SUPervision Guidelines

The guideline at hand consists of requirements and suggestions for supervising Bachelor’s and/or Master’s theses at the Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies (hereinafter, the Institute). The aim of the guideline is to give the supervisors and co-supervisors a sufficient overview of requirements, work stages and timelines that are set for final theses both generally and especially by the Institute.

Supervisor

The supervisor of a thesis can either be a UT lecturer, research fellow, or PhD student if they have acquired at least an MA degree or equivalent and are officially employed by UT. As an exception, the supervisor can also be from outside of UT, but in this case, the thesis has to have a co-supervisor from UT as well. A thesis can have up to two supervisors. If the thesis has a co-supervisor, the same rules, principles and deadlines apply to his/her work as for the main supervisor.

Both the supervisor’s and co-supervisor’s names are added to the title page of the thesis.

The supervisor has to be acquainted with the research field and methods chosen by the student and be able to supervise a thesis on that topic. Before agreeing to supervise the thesis, the supervisor has to make sure that their work load allows them to deal with questions that may rise from writing the thesis.

The supervisor has to send a confirmation to supervise in written by 1st November of the third semester if the student wishes to defend in the following spring semester, or by 1st April if the student wishes to defend in the following fall semester. The supervisor(s) and the topic of the thesis will be approved by the Director of the Institute by 15th November or 15th April at latest.

The supervisor’s role and tasks

The supervisor’s task is to help the student with both choosing the topic and putting together a content-rich thesis. The student has to have the opportunity to turn to the supervisor for consultation with problems and questions that may rise throughout the thesis writing process. The supervisor is to help with identifying the main problems, wording the hypotheses, choosing the research methods, finding the necessary sources and drawing attention to mistakes and draw-backs found in the paper.

The supervisor must keep in mind that they are not the co-author of the thesis and that students themselves have to show initiative, stay in touch and inform the supervisor about the development of the thesis. The supervisor is not obliged to fix the paper’s form and content, but point out draw-backs and offer solutions. The student must take the suggestions into account in perfecting the thesis, but they are not obligated to take the supervisor’s suggestions into consideration if they do not agree with them and concurrently present reasonable arguments.
It is recommended that at the beginning of cooperation, the supervisor and the student have a meeting where they outline the general principles for cooperation and mutual expectations. Some of the topics that should be discussed during this meeting include:

- **Time management** – how busy is the supervisor and how much time and attention can the student expect from him/her? In which way and how much in advance should the student contact the supervisor for setting up a meeting? Also, the student should outline what they have done so far, what they intend to do next and when each deadline should be met.

- **Supervisor’s role** – it is recommended to discuss how much and how detailed the assistance from the supervisor will be (e.g. when choosing theory, methods, research design), and how active the supervisor will be in the process (e.g. whether the supervisor should contact the student if the student has not been in contact for a longer period of time). The supervisor could share their previous supervising experiences, to further illustrate their work practices and explain their standpoints.

- **Student’s role** – how well should the student prepare for their consultations with the supervisor? Who sets the topics to be discussed during these meetings, is it the supervisor or the student? How often and at which stages should the student inform the supervisor about their progress or lack thereof? Additionally, should the student discuss their ambition regarding their thesis and whether there are any other factors that might influence the writing process that the supervisor should be aware of?

- **Feedback** – since different feedback is required at different stages of the thesis, there should be a continuous and open dialogue between the supervisor and the student regarding the most suitable feedback practices. However, during the initial meeting, the supervisor and the student should discuss the different practices and which ones seem to be the most suitable to both. Possible feedback practices include the use of electronic feedback; face-to-face meetings; going through the text together and a discussion of problematic areas; specific questions from the student to the supervisor about the problems he or she has and would like to get feedback on.

- Additionally, it should be discussed how many times the supervisor is willing to read the chapters of the thesis and whether the supervisor will read the finished thesis before the submission deadline.

Supervisors who work at the University of Tartu should have their contact hours listed in the Study Information System.

The supervisor has the right to refuse further supervision to a student (must be presented in written form to the programme manager) if the student does not meet deadlines, or follow recommendations or has changed the topic to something the supervisor deems out of the competence of either party.

The supervisor has the right to abandon supervision and the defender has the right to change the supervisor if it has been approved in written form by the programme manager.
The first important document that the students and their supervisors are expected to cooperate on, is the thesis prospectus, which the student has to then submit and defend. As the exact delineation of the topic, formulating the aim and research tasks, and a logical structure of work are essential to the quality of the thesis, it is important that the aforementioned points are thoroughly thought through before the writing process starts. Presenting the prospectus allows students to receive feedback on research questions, research methods, suitability of the theoretical background and general structure of the thesis. Additionally, presenting the prospectus links what has been learned in courses to writing the thesis.

The prospectus has a crucial role in defining the topic, setting an aim and logical structuring of the thesis. It should contain the following aspects:

- **The thesis' title**, which should be concise and specific, yet reflect the research topic and provide a clear picture of the nature of the research problem. Note also that this title is preliminary. Students are free to modify the wording of their title before they hand in their final thesis.

- **The thesis' author and supervisor(s).**

- **The research problem**, which must be exactly delineated and defined, should show the problem's nature, topicality and importance. This section of the prospectus should outline the research area or conceptual phenomenon that the thesis will address. The student should demonstrate his/her familiarity with the relevant theoretical parameters and relevant literature related to their topic. If the thesis is about, for example, social movements, the prospectus should give a brief outline of the concept drawing from relevant literature and giving a sense of how this framework will feed into the empirical research that will be done.

- **The aim and main research question** needs to be explicitly and clearly stated.

- **The thesis' structure.** The planned table of contents must be presented, preferably listed as chapters and subchapters. Research tasks set in the prospectus contribute to creating the thesis structure.

- The **theoretical framework and methodology** outline which theoretical perspective the thesis applies in order to address the stated research question and indicate the research method the student intends to apply and appropriately justify the choice. Here the student should outline the research design of the thesis (i.e. case study, comparative study, large-N). Chosen research methods have to be executable.

- The **overview of the data collected, used and analysed** should outline the empirical information that the thesis will examine as well as how these data will reflect the research problem or main conceptual framework. The student should also explain what kinds of problems may arise (e.g. availability of data, sources, other materials) and how they plan on solving them.

- The **Bibliography** should contain a list of the main source materials – books, scientific articles, etc. – used in the thesis. Theoretical sources and sources of empirical data, statutes/legislative acts and other literature supporting the analytical part of the thesis needs to be introduced separately. The list introduced in the plan is not final and it can
be updated during the writing process. The bibliography should be in accordance with the requirements set in the *Guidelines for writing and formatting papers*.

The supervisor must approve the prospectus by sending their approval to the Academic Affairs Specialist by **1st November**, if the student wishes to defend the following Spring semester, or by **April 1** if the student wishes to defend in the following Fall semester. By approving the prospectus, the supervisor also confirms their willingness to supervise the student. The prospectus is either accepted or rejected by the programme manager. Based on the approved prospectuses, the Director of the Institute will approve the thesis topics and the supervisor(s).

The programme manager organises the reviewing of the prospectuses and will approve or reject them. The programme manager has the right to ask for third opinions when assessing the prospectuses, as well as to assign another reviewer. Upon approval of the prospectus, the student may continue writing their thesis. If necessary, additional improvements for the prospectus and/or a co-supervisor will be suggested. If the prospectus is rejected, the programme manager will set a new deadline for the student to carry out improvements, and will review the prospectus a second time. Should the prospectus be rejected again, the student will be advised to choose a new topic and/or supervisor.

The supervisor has to make sure that the thesis presented to the defence committee is defendable. One way of determining whether the thesis is defendable is to organise a pre-defence prior to the final deadline of the final version submission. Pre-defences are subject to the programme manager’s decision.\(^1\)

**Supervisor’s review**

During the defence, the supervisor has to present a justified and objective opinion about the supervised thesis. If the supervisor is absent during the defence, the written review should be sent to the academic affairs specialist **at least two working days before the defence**.

The review should not contain a grade, but reflect on the development of the thesis. The supervisor’s review has to include the following aspects:

- An evaluation of the relevance of the topic;
- An evaluation of the thesis’ engagement with the topic in question;
- An evaluation of the thesis’ structure (coherence, balance, consistency etc.);
- An evaluation of the level of analysis and comprehensiveness of material (clarity, relevance, thoroughness, correctness and logicality of analysis, validity of conclusions, material combination skills, adequateness and sufficiency of material etc.);
- An evaluation of the thesis according to the writing and defence guidelines;
- An evaluation of the accomplishment of set tasks and goals;
- An evaluation of the evolution of the thesis during the writing process;

---

\(^1\) Generally, pre-defences are held in interdisciplinary programmes, such as European Studies, European Union-Russia studies and Baltic Sea Region Studies curricula. Pre-defences are held on the MA level only. Pre-defence procedures and requirements are found in the study guide of the respective curriculum.
An evaluation of the student’s attitude while researching the thesis and ability to take on board the supervisor’s comments and criticism.

While grading the thesis, the committee will take into account the supervisor’s review but it is not of defining importance. The supervisor’s presence at the defence is strongly recommended.

The supervisor and students must follow the Guidelines for writing and formatting papers of the Institute, available on the Institute’s website.

Important deadlines of the pre-defence and defence

Actual dates can be found at the Institute webpage www.skytte.ut.ee in the Study Materials and Guidelines section. Below is the suggested timeline to support the thesis writing planning (from September to June if the thesis is defended in Spring)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Deadline</th>
<th>Task to be completed</th>
<th>To be submitted to</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>November 1st</td>
<td>Submission of supervisor’s consent to supervise</td>
<td>The student, Study Affairs Specialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 1st</td>
<td>Submission of thesis prospectus (if the student intends to defend the next Spring semester)</td>
<td>Programme manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday of the 15th study week of the Autumn semester</td>
<td>Submission of the BA thesis prospectus</td>
<td>Programme manager</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 1st</td>
<td>Submission of thesis structure and finalized bibliography</td>
<td>The supervisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March 15th</td>
<td>Submission of the first draft, i.e. about 50% of the final thesis</td>
<td>The supervisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seven weeks before the defence (at the latest) / two weeks before the pre-defence</td>
<td>Submission of thesis for pre-defence*</td>
<td>Study Affairs Specialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Submission of supervisor’s consent to present the thesis for pre-defence*</td>
<td>Study Affairs Specialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two days before the pre-defence</td>
<td>Submission of the opponent’s review of the MA thesis*</td>
<td>Study Affairs specialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 h before the pre-defence</td>
<td>Submission of the opponent’s review of the MA thesis*</td>
<td>Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five weeks before the defence (at the latest)</td>
<td>Pre-defence*</td>
<td>Student, supervisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 1st</td>
<td>Submission of second draft, i.e. about 90% of the final thesis completed</td>
<td>The supervisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday of the 15th study week of the Spring semester</td>
<td>Submission of the BA thesis</td>
<td>Study Affairs Specialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two weeks before the date of the defence (at the latest)</td>
<td>Submission of the MA thesis</td>
<td>Study Affairs Specialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Submission of the supervisor’s consent to present the thesis for consideration</td>
<td>Study Affairs Specialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two working days prior to the defence (at the latest), or during the defence</td>
<td>Submission of the supervisor’s opinion about the thesis</td>
<td>Programme manager, Study Affairs specialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two days before the defence</td>
<td>Submission of the opponent’s review of the MA thesis</td>
<td>Study Affairs specialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 h before the defence</td>
<td>Submission of the opponent’s review of the MA thesis</td>
<td>Student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>End of May / beginning of June</td>
<td>MA defence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>BA defence</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*If pre-defence take place (subject to programme manager’s decision)*

**Communication**

All documents must be sent to the study affairs specialist electronically by the dates announced:

liina.seinberg@ut.ee (BA theses)

aigi.hommik@ut.ee or oliivia.vork@ut.ee (MA theses)

Content-related questions should be addressed to the programme manager or the deputy Head of academic affairs (olga.bogdanova@ut.ee).