Master’s Thesis Regulations
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>MASTER’S THESIS</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>DESCRIPTION</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>OBJECTIVES</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2.1</td>
<td>Learning outcomes</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2.2</td>
<td>Training objectives</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>ACTORS</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3.1</td>
<td>The student</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3.2</td>
<td>The supervisor</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3.3</td>
<td>The co-supervisor</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3.4</td>
<td>The day-to-day coach</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3.5</td>
<td>The examiner</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3.6</td>
<td>The chair of the defence</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MASTER’S THESIS</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4.1</td>
<td>Topic and objective</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4.2</td>
<td>Language and formatting requirements</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>START OF MASTER’S THESIS</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>PREREQUISITES</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>COMMUNICATION</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.1</td>
<td>Before the start of the academic year</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2.2</td>
<td>During the academic year</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>TOPICS</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.1</td>
<td>List of topics from the Faculty</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3.2</td>
<td>Student-proposed topics</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>AGREEMENT</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>WORKING ON THE MASTER’S THESIS</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>AIDS</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>DEONTOLOGY AND ACADEMIC INTEGRITY</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>INTERIM REPORTS</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>STAYS ABROAD</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>PROBLEMS WHILE WORKING ON THE MASTER’S THESIS</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5.1</td>
<td>Termination of the agreement by the student</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Introduction

These regulations aim to clarify the procedures and requirements set by the faculty relating to the Master’s thesis.

The original version of these regulations were published on 13/09/2006. The current version was approved by the Faculty Council on 24 May 2017 and concerns the regulations for the academic year 2017-2018. Unless otherwise stated, these provisions apply to all master students of this faculty (Psychology, Educational Sciences or Educational Studies). All important dates are given in Appendix 1. The exact dates for each year along with all application forms1 can be found on the Master’s Thesis Portal [ppw.kuleuven.be/thesis]. The Master’s thesis application that is referred to is available via [ppw.kuleuven.be/apps/masterproef/en].

If you have any questions relating to the submission of your Master’s thesis or questions on the topic allocation procedure, please contact ppw.masterproef@kuleuven.be. For any comments on the structure or wording of this regulations, please contact Fabienne De Ryck (fabienne.deryck@kuleuven.be).

1 Master’s thesis

1.1 Description

The Master’s thesis is a research study in which the student demonstrates his/her ability to compile a state-of-the-art literature review on a research topic in a particular discipline, to apply the discipline-specific research method and to formulate relevant and research-based conclusions. Together with the thesis supervisor, the student defines the topic so that it lends itself to a scientific approach. Writing a Master’s thesis serves as the culmination of the Master’s programme. In completing the Master’s thesis, the student moreover demonstrates his/her ability to analyse a scientific problem independently, to approach it in a critical-scientific manner, and to outline possible solutions. This requires a time investment equivalent to roughly four months’ full-time work, spread over one or two academic years, depending on the programme.

1.2 Objectives

Below, the general learning outcomes and training objectives of the Master’s thesis are outlined. These objectives are developed into assessment criteria in § 5.2.1. After completing Master’s Thesis Unit 1, students are expected to have made progress towards achieving these objectives.

1.2.1 Learning outcomes

After completing the Master’s thesis, the student should be able to ...

- conduct independent research within a (sub)discipline of psychology or educational sciences; more specifically, the student should be able to

  • provide a theoretical foundation for his/her research;
  • formulate a research question;
  • select, apply and evaluate an adequate research method;
  • draw valid conclusions and offer critical reflections.

---

1 The supervisor’s signature on all forms can be replaced by an email from the supervisor giving consent.
- report on the research conducted for his/her Master’s thesis in an academic style.

1.2.2 Training objectives

By working on the Master’s thesis ...
- the student develops and forms autonomous and critical thinking and judgment capacity, including the ability to produce new insights.
- the student develops and forms an attentive attitude to new (international) evolutions, changing societal conditions and contemporary educational/psychological challenges.
- the student gives evidence of an ethical and academic attitude to approaching research and practice problems and processes.
- the student takes responsibility for his/her thoughts and actions.
- the student shows willingness to collaborate with others.

1.3 Actors

A Master’s thesis student is aided by a supervisor. If necessary, a co-supervisor and sometimes a day-to-day coach are assigned to a student as well. A checklist can be found on the Master’s Thesis Portal that both students and the supervision team can use during the introductory interview.

1.3.1 The student

The student is expected to demonstrate independence, self-efficacy and an ability to work autonomously throughout all parts of the project. A description of a good Master’s thesis student, based on the profile outlined by the Education Council of the KU Leuven (31/03/2011), can be found on the Master’s Thesis Portal.

A Master’s thesis does not necessarily entail designing and executing a research design individually. Two or more students can research one and the same topic or different aspects of a specific problem. Students writing a Master’s thesis in one year can collaborate with students writing a Master’s thesis in two years. When students collaborate to write a Master’s thesis, they are asked to specifically indicate which parts were written individually and which parts were written in collaboration in the clarification of the student’s approach and his/her contribution to the thesis (cf.1.4.3.2). This is necessary for both students who hand in one joint Master’s thesis and students who collaborate but hand in separate Master’s theses. It ensures that each student is evaluated individually.

1.3.2 The supervisor

Each student is assigned a supervisor, who has final responsibility for the supervision (not the outcome) of the thesis. The supervisor must be a member of KU Leuven’s senior academic staff (ZAP) or junior/associate academic staff (ABAP), hold a PhD, and be affiliated to the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, KU Leuven. Exceptions to this rule should be directed to the Vice Dean for Education and submitted to the Faculty Board. Employees who hold a PhD and who act as supervisor but are no member of KU Leuven’s senior academic staff, are obliged to put forth a co-supervisor given the temporary status of their appointment. All members of senior academic staff of other faculties who oversee Master’s theses are expected to be assisted by a co-supervisor who is a member of senior academic staff (ZAP) of the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences. Emeritus professors with formal duties can also act as supervisors. Employees who hold a PhD, but are no member of KU Leuven’s senior academic staff, are allowed to supervise or co-supervise a maximum of 3 ongoing Master’s theses.

2 For a supervisor to be affiliated with the faculty he/she needs to be linked to the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences in the organigram or be the lecturer of a course that is part of a programme of the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences.
Who takes on the role of supervisor agrees to the following tasks.

- The supervisor assists the student in planning, designing and possibly suggesting changes to the research project.
- The supervisor verifies that the student acts with discretion in his/her interaction with study participants and institutions and complies with ethical rules at all stages of the project. If necessary, the supervisor ensures that the ethical board provides permission in time (cf. §3.2).
- The supervisor is available on a regular basis. The supervisor ensures that students receive feedback on any proposals or texts within a reasonable time.
- The supervisor regularly monitors the student’s progress and makes sure that the Master’s thesis can be completed within the expected time frame.

A description of a good promotor, based on the profile outlined by the Education Council of the KU Leuven (31/03/2011), can be found on the Master’s Thesis Portal.

1.3.3 The co-supervisor

If additional expertise is required, a co-supervisor is appointed. The co-supervisor assists the supervisor and takes on the supervisor’s tasks. There cannot be more than one co-supervisor. A co-supervisor must hold a PhD. Requests for exceptions should be directed to the Vice Dean for Education and submitted to the Faculty Board. Supervisor and co-supervisor can be members of the same research group or centre.

1.3.4 The day-to-day coach

The student can also be assigned a day-to-day coach who is familiar with the research field and who should be a member of junior or associate academic staff (ABAP). Members of junior or associate academic staff (ABAP) can only play a supporting role in the supervision of Master’s theses, as responsibility lies with the supervisor.

1.3.5 The examiner

The Master’s thesis is assessed by the supervisor, the co-supervisor (if appointed) and two examiners. The examiners assess the product, while the supervisor(s) also assess(es) the process.

An examiner must meet the same requirements as a supervisor. Examiners are appointed by the programme directors of the Master’s programmes. There are four categories of examiners.

- Category A: examiners who are members of the full-time senior academic staff of the faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences (including FPPW, Campus Kulak Kortrijk)
- Category B: examiners who are members of the part-time senior academic staff with an employment rate greater than or equal to 50% (including FPPW, Campus Kulak Kortrijk)
- Category C: examiners who are members of the part-time senior academic staff of the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences (including FPPW, Campus Kulak Kortrijk) with an employment rate smaller than 50% and all full-time employees in research units of the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences who hold a PhD (including FPPW, Campus Kulak Kortrijk)
- Category D: all part-time employees in research units of the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences who hold a PhD (including FPPW, Campus Kulak Kortrijk) and external examiners

1.3.6 The chair of the defence

All ZAP members of the PPW faculty (including PPW@KULAK) can act as chair during the defence. The chair steers the defence and deliberations in the right direction (e.g. timekeeping, moderating the questions part, ...).
chair writes the defence report – including the outcome – and sends it to the Student Administration Office on time.

1.4 Characteristics of the Master’s thesis

1.4.1 Topic and objective

The topic of the Master’s thesis should be related to one of the degree programmes the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences offers. Students can write a Master’s thesis on topics in the fields covered by general courses and in the various majors. The Master’s thesis is not linked to the programme or the major. Supervisors can, however, indicate in the Master’s thesis application that students from certain programmes/majors get priority in the topic allocation procedure. The topic and objective of the Master’s thesis should be clearly distinguished from the theme and the purpose of the (practice and/or research) internships. The supervisor and internship mentor are not the same person. Justified exceptions are only possible with the approval of the Vice Dean for Education. Requests should be submitted by e-mail to pww.vicedecaanonderwijs@kuleuven.be with cc to the supervisor.

A Master’s thesis can consist of a comprehensive (empirical) research process or it can be a completion of only one or a few phases of the research cycle (for example a literature review). The research can be both fundamental and practice-oriented.

1.4.2 Language and formatting requirements

The Master’s thesis should be typed in font 11 or 12, with 1.5 line spacing and a 2.5 cm margin all around. The Master’s thesis should be submitted in pdf format as indicated on the Master’s Thesis Portal. Each submitted thesis should contain the following components:

- Cover page conforming to standard formatting requirements (cover)
- Blank page
- Title page (copy of cover)
- Summary
- Short prologue with headings such as ‘Acknowledgements’ or ‘Preface’ (1p.)
- Clarification of the student’s approach and his/her contribution to the thesis
- Table of contents
- List of tables (not in article-based theses)
- List of figures (not in article-based theses)
- Body of the Master’s thesis (including references)
- Appendices
- Blank page
- Blank back page

The student is responsible for the text in the submitted copies.

1.4.2.1 Title page and cover

The title page should be formatted according to the template available on the Master’s Thesis Portal. Do not translate the heading or the degree title. The full name of the (co-)supervisor must be mentioned. The daily day-to-day coach is to be mentioned as ‘i.c.w.’ on the cover.

1.4.2.2 Summary

The summary should be organised according to the template with the accompanying instructions on the Master’s Thesis Portal. The summary needs to be submitted with the Master’s thesis (§4) and is also a part of the Master’s thesis text (after the title page).
1.4.2.3 Clarification of the student's approach and his/her contribution to the thesis

In the clarification section, the student briefly but clearly describes his/her own contribution and acknowledges the support and contributions (e.g. relating to the use of literature or data) offered by the supervisor, the co-supervisor, the day-to-day coach, the research unit, or fellow students.

1.4.2.4 Body of the Master's thesis

If the student deems a deviation from the requirements below necessary and desirable, he/she should be able to justify this for the examiners in the clarification section.

The Master’s thesis is ideally 20 to 60 pages long. The structure of the text depends on the type of Master’s thesis. As in a scientific report or article, the structure should be emphasised by using appropriate headings.

The Master’s thesis must conform to APA standards (American Psychological Association, Sixth Edition) with regard to style (i.a., punctuation, capitalisation,...), display of research results (tables, figures,...), references and citations. The guidelines for layout and structure are optional.

In programmes taught in Dutch, the Master’s thesis is written in Dutch or English. In programmes taught in English, the thesis is written in English. A student who takes a programme taught in Dutch cannot be forced to write a Master’s thesis in a language other than Dutch unless this is explicitly mentioned as a condition on the information sheet of the subject and the student has selected this subject thereby agreeing with the condition (cf. infra). Supervisors who are proficient in Dutch are expected to give students in programmes taught in Dutch the opportunity to write their Master’s thesis in Dutch.

When research is conducted in group, the student can choose to write an individual Master’s thesis or a joint thesis with more than one student author. This is always the student’s choice. The volume of work that forms the basis of the Master’s thesis text should be that of several persons in the case of a joint thesis.

In the Master’s thesis text explicit attention should go to the societal relevance of the work/the theoretical importance of it/the contribution to methodological developments/...

1.4.2.5 Appendices

If an electronic product is an essential part of the Master’s thesis, the student should contact the Student Administration Office to determine the most appropriate way to deliver this product to the examiners.

2 Start of Master’s thesis

2.1 Prerequisites

All Master’s thesis units (P0P80A, P0P81A, P0T62A, P0T63A, P0R51A, P0Q63A, P0T37A, P0T36A) are full-year course units. This means that students can only select these units in their ISP in the first semester and that they should meet prerequisite requirements at the start of the first semester. They cannot start their Master’s thesis in the second semester. It is impossible to take any of the Master’s thesis units under an examination contract or a credit contract. A degree/certificate that immediately offers access to the concerned Master’s programmes

---

3 For technical reasons, students directly entering the Master’s programme in Psychology / Educational Sciences / Educational Studies with a degree obtained from another institution than KU Leuven may be unable to select the Master’s thesis in their ISP. If that is the case, they should submit their ISP without including the Master’s thesis and should request to have prerequisite requirements overruled by submitting the ‘Overruling prerequisite requirements’ form, which is available on the Student Portal.
is a prerequisite upon beginning the Master’s thesis. For degree programmes with two Master’s thesis units, Unit 2 can only be taken on the condition that Unit 1 has already been taken or is being taken simultaneously. The particular prerequisite requirements for each Master’s thesis unit are represented in the ECTS card.

Each student must be enrolled in one of the Master’s programmes of the Faculty, must meet the prerequisite requirements for the Master’s thesis and select the appropriate units in their ISP to be able to start the Master’s thesis and get guidance.

2.2 Communication

2.2.1 Before the start of the academic year

In the course of the second semester, information will be provided about the Master’s thesis and the topic selection procedure for Bachelor students and students enrolled in fast-track programmes (i.e. bridging, preparatory and accelerated programmes), possibly combined with information on the programme itself. Students are informed via Toledo.

2.2.2 During the academic year

On the first Tuesday evening of the academic year, students will be informed of the objective and the choice of the Master’s thesis via a general information session. Furthermore, students can find more information on the subjects proposed by each supervisor in the Master’s thesis application (office hours, e-mail, information session...).

Students are informed of matters concerning the Master’s thesis via Toledo and e-mail.

2.3 Topics

Topics are assigned by the Student Administration Office via an electronic procedure overseen by the Vice Dean for Education.

Students can only write a Master’s thesis about a subject that the supervisor is willing to supervise. This can include a topic from the Faculty’s list of thesis topics that is made available each year or a topic that is proposed by the student himself.

2.3.1 List of topics from the Faculty

Before the summer, supervisors are requested to submit a list of Master’s thesis topics that they would be willing to supervise. Full-time members of senior academic staff (ZAP) with a principal contract at the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences should submit topics for at least 5 students via the Master’s thesis application. Part-time members of senior academic staff (ZAP) affiliated with the faculty should submit topics for at least 2 students via the Master’s thesis application. The Master’s thesis topics can be consulted by students enrolled for a Master’s programme at the faculty through the Master’s Thesis Portal in the course of the first two weeks of September.

The Master’s thesis topics offered by supervisors are linked to their research expertise.

When the topic list is made available, the following information should be included:

- Language:
  - Can students who do not master Dutch select the topic?
  - Can the Master’s thesis be written in English?
- Compulsory course related to this topic?
Is the topic suitable for one-year Master’s Theses?
- Is the topic suitable for outgoing Erasmus students?
- Brief explanation of the topic
- Type of data collection
- Research and analysis methods and techniques
- Special requirements (e.g. time of data collection, ethnic issues ...)

For each topic, it should be clearly indicated which programmes/majors have priority and how many students can choose the topic. If the topic is available to several students but is chosen by only one student, it should be possible for this student to work on this topic individually.

In the topic’s information sheet it is also mentioned whether or not a student is required to take a course. If so and there is an exam conflict between the course which a student is required to take in the context of the Master’s thesis and an compulsory course, he/she can submit a request for rescheduling to the exam ombudsperson (more information via https://ppw.kuleuven.be/home/english/student-portal/student-support/examombudsservice.html).

The allocation procedure for Master’s thesis topics that are put forth by the faculty runs via the Master’s thesis application (a secure faculty website) and involves a number of strictly timed stages. Via the Master’s thesis application, both students and supervisors confirm that they are aware of Faculty regulations and meet the requirements of the topics chosen.

For the first round, students are asked to select five topics and assign prioritization. The application will be made available on the first Wednesday of the academic year. The topics will be assigned via a lottery algorithm4 with the aim of assigning a topic to as many students as possible in the first round according to the specified lottery rules. Students who were not assigned one of their chosen topics in the first round should choose at least 3 and at most 5 new topics.

Students who have not yet been assigned a topic after Round 2, will be contacted by the faculty. In agreement with the vice-dean of education and the programme directors, a solution will be considered for these students.

The general timing can be found in Appendix 1. The precise timing of the information sessions and the selection rounds is indicated in the Master’s thesis application.

2.3.2 Student-proposed topics

Instead of selecting a topic from the faculty list, students can suggest a Master’s thesis topic themselves. A student-proposed topic should also be related to one of the degree programmes at the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences and should be within the area of expertise of a potential supervisor. A proposed topic should sufficiently differ from the topics in the faculty list in terms of content and the student should find a supervisor who is willing to supervise a Master’s thesis on this topic. Accepting student-proposed topics does not negate the obligation of senior academic staff (ZAP) to submit topics for the agreed upon number of students (5 for full-time ZAP, 2 for part-time ZAP) in the Master’s thesis application.

Students who consider proposing a topic themselves are recommended to contact a potential supervisor as soon as possible to discuss the topic. The student is advised to prepare a proposal (1-2 pages) for the supervisor describing the type of research he/she would like to undertake. Supervisors can refuse to supervise the thesis. If the supervisor agrees to supervise the student’s Master’s thesis on the proposed topic, the student submits the

---

4 The system primarily takes the indicated degree/specialisation into account and then applies a weighting to the ranking of the five chosen topics.
request for the proposed topic **before the deadline of the first selection round** via the Master’s thesis application. In this request the student indicates that there is an agreement with the mentioned supervisor. The request procedure also entails a preliminary topic title, a brief description of the proposed research, the motivation for choosing the topic and the way in which the proposal came into being. The vice-dean of education processes the requests. The students are informed of the decision by the second Thursday of the academic year at the latest (10 a.m.) via the Master’s thesis application. If the proposed topic is refused, the student can still participate in the second selection round. The following elements are taken into account concerning the proposed topic when the requests are processed:

- If (s)he is a member of senior academic staff (ZAP), the supervisor has submitted topics for the agreed upon number of students (5 for full-time ZAP, 2 for part-time ZAP) in the application.
- The proposed topic differs sufficiently in terms of content from the topics proposed by the supervisor in the application.
- The student’s motivation clearly indicates that the topic was put forth at the student’s request and that the work on the Master’s thesis has not yet been initiated (e.g. at the time when the prerequisite requirements have not been met yet).

### 2.4 Agreement

The allocation of the topic in the Master’s thesis application entails an agreement between the student on the one hand and the supervisor on the other hand. The agreement concerns both the topic of the Master’s thesis and the supervision of it. Hence, a student cannot participate in future selection rounds and a supervisor cannot refuse students assigned to him/her via the application. In case a problem should occur, the student as well as the supervisor can contact the ombudsman (cf. §3.5).

### 3 Working on the Master’s thesis

#### 3.1 Aids

Apart from the supervision of the (co-)supervisor (and potentially a day-to-day coach), students can also use aids for the Master’s thesis found on [https://ppw.kuleuven.be/home/english/student-portal/thesis/aids](https://ppw.kuleuven.be/home/english/student-portal/thesis/aids).

#### 3.2 Deontology and academic integrity

While working on the Master’s thesis, the student pays attention to deontology and academic integrity. In the Master’s thesis application the student signs a honour code regarding the mastery of the rules on citing and referring. More information is available on (website plagiarism). The supervisors of the Master’s Thesis are responsible for the submission of the research protocol to the authorised ethical board. Ethical review of the protocols is, in some cases, required by law (e.g. for medical procedures or animal testing). When students work with personalised data, the involved researchers also have to conform to the regulations in terms of privacy and protection of the personal environment. An application for ethical review is preferably part of a broader research programme that is submitted to the ethical board as a whole (for information on the competences of the ethical boards, see [https://www.kuleuven.be/english/research/integrity/committees](https://www.kuleuven.be/english/research/integrity/committees) - instructions for the preparation of these applications can be found on their respective webpages). If the work that the student does for the Master’s thesis is part of a broader research programme, no separate application is needed. If this is not the case, the student prepares the application under the supervision of the supervisor and the latter submits the application. Ethical approval is not strictly required for a considerable portion of the research done in the context of Master’s theses organised at our faculty. It is, however,
advisable in the light of reports to funding agencies, inspection or auditing. Post-hoc approval of research protocols is impossible.

3.3 Interim reports

In the course of the Master’s thesis process, there is at least one interim report with feedback on the results of the study and the process. This takes place at a moment in which the feedback can still lead to an adjustment of the process and the study. During the interim feedback, reference is made to the evaluation criteria used in the final assessment. Only students in a two-year programme are also formally evaluated (pass/fail on the Master’s Thesis, part 1) on the interim reports.

The supervision team and the student specify the research project (topic, methods,...) and record agreements on form, content and evaluation modalities as well as the submission deadline of the interim reports in a document to ensure that expectations are clear for both parties. The arrangements should allow the supervisor ample time to present their decision to the Student Administration Office.

The evaluation criteria can be found in §5.2.2.1.

3.4 Stays abroad

All students who are planning a study stay abroad as part of their Master’s thesis, or their study programme in general, even if only for 1 day or to a neighbouring country, are to submit an application beforehand through the KULoket application 'Request for study period abroad'. After it has been processed by the International Office, the application file will be sent to the faculty’s Student Administration Office for approval. A link with more information about this application can be found at http://www.kuleuven.be/english/admissions/outgoing/en. You can contact international@ppw.kuleuven.be with any questions.

3.5 Problems while working on the Master’s Thesis

If one of both parties considers the agreed upon terms (in terms of execution and supervision) to be unfulfilled, it is advised to discuss this with the other party first. If this is impossible or does not yield a desired outcome, one can contact the education ombudsperson for explanation and mediation. If necessary, the education ombudsperson will try to come to a fair and correct compromise with the parties involved in agreement with the vice-dean and if necessary the programme director.

3.5.1 Termination of the agreement by the student

A student can alter the topic and/or the supervisor of the Master’s thesis. The procedure for changing the topic and/or supervisor is outlined here.

Before a student starts looking for a different topic and/or another supervisor, he/she should inform his/her current supervisor of his/her plans and the underlying reasons. The student should also report this to the education ombudsperson. Together with the student, the supervisor analyses the underlying reasons and explores alternative scenarios to avoid changing topics and/or supervisors (e.g. reformulating the research question/problem, adapting the work plan, the methodology, the supervision arrangements...).

3.5.2 Termination of the agreement by the supervisor

Not only the student, but also the supervisor is entitled to terminate the agreement. This should be documented via the education ombudsperson and submitted to the programme director.


3.5.3 Start a new agreement

If the agreement between a student and supervisor has been ended, the student has to commence with a new topic. Students can change topics and/or supervisors at two different times:

a) The student wishes to change the topic at the start of the academic year.
   The student follows the annual online selection procedure. After a topic has been assigned during the selection rounds, it is no longer possible to change the topic in the first semester.

b) The student wishes to change the topic in the second semester.
   The Faculty’s Student Administration Office will find out which supervisors still have topics and supervision slots available during the current academic year. The student should then contact a potential supervisor, who is entitled to refuse. Students are not allowed to switch to a student-proposed topic in the course of the academic year.

A student who changes topics and/or supervisors should hand in a “Change of Master’s thesis topic or supervisor” form to the Student Administration Office, stating the new title and/or the new supervisor (see Master’s Thesis Portal). This agreement is signed by both the new and the previous supervisor. Each agreed upon change of supervisor or topic has to be reported to the education ombudsperson.

Students who take up a Master’s thesis topic commit to completing both Master’s thesis Unit 1 and Unit 2 in this subject. Student who want to change Master’s thesis topics after they have passed Master’s thesis Unit 1 can no longer take Master’s thesis Unit 1 in their ISP. Under the new subject too, they will retain their pass grade for Master’s thesis Unit 1. Students who change topics immediately take on Master’s thesis Unit 2 for this new topic. Such students agree to organize themselves in such a manner that they immediately apply the obtained Master’s thesis Unit 1 objectives to the new subject. This makes it possible to finish the new subject in the same academic year on taking on Master’s thesis Unit 2.

4 Completing and submitting the Master’s thesis

4.1 Submitting the Master’s thesis

The student decides – it is their own responsibility – when he/she submits the Master’s thesis. It is highly recommended to discuss this with the supervisor beforehand. All submission deadlines and instructions can be found on the Master’s Thesis Portal in the beginning of October. Master’s theses that are uploaded after the deadline will not be accepted.

4.2 Copyright and archiving

The Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences acts in line with the general regulations concerning copyright. The Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences undertakes to comply with the general regulations governing copyright on student theses. For more information, see https://admin.kuleuven.be/sab/jd/en/student-thesis-copyright.

The Master’s thesis will be electronically archived in the PBIB collection. If your Master’s thesis may not be disclosed for certain reasons, you can apply for an embargo based on consultation with your supervisor. The procedure for this is described on the Master’s thesis portal (submission procedure).

Students are obliged to submit the texts and collected data to the research unit at the latest upon submission of the Master’s thesis. The University is entitled to the free use of a thesis and it’s data for teaching and research purposes.
4.3 Regulations for the January exam period

Students who graduate in January can exceptionally take up P0Q63A and P0P81A Master's thesis, part 2 and P0T37A Master's thesis, P0T36A Master's thesis and P0T63A Master's thesis, part 2 during the first exam period instead of in the second exam period. They can then – if necessary – use their second exam opportunity during the June or September exam period of the same academic year.

5 Defence and evaluation of the Master’s thesis

5.1 Oral defence

All students are to defend their Master’s theses (also in the case of a group Master’s thesis). A student’s presence at the defence is a prerequisite to pass the Master’s thesis. The defence presentations take place at the end of the exam period in which the Master’s thesis is submitted. The exact dates and method are announced at the start of the academic year through the Student Portal. Students keep their agendas free for all the announced dates.

The defence of the Master’s thesis approximately takes up 20 minutes in total. Students take 2 minutes to summarise the essence of the Master’s thesis. During the defence, students may only make use of the Master’s thesis (an electronic or printed version). Students answer any questions in the subsequent 8 minutes. Examiners and (co)supervisors are expected to have read the Master’s thesis beforehand and to have prepared a couple of questions. The remaining time is meant for deliberations between the members of the evaluation committee, after the student has left the room. The daily supervisor is allowed to be present as an observer during the student’s presentation and the deliberations. He/she cannot replace the (co-)supervisor. Students from English-taught programmes defend their Theses in English. Students from Dutch-taught programmes can choose between Dutch or English as language of the defence.

In addition to the student, both the chair, supervisor and two examiners are present for the defence. Co-supervisors are expected to attend inasmuch as is possible, but their presence is not mandatory.

5.2 Evaluation

5.2.1 Evaluation criteria

To ensure transparent assessment, criteria have been derived from the objectives of the Master’s thesis (cf. Chapter 1). These assessment criteria form the basis of the evaluation and are mentioned below. The quality standards for the Master’s thesis are absolute, which means that they cannot be adjusted to take individual circumstances into account. Similarly, changing topics or supervisors in the course of the Master’s programme will not be regarded as an extenuating circumstance.

The criteria used in assessing a Master’s thesis are characteristic of scientific research and research reporting and function as focal points for the evaluation of the Master’s thesis. There is no a priori weighting of criteria. The assessment committee provides an overall evaluation, basing itself on the below criteria. A member of the assessment committee can use the grating scale on the Professor Portal. These scales are designed as an aid and are in no way obligatory.

The below aspects form the basis for the global mark out of 20.

---

5 Even after their own defence date is known, the student must remain available on the final afternoon of the defence date(s) for the select exam committee in case of suspicions of plagiarism.
Quality of the research

Theoretical framework
- The research question draws on relevant literature.
- The findings are linked to the literature and the theoretical framework.
- The student’s own work engages with the existing literature.

Research question
- The research question is relevant and specific.
- The research is driven by the research question.

Research method
- The research method is adequate and thorough.
- The student describes his/her reasons for adopting this research method.
- The data analysis (where applicable) is adequate.

Conclusions and critical reflection
- The conclusions are valid and have been critically reflected upon, specifically paying attention to the societal and/or theoretical relevance of the Master’s thesis.

Academic characteristics
- The study makes a meaningful contribution to research in the discipline.
- The Master’s thesis is original and shows creativity.
- The Master’s thesis demonstrates depth and personal initiative with regard to the topic and/or the research method.
- The student pays attention to academic integrity.
- The student gives evidence of analytical and synthetic skills.
- The student can adequately justify the made choices.
- The thesis reflects a critical scientific attitude.

Characteristics in terms of language and form
- The different parts/chapters of the Master’s thesis form a logical and coherent whole.
- Correct spelling and punctuation is used.
- The text reflects a correct use of language and sentence structures.
- The presentation of the Master’s thesis is neat.
- An academic writing style is adopted (neutral, critical, formal, underpinned).
- The APA standards style (i.a. punctuation, capitalization,...), display of research results (tables, figures,...) and references and citations are taken into account.

Process (only to be assessed by the supervisor)
- The student can work independently.
- The student can fluently communicate with the involved team.
- The student has improved his/her research and writing skills.

5.2.2 Evaluation procedure

5.2.2.1 Master’s thesis part 1

Master’s Thesis Unit 1 is assessed by the supervisor on a pass/fail-basis. Assessment is based on the same criteria as those that apply to the full Master’s thesis (cf. §5.2). The interim report includes the assessment of the student’s potential to complete a Master’s thesis by the supervisor. The specific modalities of the evaluation are agreed upon by the student and the supervisor.

5.2.2.2 Master’s thesis part 2 and Master’s thesis Educational Studies

- The Master’s thesis is assessed by an assessment committee consisting of the supervisor, potentially the co-supervisor and two appointed examiners.
- The (co-)supervisor(s) and other examiners award a grade on the basis of the final product. (Co-)supervisors also assess the learning process. The presentation and responses given by the student during the defence are not graded separately but can influence the final score as the student needs to meet the objectives of the Master’s thesis.

- The presence of the student during the defence is a condition of admissibility: students cannot pass the Master’s thesis (part 2) if they are not present at the defence. All aspects of a Master’s thesis are globally assessed with a grade out of 20. Examiners and (co-)supervisors should submit their preliminary scores to the chair of the defence on the start of the defence. The (co)supervisor sends his/her grade to the Student Administration Office beforehand, should he/she not be able to attend the defence. One mark is given at the end of the deliberations. The chair ensures that a collective mark is agreed on in a spirit of mutual consent. This final mark need not correspond to the average of the original submarks. If the committee is unable to agree to the chair’s proposal, the unweighted average of the subscores, rounded to the first decimal place, will count as the final score.

- If the committee includes a co-supervisor, the unweighted average of the grades awarded by the supervisor and co-supervisor(s) is first calculated, rounded to one decimal place.

- Only the chair is entitled to communicate about the discussions of the assessment committee. All members of the committee endorse the decision of the committee.

- If a Master’s thesis is awarded a fail mark and is subsequently resubmitted in another exam period, it will be read by the same examiners if possible.

- If students submit one thesis together, the examiners should be the same for all students of that Master’s thesis. As the quality of the individual contributions in co-authored Master’s thesis may vary, a different score and assessment may be awarded to each of the students involved.

5.3 Plagiarism control

All Master’s theses are uploaded into the Turnitin database and checked for plagiarism by the faculty’s plagiarism expert. In case plagiarism is suspected by the supervisor, an examiner or the faculty’s plagiarism expert after the submission of the Master’s thesis, the person involved has to notify the exam ombudsperson of the degree programme (via ombuds@ppw.kuleuven.be) and the Student Administration Office (via masterproef@ppw.kuleuven.be) before the start of the Master’s thesis defences. If plagiarism is suspected, the procedures as specified in the OER are applied for irregularities.

- Suspicion of plagiarism falls under the procedure of irregularities and therefore the student needs to be heard by the select examination committee. The select examination committees that meet over suspicions of plagiarism in Master’s theses are held at the end of each defence period. All students and professors are to keep these moments, which are communicated through the Student and Professor Portal, free, even after the concrete schedule for the defences has been announced. During these select examination committees the student is invited to share his/her ideas about the suspicions of plagiarism. The assessment committees can only determine the end result of the Master’s thesis but cannot draw conclusions about plagiarism. Only the examination committee, advised by the select examination committee can issue a ruling about plagiarism, and if necessary determine the sanction.

- If the person who suspects plagiarism is an examiner, he/she can take into account citation errors in the assessment of the Master’s thesis. The examiner cannot alert the other examiners or supervisors to his/her

---

6 Clarification: The examination committee is the committee which approves examination results for the various courses, decides whether students have successfully completed their degree programme and determines their end result. The assessment committee is the committee which assesses the Master’s thesis.
suspicions of plagiarism beforehand. All members of the assessment committee (including the supervisor(s)) will be informed at the end of the defence. The student is informed when he/she goes to sign the list of attendance.


### 5.4 Retaking exams

The normal rules of the cumulative credit completion rate and the maximum number of exam attempts allowed as described in the Regulations on Education and Examinations also apply to the Master’s thesis units. Students are entitled to 6 exam attempts (per Master’s thesis unit), with a maximum of 2 exam attempts per academic year. For each academic year that the Master’s thesis unit is included in the ISP, two exam attempts are registered (also if the Master’s thesis has not been submitted twice). Students who submit during the first exam period but do not pass can resubmit in the second or third exam period. Students who submit during the second exam period but do not pass can only resubmit in the third exam period if they have not taken up an exam attempt in the first exam period. For more information, see the Teaching and Examination Regulations.

### 6 Quality assurance

At least biennially, the Master’s thesis regulations are re-examined by teachers, students and junior/associate academic staff (ABAP) during the Faculty Council. Every three years, the Master’s thesis courses are evaluated via the online student questionnaire. The results serve as an indicant for the programme directors. The results are discussed at the educational committee of the faculty.
7 Appendix

The exact dates and more information can be consulted at all times on the Student and Professor Portal. Teachers will be kept informed via email about the submission of topics and the assignment of the examiners.

7.1 Two-year Master’s thesis

Academic year X = academic year in which the student has registered for Master's Thesis Unit 1

Gray = additional information for supervisors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ac.yr.</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>What</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>X-1</td>
<td>2nd semester</td>
<td>Information on the Master’s thesis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X-1</td>
<td>2nd half of May</td>
<td>Start submitting topics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X-1</td>
<td>2nd half of August</td>
<td>Deadline for submitting topics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X-1</td>
<td>In the course of the first half of September</td>
<td>Topics available online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X-1</td>
<td>By 15 September</td>
<td>Contact potential supervisor regarding student-proposed topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>Tue week 1</td>
<td>General information session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>Wed week 1</td>
<td>Start of submission of preferences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>Tue week 2</td>
<td>Start of selection round 1 (12 a.m. (noon)) + outcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>By Tue week 2 (12 a.m. (noon))</td>
<td>Deadline for submitting student-proposed topics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>Fri week 2</td>
<td>Start of selection round 2 (12 a.m. (noon)) + outcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>By Tue week 3 (12 a.m. (noon))</td>
<td>Deadline for contacting Student Administration Office for students who have not yet received a topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>Submission deadline scores</td>
<td>Submit pass/fail (Master's Thesis Unit 1) to Student Administration Office</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>By first day of September exam period</td>
<td>Submit interim report (Master's Thesis Unit 1) to supervisor (second exam attempt)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X+1</td>
<td>May</td>
<td>Deadline for submitting Master’s thesis (June exam period)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X+1</td>
<td>End June exam period</td>
<td>Defences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X+1</td>
<td>Last half day June exam period defences</td>
<td>Select examination committee (suspicions of plagiarism)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X+1</td>
<td>August</td>
<td>Deadline for submitting Master’s thesis (September exam period)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X+1</td>
<td>End of September exam period</td>
<td>Defences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X+1</td>
<td>Last 3 hours defences September exam period</td>
<td>Select examination committee (suspicions of plagiarism)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X+2</td>
<td>January</td>
<td>Deadline for submitting Master’s thesis (January exam period)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X+2</td>
<td>End January exam period</td>
<td>Defences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X+2</td>
<td>End of January exam period defences</td>
<td>Select examination committee (suspicions of plagiarism)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### 7.2 One-year Master’s thesis

Academic year X = academic year in which the student has registered for Master’s Thesis Unit 1  
Gray = additional information for supervisors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ac.yr.</th>
<th>Period</th>
<th>What</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>X-1</td>
<td>2nd half of May</td>
<td>Start submitting topics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X-1</td>
<td>2nd half of August</td>
<td>Deadline for submitting topics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X-1</td>
<td>In the course of the first half of September</td>
<td>Topics available online</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X-1</td>
<td>15 September</td>
<td>Contact potential supervisor regarding student-proposed topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>Tue week 1</td>
<td>General information session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>Wed week 1</td>
<td>Start of submission of preferences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>Tue week 2</td>
<td>Start of selection round 1 (12 a.m. (noon)) + outcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>By Tue week 2 (12 a.m. (noon))</td>
<td>Deadline for submitting student-proposed topics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>Fri week 2</td>
<td>Start of selection round 2 (12 a.m. (noon)) + outcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>By Tue week 3 (12 a.m. (noon))</td>
<td>Deadline for contacting Student Administration Office for students who have not yet received a topic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>Before start 2nd semester</td>
<td>Submit interim report (Master’s Thesis Unit 1) to supervisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>May</td>
<td>Deadline for submitting Master’s thesis (June exam period)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>End June exam period</td>
<td>Defences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>Last half day June exam period defences</td>
<td>Select examination committee (suspicions of plagiarism)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>August</td>
<td>Deadline for submitting Master’s thesis (September exam period)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>End of September exam period</td>
<td>Defences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X</td>
<td>Last 3 hours defences September exam period</td>
<td>Select examination committee (suspicions of plagiarism)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X+1</td>
<td>January</td>
<td>Deadline for submitting Master’s thesis (January exam period)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X+1</td>
<td>End January exam period</td>
<td>Defences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X+1</td>
<td>End of January exam period defences</td>
<td>Select examination committee (suspicions of plagiarism)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>