



OÑATI INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE
FOR THE SOCIOLOGY OF LAW

—
OÑATIKO LEGE-SOZIOLOGIAKO
NAZIOARTEKO ERAKUNDEA

—
INSTITUTO INTERNACIONAL
DE SOCIOLOGÍA JURÍDICA DE OÑATI

INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS: THESIS WRITING & EXAMINATION

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. Written or oral defences take place in early September.

The coursework period includes student participation in a thesis research seminar, in which students receive support by the Scientific Director in finding a relevant research topic and developing suitable research questions, putting together an appropriate research design and writing a thesis research proposal of **2,500** words. In the thesis research period, students work on their own, but with the support by academic supervisors, on their projects and submit, at the end, a Master's thesis of **15,000** words reporting on their research and findings.

This document provides guidance for students regarding the thesis research project and the related requirements. See the last page for important dates!

Thesis requirements

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 journal article. It has a maximum word length of **15,000** words, including footnotes and bibliography/list of references, but excluding Appendices. You are strongly encouraged to adopt a condensed style of writing, focusing on what is essential for the thesis. In practice this means, in many cases, that you will have to cut down on lengthy parts, which reflect your earlier work in progress, but could be reorganised and rewritten to more directly bring your message across. If your thesis exceeds the word limit without good reasons, which are to be discussed with the Scientific Director beforehand (e.g., minimum length requirements regarding the recognition of the degree in certain countries of origin), this may negatively affect the grading process.

The thesis should normally be written in English. The use of other languages officially used at the institute (e.g., Spanish, Basque, French) may be approved if appropriate supervision and examination can be arranged.

The form of the Master thesis is an important criterium for assessment. Here are some examples of relevant and frequently used styles to choose from in the writing of Master theses:

- the Chicago Manual of Style (CMOS) for reference entries and in-text citation (https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide/citation-guide-2.html)
- you may also consult the CMOS guidelines for manuscript preparations, if you plan to use figures, tables and photos (<https://press.uchicago.edu/resource/emsguide.html>)
- American Sociological Association (ASA) style (https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/asa_style/references_page_formatting.html)
- American Psychological Association (APA) style (<https://apastyle.apa.org/instructional-aids>)

Obviously, the Master's thesis has to comply with the standards of good academic practice, especially as regards use and citation of sources. **All sources must be properly cited, and any**



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quotations must be clearly marked as such. Failure to mark quotations or cite sources may be treated as plagiarism and lead to the Master's thesis not being accepted.

A teacher or examiner who identifies or suspects bad academic practice or plagiarism should report the matter to the Scientific Director, who may investigate by any means considered appropriate. If a prima facie case is found, the student will be notified of the details and given an opportunity to explain; the student may be accompanied by a friend or adviser. The decision on the grade to be awarded or penalty will be taken by the Scientific Director and, depending on circumstances and the severity of the case, reported to the Academic Committee of the Master's programme and, in the case of completed Master's theses, to the Board of Examiners.

Research for the Master thesis must comply with the ISA Code of Ethics (http://www.isa-sociology.org/about/isa_code_of_ethics.htm). Consideration of ethical issues should be included already in the outline of the thesis and research proposal, and where relevant, should be discussed within the final version of the Master's thesis.

For a Master's thesis in the Sociology of Law the following aspects have to be observed:

- Identify a particular **socio-legal** problem or issue and formulate relevant research questions on the basis of an extensive literature review and / or detailed empirical observations;
- Translate the problem into a conceptual framework, involving key concepts and methods;
- Create a research design that allows for the operationalisation of the key concepts both in the collection and interpretation of your data, and that provides a clear strategy of how to answer your research questions;
- Start writing at an early stage of the research; rewriting and editing are integral parts of the writing process;
- Reflect on the relevance of the research, your role as a researcher, and possible ethical issues as well as how you approach them.

Thesis evaluation criteria

1. Choice of topic and title (relevance of topic for the field of socio-legal studies)
2. Style (reference entries, in-text citations, lay-out, page numbers)
3. Language (spelling, grammar, punctuation, range of word use, readability)
4. Relevance and clarity of research question/s
5. Selection of relevant primary sources / data and literature review
6. Methodology / research design
7. Logical construction of argument / structuration of the Master thesis
8. Reflexivity (positioning of the argument in relevant debates) and self-reflexivity (situating oneself as researcher and author, also in relation to ethical issues)
9. General and specific knowledge of the Master candidate
10. Master candidate's own contribution in terms of new perspectives, synthesis, insights, methodology / approach



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Supervision of Master's theses

Each student is appointed one or, exceptionally, two individual supervisors. The appointment will take place in consultation with both the candidate and the supervisor(s) in question. The Scientific Director is the main contact in this respect overseeing the process. Students may consult course teachers for advice about their thesis topic, and may also ask a course teacher to act as supervisor for the thesis. Consultation should start at least four weeks prior to the appointment. In many cases, supervisors will be teachers of the IISL Master programme and related UPV/EHU faculty, although students wishing to conduct research on a topic that falls outside the topic area of courses taught and/or requires particular expertise may be assigned 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. If students decide not to follow any of the advice given by the supervisor, they should explain their reasons to the supervisor.

Supervisors are not asked to examine the thesis. However, the IISL does ask them to produce a short report (one page maximum) once the thesis is submitted. The report should include the supervisor's views on the quality of the thesis (see thesis evaluation criteria above), as well as any issues or circumstances that the supervisor feels the examiners should take into consideration (e.g., unforeseen problems in collecting data, which should be mentioned in the thesis as well).

Examination of Master's theses

Apart from the Scientific Director, two additional examiners (an internal examiner of the UPV/EHU and an external examiner) are appointed for grading each individual thesis. The examiner should provide a written evaluation of the thesis on the basis of the thesis evaluation criteria listed above, with comments, and some questions to be sent to the student. Supervisors may attend the defence (if this is held in oral form) but are not jury members.

Master's Theses defences can adopt two forms: **written defence or oral defence**. The students will be asked to notify the Master Coordination Team early on in the thesis-writing process about which form they prefer, and the examination process will be organized accordingly.

Written defence: 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. 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. After reading the written replies, or defence, the examiners assign a definitive grade.

Oral defence, presential or on-line: In the case of an oral defence (viva), 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. This may take face-to-face at the IISL but also in a dual mode (with some participants on-site and others online) or completely online, using a video-conferencing platform.



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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.

In the case of on-line defense, 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 team of examiners for their deliberation.

As in the coursework, the Spanish grading scale is applied. Accordingly, the grade awarded to a student should be a numerical grade out of 10, with 5.0 being the passing mark.



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IMPORTANT DATES 2023

January 28 th , until 11:00pm	Provisional thesis title and short outline (1,000 words) by students to be submitted to Moodle
March 25 th , until 11:00pm	Thesis research proposal (2,500 words) by students to be submitted to Moodle; relatedly: appointment of supervisors & examiners; students inform IISL Master Coordination Team whether they settle for written or oral defence
May 15 th , until 11:00pm	First progress report by students to be submitted to Moodle (supervisors download them from Moodle themselves)
June 15 th , until 11:00pm	Second progress report by students to be submitted to Moodle (supervisors download them from Moodle themselves)
July 25 th , until 11:00pm*	Submission of the Final Thesis by students to Moodle (supervisors may download them from Moodle for their information; examiners can start downloading the theses and begin reading)
September 4 th , until 11:00pm (for written defences only)	Comments and questions by examiners to be submitted to Moodle (examinees download them from Moodle themselves)
September 11 th , until 11:00pm (for written defences only)	Written replies by students submitted to Moodle; in the next three days: finalisation of the grades by the examiners
September 5 th – September 14 th (period for oral defences)	Oral defences in person or online to be scheduled within this period; as part of the procedure: finalisation of the grades by the examiners
September 15 th	IISL sending grades & documentation to UPV/EHU administration

*If a thesis is not submitted by the indicated date in July, students cannot expect the examination process to be organized in time for them to graduate in September. As a consequence, they may have to register again for the thesis module in the following academic year, which would incur an additional fee to the UPV/EHU.