

# 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**

- See our guide on How to Finish EUS for this step!

### **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.

A **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**

- See our guide on How to Finish EUS for these steps!