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Guidelines for Theses at PLUS

Updated: August 2024

Contents

1. Foreword

During the course of study, students are required to complete various written assignments in the form of seminar papers, bachelor's and master's theses. The following guidelines for written work show what is expected of students at the Chair of Planning of Landscape and Urban Systems (PLUS) and how the actual writing of seminar papers, bachelor and master theses is organized. This document is to be understood as a suggestion, the binding nature of which must be clarified with the supervisor in each individual case. In principle, the structure of the written work always depends on the supervisor.

2. Theses objectives

- Familiarization with the process of a specific project or current problem.
- Systematic approach to problem solving, choice of methods and procedures.
- Correct use of scientific writing, methods and ethics.
- Problem-oriented procurement and preparation of documents, targeted study of literature.
- Strengthening and promoting interdisciplinary thinking and action.
- Appropriate and structured presentation of work in plans and reports.
- Convincing presentation of results, competent argumentation in discussion.

3. Organization

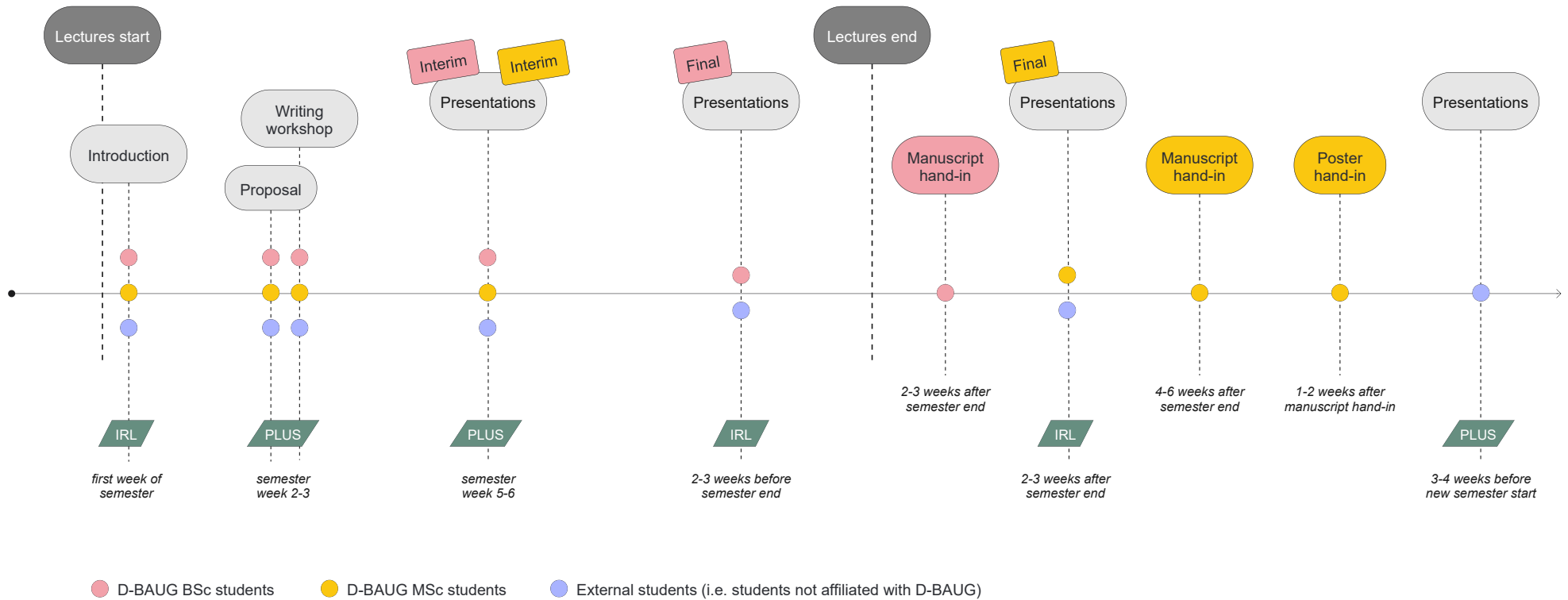## 3.1. Staff

Lead: Prof. Dr. Adrienne Grêt-Regamey, HIL H 51.3, gret@ethz.ch

Organization: Matteo Riva, HIL H 51.4, rivam@eth.ch

3.2. Topics

A constantly updated list of topics can be found on the institute's website.

3.3. Semester schedule

Timeline milestones:

- **Lectures start** → Introduction — IRL — *first week of semester*
- **Writing workshop** / Proposal — PLUS — *semester week 2-3*
- **Interim / Interim** — Presentations — PLUS — *semester week 5-6*
- **Final** — Presentations — IRL — *2-3 weeks before semester end*
- **Lectures end** / Manuscript hand-in — *2-3 weeks after semester end*
- **Final** — Presentations / Manuscript hand-in — IRL — *2-3 weeks after semester end*
- Manuscript hand-in — *4-6 weeks after semester end*
- Poster hand-in — *1-2 weeks after manuscript hand-in*
- Presentations — PLUS — *3-4 weeks before new semester start*

Legend:
- ● D-BAUG BSc students
- ● D-BAUG MSc students
- ● External students (i.e. students not affiliated with D-BAUG)
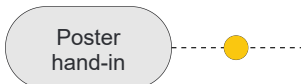
Introduction — IRL

- Prior: Choice of topic, meeting with supervisor
- Administrative information
- Deadlines and calendar (final)
- Input on scientific work

Writing workshop — PLUS

- Writing a scientific text
- Structuring the thesis
- Research questions and hypotheses
- Literature and references
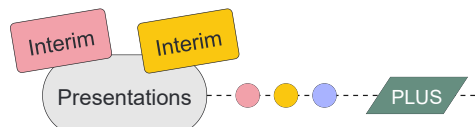- Optional for external students

Manuscript hand-in

- Submission in PDF and Word/Latex format to supervisor(s)
- Manuscript contains short 1-2 pages summary
- Requirement of a printed version to be discussed and determined with supervisor(s)
- External students follow individual schedules and respective faculty guidelines

Poster hand-in

- Only for MSc students
- Submission in PDF format to supervisor(s)
- Submission in printed form in A0 format to the supervisor or to the teaching coordinator.
- Poster does not count towards the final grade.
- Optional for external students, unless prescribed by the MSc program (in consultation with supervisor)
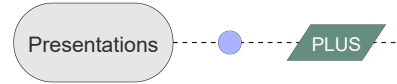
Proposal — PLUS

- Write a thesis proposal
- Further information is provided in *chapter 4*.
- Submission deadline: by the workshop at the latest
- Recommended (but optional) for external students

Interim Presentations — PLUS

- Compulsory for D-BAUG students
- BSc: 10' presentation, 10' discussion
  MSc: 10' presentation, 10' discussion
- Present progress and obtain feedback
- Content: scientific context, research questions, methodology, possibly first results, timetable, ...
- External students see below

Final Presentations — IRL

- Compulsory for D-BAUG students
- BSc: 15' presentation, 10' discussion
  MSc: 15' presentation, 15' discussion
- Presentation of the results and outlook
- Content: scientific context, research questions, methodology, results, discussion, limitations, outlook
- External students see below

Presentations — PLUS

- External students present depending on the status of their work (interim, final, post-deadline, ...).
- At least one presentation (any slot) is mandatory for external students, preferably in the final phase.
- The presentation does not count towards the final grade, unless this is prescribed by the relevant study regulations.
- This additional presentation slot is planned (or not) depending on the needs of external students.

4. Proposal for theses

Submission: first lectures week (at the latest by the workshop, see schedule).

The proposal is the first step in every thesis and forms the basis for a goal-oriented and planned research approach. It should be a proposal or work plan of approximately 2-4 pages, containing the following aspects:

- **Title of the thesis:** a working title that can still be revised.

- **Introduction and context**: The introduction includes the initial situation, the practical and/or theoretical problems as well as the scientific context and social relevance.

- **Research gap(s) and question(s)**: Precise explanation of the problem to be investigated, demonstration of the relevance of the problem, i.e. why this thesis should be written, and thus justification of the chosen research question of the paper.

- **Methodology / Approach**: Justification of the specific case selection and description of the data basis, description of the selection and application of the research method (modeling, etc.).

- **Timetable**: Students should organize their main activities into a time schedule (e.g. meetings, research work, proposal, literature processing, data collection, analysis, manuscript, submission) based on the given submission date.

- **References**: Literature that is of relevance for the work.

5. Formalities

The formalities of the thesis also depend on the requirements of the supervisor(s) as well as on the requirements and regulations of the student's department.

- The *approximate* length for all theses is 10'000 words excluding bibliography and appendices. This value serves only to provide a general idea; the actual length must be discussed with the supervisor.

- Language: German or English (in consultation with supervisor and according to the regulations of the student's department)

- Title page (or following page) should include: thesis title, student information (name, matriculation number, email, department), type of thesis, semester, supervisor(s) and professor, date, ETH and PLUS logo.

- Summary of approximately 1 page at the beginning of the work

- Citation style according to citation etiquette (or in consultation with supervisor). Further information https://ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/main/education/rechtliches-abschluesse/leistungskontrollen/plagiarism-citationetiquette.pdf

- Correct spelling and punctuation

- Labeling and consistent numbering for graphs and tables

- As per ETH regulations, every thesis should contain a declaration of originality https://ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz/main/education/rechtliches-abschluesse/leistungskontrollen/declaration-originality.pdf

6. Scientific Writing

The manuscript should meet basic standards of academic writing. Particularly important are 1) structure and 2) grammar and spelling. The structure of the text is of central importance. The text should be clearly formulated and easy for readers to follow. It is important to divide the text into paragraphs. A paragraph consists of 100 to 200 words. As a rule of thumb, one paragraph = one thought. A paragraph contains four types of sentences: topic, body, token, and wrap. The paragraph begins with a so-called "topic sentence", which states its general topic, and ends with a sentence that briefly summarizes the main findings/message of the paragraph. For more information, see: https://medium.com/advice-and-help-in-authoring-a-phd-or-non-fiction/how-to-write-paragraphs-80781e2f3054.

The manuscript should not contain any grammar and spelling errors. Correction programs such as Word often do not recognize grammatical errors, therefore it is important that students allow enough time to proofread their work with regard to grammar and spelling. We recommend having a friend or fellow student review the manuscript before handing it in. When writing your manuscript, please ensure the use of gender-appropriate and inclusive language.

Regarding citation and bibliography, the citation etiquette provided by us should be used as a working aid. Additionally, each paper is required to be accompanied by a declaration of originality. Plagiarism is handled according to ETH guidelines. For more information, see: https://ethz.ch/students/en/studies/performance-assessments/plagiarism.html.

Further information on scientific writing can be found, for example, in the following book: Plümper, T. (2012). Effizient schreiben: Leitfaden zum Verfassen von Qualifizierungsarbeiten und wissenschaftlichen Texten. Oldenburger Verlag.

7. Theses evaluation criteria

Student: _____

Title of the thesis: _____

Supervisor(s): _____

Evaluation of the manuscript

	Criterion	Possible score	Achieved score	Remarks
Process evaluation	Task Answering research question(s) Interpretation of the task	12		
	Work independence Personal initiative	4		
	Creativity Innovative approaches	4		
Contents evaluation	Introduction and theory Contextual background Relevance of research question(s) Soundness of literature review	12		
	Methods Transparency of the procedure Applicability of the methods	12		
	Results Clarity of data presentation Accuracy of findings Relevance of the outcomes	12		
	Discussion and conclusions Quality of explanations and reasoning Capturing relevant correlations	12		
Formal evaluation	Linguistic quality	-4 to +4		
	References and citations	-4 to 0		
	Graphics and illustrations	-4 to +4		
	Formatting and design	-4 to +4		
Total score evaluation of the manuscript		**max. 80**		

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Evaluation of the final presentation

Criterion	Possible score	Achieved score	Remarks
Structure of the presentation Clear structure and format Logical and comprehensible sequence	5		
Contents competency Ability to answer questions Contents clear and scientifically sound	5		
Language Fluent and spontaneous speech (no reading) Loud and clear voice Audience communication and interactivity Body posture, gaze	5		
Organizational Preparation of appropriate visual aids Adherence to time limits	5		
Total score evaluation of the presentation	**max. 20**		

Evaluation of the thesis

Total score evaluation of the manuscript	**-**		
Total score evaluation of the presentation	**-**		
Complexity «Bonus» "Standard" = 0 points, tasks involve straightforward issues with clear problem and readily available data. "Difficult" = 4 points, tasks involve intricate issues, problem not clearly defined, data is not readily available.	0 to 4		
Total score evaluation of the thesis	**-**		
Grade of the thesis	**-**		*see grading scale*

Grading scale *(= Sum / 100 * 5 + 1)*

1-57	58-62	63-67	68-72	73-77	78-82	83-87	88-92	93-97	98-104
< 4.0	**4.0**	**4.25**	**4.5**	**4.75**	**5.0**	**5.25**	**5.5**	**5.75**	**6.0**

Grading scale without presentation *(= Sum / 80 * 5 + 1)*

For D-USYS master theses another template must be used (see PLUS website)

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