

# MACIS

Master's Thesis Guidelines HS 2024

Formal and informal issues

# Milestones September 2024 – March 2025

- **19 September 2024:** Registration Deadline  
Register for your thesis and the thesis colloquium with myStudies.
- **23 September 2024:** Begin of Thesis Colloquium
- **03 March 2025:** MA Thesis Workshop
- **31 March 2025:** Submission Deadline

# First steps

- **78 ECTS: You are eligible to start your MA thesis.**
- Find your topic
- Find your supervisors
  - Main supervisor: CIS professors (ETH and UZH)
  - Co-supervisor: Any professor, not from the same chair as main supervisor. If outside CIS, upon approval by Vally Koubi.
  - Find your co-supervisor up until four weeks after the start

# Registration instructions

The registration deadline is **Thursday, 19 September 2024**.

- Register for your thesis (tab “Projects/Papers/Thesis”) **and** the MA Thesis Colloquium in myStudies. The registration is only possible if you have reached 78 ECTS. You will be asked to upload your proposal.
- If your main supervisor is an UZH professor, you will be unable to register your thesis with myStudies. Please send your signed proposal to Benita no later than 19 September. If your supervisor is unable to sign, he/she may send a short e-mail confirmation the he/she is willing to supervise your thesis.
- Registration co-supervisor: you may wait with your decision until 4 weeks after the registration. Please add yourself in myStudies in the meantime. You may add the name of your co-supervisor later.
- Please get in touch with Benita if myStudies denies the registration.

# Thesis proposal

- Length: 3 – 5 pages w/o references
- Indicate the research question and its relevance
- Mention the relevant scientific literature
- Sketch potential theoretical arguments addressing this question
- Sketch an empirical research strategy
- Indicate the main and co-supervisor (if available)
- The thesis proposal is not a full research design yet!

# Informal advice (proposal)

After having found your research idea and before you start writing it up as a proposal → test the clarity

- **Party („elevator speech“)** Test: Can you describe the idea and method of your thesis clearly enough to an accidental and slightly interested person whom you meet at a party? (Dunleavy 2003)
- **Figure Test:** Check whether you paint your research idea in a simple diagram with arrows indicating the relationships with boxes as independent and dependent variables. (Plümper 2003)

# Schedule MA Thesis Colloquium (4 ECTS)

Dr. Judith Spirig – IFW C 42

- **Meeting 1: Your Topic + Research Question Input**  
Monday, 23 September 2024, 13.00 – 15.45
- **Meeting 2: Your Research Question + Theory Building Input**  
Monday, 14 October 2024, TBD
- **Meeting 3: Your Theory + Empirical Strategy Input (including reproducibility)**  
Monday, 11 November 2024, TBD
- **Meeting 4: Your Empirical Strategy + Academic Writing Input**  
Monday, 16 December 2024, TBD
- **Small Group Meetings: Your Questions**  
January/February 2025 (TBD)
- **Workshop:**  
Monday, 3 March 2025

*Requirements: active participation (outlines, presentations, feedback)*

# Submission instructions

The submission deadline is **Monday, 31 March 2025**.

- You may submit your thesis either electronically (PDF) or in hard copy, to be agreed with your supervisors. Please cc Benita when submitting online. If you deposit your thesis after the formal deadline, it will automatically be rejected.
- Don't forget the declaration of originality
- If your MA Thesis involves the analysis of data, you will have to prepare a replication package (further instructions will follow). Don't forget to include instructions on how to access the replication package (most importantly the link to the replication package).
- If your MA Thesis projects involves human participants, don't forget to include your ethics committee application as well as the committee's decision in the appendix of the MA thesis



# Rules and guidelines

- Duration: 6 months  
In exceptional cases and with (very) good reasons prolongation is possible, with a final decision taken by the director of studies. The assumption is that you work on your MA thesis full time.
- No required or maximum length (rule of thumb 50 pages)
- Template: extended research article
  - More extensive literature review
  - More extensive documentation of design, data, analysis
- Important: Contact your main supervisors early -> approx. 4 weeks before the thesis registration deadline
- Grading: 1- 6. Grade  $\geq 4.0$  required for pass

# Reproducibility

All theses involving empirical research have to include a replication package. Such a package has the following components:

- **Readme**, which includes information about the computational platform(s) (Mac OS, Windows, Linux, etc.) and configurations (i.e. CPU model (or the number of cores), RAM etc.); R/Python/Stata version(s) and all the packages/libraries/ado files (and their specific versions); the running time, either for all files together or for each file (whichever makes more sense in this particular case), using the aforementioned environment to run the code; List of code scripts, the content of the scripts, the sequences to run them; list and description of data files
- **All Code/documentation of the analysis** needed to replicate all analyses discussed in the main text as well as in the supplementary material.
- **All Data** needed to replicate all analyses discussed in the main text as well as in the supplementary material. In case of proprietary or personal data (which you cannot share), you should include instructions on how to apply for the access of the data and the version info of the proprietary data (if possible).

You are required to store your replication package in a folder on your polybox. The link to access the replication materials has to be included in the thesis. We will speak more about how to do this step-by-step in the MA Thesis Colloquium. If you cannot submit a complete replication package, you need to include a justification and the approval of your supervisor in the appendix.

# Research involving human participants

- ETH guidelines state that all (social science) research that involves human participants – including research conducted for an MA thesis – needs to be approved by the ETH Zurich Ethics Commission. This includes:
  - Research involving persons (e.g., surveys)
  - Collection of personal data
  - The processing of non-anonymised personal data
- If you plan to conduct research involving human participants, discuss this with your supervisor asap.
- Note that applying for and receiving approval takes time! Usually it takes 3-8 weeks until the first decision, but: "Human subject research for Bachelor's or Master's theses can be reviewed quicker, if you refer to this circumstance in the application and confirm that the supervisor has reviewed the proposal with regards to content and completeness. The student character of the project will be indicated in the approval letter."
- Note that if you conduct research involving human participants, you are required to include the ethics approval application as well as the committee's decision in the appendix of the MA thesis.
- Further information: <https://ethz.ch/en/research/ethics-and-animal-welfare/research-ethics.html>

# Informal advice

- Choose your co-supervisor soon and keep her/him up to date.
- Don't gamble with deadlines, they are strict. If you hand in your thesis after the deadline, it will be rejected. If you anticipate problems with the deadline, contact your supervisor and Benita as early as possible.
- Feel free to choose your topic and main supervisor, irrespective of whether you have a research assistant employment with a particular professor.
- Prospective PhD students at CIS now involved in MA thesis work do not enjoy any advantage over those who are planning to seek employment elsewhere.
- If you plan to do a PhD afterwards, you can use the MA thesis as a first step and move on with the same topic from the MA to the PhD.
- The last two months of the MA thesis work are usually very stressful, particularly for those of you who are looking for a job. Don't underestimate the time it takes to write (well).
- Writing a MA thesis is equivalent to a fulltime job!

# Some practical advice for the coming months

- Start early! Make a plan and update regularly
- Organise literature and ideas early on
- Use databases to find the most up to date literature
  - ISI Web of Knowledge (SSCI)
  - Google Scholar (also unpublished work)
  - Connected Papers
  - Scopus
  - Paper references
- Use electronic tools early and efficiently
  - Bibliographic tools
  - Note-taking tools
  - To-do tools
- Keep your ideas and notes in one place, preferably in electronic form
- Backups!

# Timing and schedule of writing your MA thesis

- Plan enough time for working over the text: formulating your argument and writing convincingly is a major selling point (not only the data analysis for example)
- If you hesitate to chuck away some of your precious written pieces: save them in a „leftover-file».... it can easily be deleted at the end of the thesis writing process

Lots of success!