



OÑATI INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE
FOR THE SOCIOLOGY OF LAW

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OÑATIKO LEGE-SOZIOLOGIAKO
NAZIOARTEKO ERAKUNDEA

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INSTITUTO INTERNACIONAL
DE SOCIOLOGÍA JURÍDICA DE OÑATI

INFORMATION FOR SUPERVISORS AND EXAMINERS: MASTER'S THESES

The IISL's International Master's in Sociology of Law consists of two components. First, students attend intensive courses from generally the last week of September until the last week of March. Second, students work on their Master's thesis projects from usually beginning of April to late July. The defence procedure takes place in early September.

The following guidelines provide useful background information for supervisors and examiners concerning the Master's thesis process, from the research proposal to thesis submission and defence. See the last page for important dates!

We are very grateful that you accepted our invitation to supervise or examine one or more Master's theses of the present cohort. The Master Coordination Team (master@iisj.es) will be available for questions, and they may ask you to fill in a digital form or return a document by email confirming your assignment.¹

To facilitate communication and exchange of documents, the electronic learning platform Moodle will be used. The Master Coordination Team will give supervisors and examiners access to this platform, provide guidance on how to use it and support you in practical questions if need be.

Form and scope of the thesis

The thesis contributes one-third of the credits for the degree (20 ECTS). It is graded separately, and the grade for the thesis is stated on the certificate of the degree.

The thesis should be of the style and substance of a substantial academic journal article. It should have a maximum word length of 15,000 words including footnotes and bibliography, but excluding Appendices. Students are therefore strongly encouraged to adopt a condensed style of writing, focusing on what is essential for the thesis. If a thesis exceeds the word limit without good reasons, which are to be discussed with the IISL Scientific Director beforehand (e.g., length requirements regarding the recognition of the degree in certain countries of origin), this may be considered as a "malus" and negatively affect the grading process.

The thesis should normally be written in English. The use of other languages may be approved if supervision and examination can be arranged.

The IISL accepts different citation styles but expects coherence throughout the thesis. Plagiarism will not be tolerated.

Thesis research proposal

While the main period for researching and writing of the thesis is from April to the end of July, students are encouraged to start conceptualizing their research early in the context of the thesis research seminar, which runs parallel to the courses from late September to late March.

To facilitate this, students are required to submit a provisional thesis title and short outline (1,000 words) at the end of January, and then a second and longer thesis research proposal (2,500 words) at the end of March. The longer proposal provides a brief background to the topic, explains the

¹ <http://www.iisj.net/en/socio-legal-master/teachers-supervisors-and-examiners-application-form>



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aims of the research, proposed methodology, identifies potential ethical issues and explains how they will be addressed. The thesis research proposal is assessed by the Scientific Director as part of the thesis research seminar.

Supervision of Master's theses

Each student is appointed one or, exceptionally, two individual supervisors, or a supervisor and a co-supervisor. For the most part, supervisors will be teachers of the IISL Master's, although students wishing to conduct research on a topic that falls outside the courses taught and/or requires particular expertise may be appointed an external supervisor.

Supervision may entail helping students focus on a suitable topic, suggesting literature and other sources, discussing the theoretical approach and methodology in relation to the research questions, commenting on the student's literature review and other draft chapters of the thesis, and approving the final draft for submission. Students are asked to keep in regular contact with the supervisors, usually by email/Skype/Zoom/WhatsApp, etc., and to agree with them on a timeline for the various stages in accordance with the general deadlines below. The individual timeline should allow sufficient time for the supervisor to comment on drafts according to their own schedules.

Students received citation and referencing training in the thesis seminar and have had the chance to gain practice with academic writing throughout the different courses. However, in the stressful period of thesis-writing, there may still be a risk of conscious or unconscious plagiarism in some cases. We therefore kindly ask you to be alert and follow up with students on any untransparent or dubitable working practices. Please flag to us if you are uncertain about the quality of the work in this regard once you notice irregularities.

Please note that, at the IISL, the use of ChatGPT or other AI-based software by students, for generating text or other data, is generally not allowed. These are considered as unauthorised aids whose use in preparing essays, exams or theses amounts to cheating. Exceptions can be made in specific contexts (e.g., thesis with an AI-related topic) but should be agreed with us beforehand and respective sections have to be clearly marked. Otherwise, the general rule applies.

Supervisors are not asked to examine the thesis, which is the task of the Board of Examiners. However, supervisors will be asked to produce a short report (one page maximum) once the thesis is submitted. The report should include the supervisor's view of the quality of the thesis, as well as any issues or circumstances that the supervisor feels relevant to be considered in the defence (e.g., unforeseen problems in collecting data, which should be mentioned in the thesis as well).

Submission of Master's theses

According to general regulations applied by the University of the Basque Country, students shall benefit from two assessment calls (*convocatoria*) per academic year to submit and defend their Master's theses. As the Master's thesis project is the final assignment after all the coursework is completed, the two assessment calls we hold are targeted for thesis submission towards the end of the academic year, with thesis submission being due either in June (1st call) or July (2nd call) and defences taking place right before the Spanish summer break (mid-July) or right after (early September). The calendar at the end of this document considers dates for both calls. We expect most students to take the 2nd call, though. The specific dates will be agreed with the examiners.



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Examination of Master's Theses

Board of Examiners: The thesis is to be graded by a team of three examiners (the Scientific Director, an “internal examiner” who is either the Scientific Coordinator of the IISL Master or a professor at the University of the Basque Country (UPV/EHU), where the IISL Master is accredited, and an “external examiner” who is not an UPV/EHU faculty member, but an international scholar entitled to examine a Master thesis in the Sociology of Law. An additional internal examiner will be nominated as substitute (fourth member of the Board of Examiners). Supervisors may attend the defence but are not jury members.

Please raise any suspicion of dubitable citation practices and plagiarism or unauthorised use of AI-based software (like ChatGPT) in the thesis examination process, at best by notifying the Scientific Director already well before the scheduled defence. The Scientific Director may investigate the case by any means considered appropriate, and depending on the severity of the case, impose a penalty in line with UPV/EHU regulations. The findings and decision will be shared with the examiners and reported to the Academic Committee of the Master's programme. In less severe cases, a decision in the Board of Examiners may be taken to downgrade the thesis in line with the grading criteria.

The Master's thesis defence takes place in the form of an **oral defence (viva)**, which can be organised **face-to-face** (on-site at the IISL), **virtually** (online, using a video-conferencing platform), or in a **dual mode** (i.e., in hybrid form, with some participants being on-site and others online). For the oral defence, a day and time will be arranged with the Master Coordination Team, at which all parties are available, including the Board of Examiners, the candidate in question, as well as IISL support staff. Two video-conference rooms will be used, one for the public act, which the student will be able to share with up to twenty people (who have to remain silent throughout the whole event), and a second, which will only be accessed by the Board of Examiners for their deliberation.

The oral defence procedure will take approximately 90 minutes. The scheme will be as follows: (1) words of welcome by the Scientific Director and decision on who is chairing the defence; (2) summary of the most relevant aspects of the thesis by the candidate (ca. 15 minutes); (3) interventions by examiners (no more than 10 minutes each); (4) candidate's response to examiners' comments and remarks (up to 30 minutes and, if needed, additional but short comments by examiners); (5) the examiner team withdraws to deliberate for no more than 15 minutes; (6) the examiner team returns to the room and the Scientific Director or the chair of the defence communicates the result of the deliberation, i.e., the final grade of the thesis; (7) at the end, the supervisor, if present, may be invited for a short statement on the candidate's work.

With video-conferencing tools being widely available today, the oral defence is the default mode even if candidates and examiners are in different countries at the time of the defence. In the past, **written defences** were used as an alternative mode, which can still be resorted to in exceptional, well-justified cases.

In the case of a written defence, all examiners provide an evaluation of the thesis in writing including comments and questions to be sent to the student. A provisional grade could also already be given at this stage, though this should not be sent to the student. Students are requested to give written replies to the examiners within one week of receiving their comments. The reply should aim to succinctly answer to the questions and concerns raised by the examiners. The reply should not restate the argument of the thesis.



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After reading the written replies, or defence, the examiners assign a definitive grade. The provisional grade may be raised but not reduced as a result of the written defence. The examiners may agree on a joint grade (if they are in exchange about the thesis), or the average of the three may be awarded (if separate grades are received by the IISL). In the case of a significant divergence, the thesis may be sent to a fourth person for examination.

Grading of Master's theses

In the evaluation of the thesis, please consider all the criteria presented in the grading sheet, which you will receive separately or be able to download from our electronic learning platform Moodle (see **IISL Grading Sheet for Thesis**). According to the Spanish grading scale, the grade awarded to a student should be a numerical grade out of 10, with 5.0 being the passing mark.

There is no direct equivalence between the Spanish grading scale and the ECTS grading scale (European Credit Transfer System). However, this table may give international teachers some orientation in grading Master's students' assignments according to the Spanish grading scale.

Spanish Grading Scale		ECTS Grading Scale			
Grade	Range		Grade	Percent	Description
Sobresaliente (SB)	9.0-10.0	~	A	10%	Excellent – outstanding performance with only minor errors
Notable (NT)	8.5-8.9	~	B	25%	Very good – above the average standard but with some errors
	7.0-8.4	~	C	30%	Good – generally sound work with a number of notable errors
Aprobado (AP)	6.0-6.9	~	D	25%	Satisfactory – fair but with significant shortcomings
	5.0-5.9	~	E	10%	Sufficient – performance meets the minimum criteria
Suspenso (SS)	2.5-4.9	~	FX		Fail – some more work is required before the credit can be awarded
	0.0-2.4	~	F		Fail – considerable further work is required

Based on our experience, this means that about a third of the students of a cohort may reach an A (“sobresaliente”) or a B (“notable alta”) in a course or a Master's thesis. Theoretically, about another third would attain a C (“notable baja”) and the last third would reach a D or E (“aprobado”). In practice, the distribution may look a bit different, and this is fine. In the end, the ranking of students in a cohort, if needed to calculate equivalences, will follow the actual



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distribution of grades. We just have to ensure sufficient consistency in expectations and actual grading across the programme.

Please try to adjust to the Spanish grading scale based on this guidance. In each Board of Examiners there will at least one Spanish colleague (from the University of the Basque Country) who can assist with applying the Spanish grading scale. Likewise, the Scientific Director, who will be on most or all the Boards, will have an overview of how the students within the cohort compare to each other.

It may be that your own national system is either more generous or stricter in awarding best grades. If some students' performance is in the top ten percent of a cohort, they should be awarded a grade between 9.0 and 10.0 (~A). If their work is clearly above average but still shows some deficiencies, they should get 8.5 or a little above (~B), and so on. If some students' performance is just sufficient to pass the course, their grade should be 5.0 or 5.5. Normally, grades should be a whole or half integer (i.e., 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10; or 5.5, 6.5 etc.), unless there is a very good reason for a more subtle variation (e.g., 6.8), such as when different assessment components are weighted in the final grade or a ranking of students seems appropriate.



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IMPORTANT DATES 2024

January 27 th , until 11:00pm	Provisional thesis title and short outline (1,000 words) by students submitted to Moodle
March 30 th , until 11:00pm	Thesis research proposal (2,500 words) by students submitted to Moodle; students announce whether they will take the 1 st or 2 nd call; based on this: appointment of supervisors & examiners for the respective periods
May 15 th , until 11:00pm	First progress report by students submitted to Moodle (supervisors download them from Moodle themselves)
June 15 th , until 11:00pm	Second progress report by students submitted to Moodle (supervisors download them from Moodle themselves)
1 st call: 27 th June, until 11:00pm	Final thesis submission <u>by students who opted for the 1st call</u> to Moodle (supervisors and examiners can download the theses from Moodle on their own, examiners begin reading); <u>no submission needed if students have opted for the 2nd call</u>
1 st call: 15 th to 19 th July	For students in the 1 st call only: oral defences in person or online to be scheduled within this period; finalisation of the grades by the examiners
2nd call: July 25th, until 11:00pm	Final thesis submission by <u>students in the 2nd call</u> to Moodle (supervisors and examiners can download the theses from Moodle on their own, examiners begin reading)
1 st call: July 29 th	IISL sends grades & documentation of the 1 st call to UPV/EHU administration, prepares preliminary certificates if requested
September 2 nd , until 11:00pm (in case of written defences only)	Comments and questions by examiners submitted to Moodle (examinees download them from Moodle themselves)
September 9 th , until 11:00pm (in case of written defences only)	Written replies by students Moodle; in the next three days: finalisation of the grades by the examiners
2nd call: September 2nd to 12th (period for oral defences)	Oral defences in person or online to be scheduled within this period; finalisation of the grades by the examiners
2 nd call: September 13 th	IISL sends grades & documentation of the 2 nd call to UPV/EHU administration