances and the student wishes to continue the programme, he/she will need to register for the programme again and notify the thesis coordinator. The thesis coordinator determines whether or not the student will receive supervision outside the regular thesis process; whether a different thesis subject must be chosen; and whether a different thesis supervisor will be assigned.
5. The student who obtains a pass for his or her thesis and complies with all other obligations will

receive a graduation notice by email within two weeks after the registration of his/her final result. The student can use the link in the email to indicate that he/she wishes to graduate or the student may request a graduation postponement.

6. Students who fail to submit the thesis at the first opportunity only retain the opportunity to resubmit in accordance with the standard procedure. In special circumstances, a student may submit a request to the Examination Board for a submission opportunity outside the standard submission opportunities in the current academic year. The programme's study guide specifies the other cases in which the student can appeal to the Examination Board and which guidelines apply to submission opportunities.

#### **Article 10**                      **Evaluation**

1. When grades are registered, the student will be asked to fill in a digital evaluation of the Master's thesis process.

Adopted by the Faculty Board in November 2021, after consultation with the Master's Programme Committees, the Examination Board and the Joint Assembly.

This Regulation takes effect from 15 November 2021.

## APPENDIX 1 TABLE OF DEADLINES FOR SUBMISSION AND GRADING 2021-2025, 1st and 2nd submission

These are the deadlines set by the Faculty of Social Sciences' student administration. For programme submission deadlines, see the manual of the relevant degree programme.

Year	Student	Assessor: upload in Formdesk	Education Office: submit overview	Thesis coordinator: register grades in VRR	2nd submission opportunity	Student	Assessor: upload in Formdesk	Education Office: submit overview	Thesis coordinator: register grades in VRR
2022	see programme manual	Fri 15 July	Mon 18 July	Mon 18 July		see programme manual	Mon 22 Aug	Tue 23 Aug	Tue 23 Aug
2023	see programme manual	Fri 14 July	Mon 17 July	Mon 17 July		see programme manual	Mon 21 Aug	Tue 22 Aug	Tue 22 Aug
2024	see programme manual	Fri 12 July	Mon 15 July	Mon 15 July		see programme manual	Thu 22 Aug	Fri 23 Aug	Fri 23 Aug
2025	see manual	Fri 11 July	Mon 14 July	Mon 14 July		see programme manual	Thu 21 Aug	Fri 22 Aug	Fri 22 Aug