Requirements for final theses, forming of the defence committee, appointment of a reviewer, and for the defence and second defence at the Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies

The requirements of the Johan Skytte Institute of Political Studies (hereafter: the Institute) for the final theses and defence, including the compilation of the final thesis and the thesis prospectus, guidelines for submission of the final thesis and the self-check list, will be published on the Institute’s website.

1. Dates and location of the final defence

1.1. Defence of Bachelors’ (BA) and Masters’ (MA) theses (hereafter: the thesis) will take place twice within the academic year, except for double- and joint degree programmes. The defence for the double and joint degree programmes can take place up to three times a year.

1.2. On the suggestion of the programme manager, the Head of the Institute will confirm the dates of defence for the ongoing academic year by November 1st at the latest.

1.3. The location of the defence will be determined by the programme manager.

2. Defence committee

2.1. Based on the suggestions of the Deputy Head of Academic Affairs, the Head of the Institute will confirm the composition of the defence committees for the ongoing academic year by November 1st at the latest.

2.2. The defence committee for BA theses has at least two and the defence committee for MA theses at least three members. A person with at least an MA degree may be appointed as a member of the defence committee. Based on the specifics of the curriculum, the defence committee might involve representatives of the Institute, the Faculty of Social Sciences, and representatives from other faculties, if necessary. Practitioners and renowned experts of the field may serve as committee members.

2.3. The chairman of the defence committee can only be a person with a doctoral degree. In general, the chairman of the defence committee is the programme manager.

3. Supervisor

3.1. 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.

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1 Double degree programme is an integrated curriculum offered by a consortium of at least three universities from three different countries. Students studying at this curriculum must study in at least two of the participating universities, upon completion, the student will be awarded a double degree (e.g. Erasmus Mundus).
3.2. The student has the right to receive feedback from the supervisor at agreed upon times and ways.

3.3. 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.

4. Thesis prospectus

4.1. The student must choose a supervisor by the deadline set by the programme manager, in cooperation with the supervisor work out the thesis topic and compile a thesis prospectus and a thesis adhering to the requirements.

4.2. BA thesis prospectus will be submitted on the semester prior to the semester of defence, on the Monday of the next-to-last week of the semester. MA thesis prospectus, with a notification on the selection of the supervisor, will be submitted to the programme manager by November 1st, if the defence takes place in the following spring semester, or by April 1st, if the defence takes place in the following fall semester.

4.3. The programme manager organises the reviewing of the prospectuses and will approve or reject them. 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.

4.4. If the topic of the final thesis changes, a new thesis prospectus must be submitted. The exact contents of the thesis or the solving of the problem might become more exact during the writing.

4.5. Only theses for which a thesis prospectus was previously submitted and approved will be allowed to proceed for the defence.

5. Submission of the final thesis

5.1. The deadline for submitting BA theses is on the Monday of the next-to-last week on the semester of the defence.

5.2. The deadline for submitting MA theses is two weeks prior to the defence at the latest.

5.3. The final thesis, including the non-exclusive license, as well as the supervisor’s approval that the thesis is ready for consideration, must be submitted to the Academic Affairs Specialist both electronically (in pdf-format) as well as in a hard copy (one copy).

5.4. In case of an MA-thesis, the student must also submit an application for consideration to proceed for the defence, to the Head of the Institute, as well as a short annotation of the thesis.
5.5. The bound copy of the thesis and the thesis in electronic form must be identical by content and format.

6. Defence of the final thesis

6.1. In order to receive a BA- or an MA-degree, the thesis must be defended. The defence will take place publicly and orally in front of the defence committee, unless the Vice Dean for Academic Affairs orders a closed defence.

6.2. On the decision of the programme manager, an auditory pre-defence can be organised prior to the final defence. There are no pre-defences held on the BA-level.

   6.2.1. Pre-defences will take place based on a timetable no later than five weeks before the final defence of the MA thesis.

   6.2.2. The pre-defence will be organised by the programme manager, with the approval of the Head of the Institute. This includes the compiling of the defence committee, confirming the timetable and contacting the reviewers. The defence committee comprises of at least three members and the programme manager is generally the head of the committee.

   6.2.3. Theses presented to pre-defence must be at least 75% complete, must contain a table of contents, list of abbreviations (if necessary), introduction, main part (separated into chapters), references and appendices. Theses presented for pre-defence are not required to contain a foreign language abstract.

   6.2.4. The pre-defence has the same format as the final defence and the thesis is either accepted or rejected in the process of it. The supervisor must give their approval before a thesis is presented for pre-defence.

   6.2.5. The final thesis must be presented to the Institute’s Academic Affairs Specialist electronically by the deadline specified by the programme manager. By the same deadline, the supervisor can make his or her recommendations on the selection of the opponent.

   6.2.6. The thesis submitted for pre-defence must be in accordance with the Institute guidelines for writing and formatting papers.

   6.2.7. The pre-defence is not graded. As a result of the pre-defence, the defence committee will make one of the following three choices: thesis is ready for consideration, thesis is ready for considering after correcting mistakes, thesis is not ready for consideration.

   6.2.8. The student has the right to ask the committee for reasons of acceptance/rejection and/or suggestions for improvement.

6.3. An MA student is allowed to defend their thesis if they have completed the curriculum, their thesis prospectus has been approved and they have submitted by deadline all of the required documents, as well as their final thesis which adheres to the set requirements.
6.4. If the curriculum holds pre-defences, the student is allowed to defend if they have successfully passed the pre-defence.

6.4.1. If the thesis passes pre-defence, but the author of the thesis has not completed all of the required courses, they must reach an agreement with their lecturers/professors so that the exams are taken before the defence. All grades must be in the Study Information System (ÖIS) or passed to the Academic Affairs Specialist no later than two working days before the final defence.

6.5. After the submission of the required documents the programme manager will decide whether the thesis will proceed for final defence and will approve the reviewer (in accordance with the supervisor, if necessary).

6.6. If the programme manager is the supervisor of the thesis, another leading lecturer of the curriculum will be involved in the choice of reviewer. In case of difference of opinion, the Deputy Head for the Academic Affairs may ask for the opinion of a third lecturer.

7. Review

7.1. The reviewer for a BA thesis will generally be decided by the thesis supervisor in accordance with the programme manager. The reviewer will be contacted by the supervisor. The reviewer of an MA thesis will generally be decided by the programme manager. The reviewer will be contacted by the programme manager.

7.2. The reviewer of a final thesis should have at least an MA-degree or a qualification responding to this level and have competence in the respective scientific field.

7.3. The task of the reviewer is to provide an objective assessment of the final thesis.

7.4. The written review along with a suggestion for a final grade will be submitted to the programme manager and the Academic Affairs Specialist no later than two business days before the defence. The Academic Affairs Specialist forwards the review to the author of the final thesis at least 24 hours before the defence.

7.5. During the defence, the supervisor and the reviewer should be present, unless if they have objective reasons for not being present.

8. Procedure of the defence

8.1. The defence procedure comprises usually of the oral presentation of the degree seeker, after which there is a debate between the reviewer, the defence committee and the degree seeker (response to the reviewer, additional questions, questions from the defence committee, closing statements).

8.2. The final thesis will be assessed according to the grading system in force (A-F) based on the accomplishment of objectives and learning outcomes listed in the curriculum.

8.3. While assessing the final thesis, the defence committee will take into account the thesis’ accordance to the assessment criteria, the MA students’ performance during the defence
(content and style of the presentation, answering of questions), opinion of the opponent and the supervisor.

8.4. After the MA thesis defence, the committee will have a closed discussion for the assessment of the thesis.

8.5. The opponent will make a suggestion for grading the final thesis. However, the defence committee is not obligated to go by the opinions of the opponent or the supervisor.

8.6. The defence committee will decide based on simple majority, if the votes are equally divided, the opinion of the head of the defence committee will be decisive.

8.7. The grades for the final theses will be announced shortly after the defence protocol is drawn up, but no later than one business day after the defence.

8.8. The decision of the defence committee can be contested based on the procedure set out in the University of Tartu Study Regulations.

9. Publishing of final theses

9.1. Final theses as well as the multimedia files that form a part of the thesis will be published electronically in DSpace, the digital archive of the University of Tartu.

9.2. If publishing a final thesis is not possible due to e.g. the proprietary rights belonging to other people, protection of personal data laws, secrets of state or trade or other confidential information, the author must submit a reasoned request to the Head of the Institute for setting restrictions on the publication of the thesis prior to the defence.

9.3. The restrictions will be set by the Vice Dean for Academic Affairs with his order.

10. Regulations for the repeat defence

10.1. If, following the final defence, the student receives a negative grade, they are entitled to repeat their defence once.

10.2. Before a repeat defence, the student must improve the existing thesis based on the recommendations of the defence committee and the supervisor, or write a new thesis on another topic.

10.3. When the thesis is written on a new topic, all the rules and processes stated above must be followed from the start, including gaining approval from the programme manager for the thesis topic and the selection of the supervisor, as well as having the supervisor approved by the order of the Head of the Institute.

10.4. The repeat defence of the final thesis will take place on the date of the thesis defences set by the order of the Head of the Institute based on the guidelines for the defence of the final theses.