

MA-Thesis Manual North American Studies 2016-2017

MA Thesis

EC: 20

Level: 600

Language: English

Admission requirements

By the end of the first semester students are expected to formulate a thesis topic with the help of their chosen thesis supervisor.

Description

In order to graduate, students must complete 40 EC in MA course work (10 of which may take the form of an internship) and write a master's thesis of 15,000 – 20,000 words. The thesis is researched and written under the supervision of a lecturer affiliated with the North American Studies department. It is assessed by the supervisor and a second reader (appointed by the Board of Examiners). Students are free to choose their supervisor and suggest a thesis topic in the field of North American Studies.

Students will be guided through the process of writing their MA thesis through group discussions in a thesis seminar and in regular meetings with their thesis supervisor.

Aim of the master's thesis

A master's thesis is an extended academic essay based upon independent research that demonstrates extensive knowledge of a topic and a degree of originality.

Written under the supervision of a teacher, the thesis must show that the student is capable of

- understanding the relevance of the chosen topic to academic debates in the field;
- demonstrating knowledge of the relevant secondary sources;
- identifying, locating and researching relevant primary sources;
- summarizing and analyzing secondary and primary sources in a concise and critical manner;
- ordering a significant body of material in a coherent and fluent way;
- building a logical argument that develops a clear, focused thesis question;
- writing academic English of a satisfactory standard
- following appropriate academic conventions regarding footnotes and other forms source referencing, bibliography, and so on.

Choosing a topic and writing a thesis proposal

Generally speaking, students are encouraged to select the topic of their thesis themselves, guided by advice from their thesis supervisor. They are encouraged to choose a topic related to one of their Master's courses, but this is not a requirement. In selecting a topic students should approach a lecturer at an early stage and discuss the topic with him/her. The supervisor, also known as 'first reader', will be able to suggest research strategies and recommend relevant literature. At this point, clear agreements should be made

concerning the supervision procedure. The second reader will be appointed by the Board of Examiners.

The Master's thesis is centered around one or more research questions, together with the suggested answer to that/those questions. This is called the thesis statement. Before research questions can be formulated, the student carries out preparatory reading. The student, together with the supervisor, then identifies a research strategy and agrees on a timetable for measuring progress. The student collects and analyzes primary and secondary sources, situating his or her own views in existing scholarly debates.

Submitting the thesis proposal

Once the student has selected a topic, formulated a tentative thesis statement on the basis of one or more research questions and put together a provisional bibliography, the Thesis Proposal form can be completed (see Thesis Proposal form). The Thesis Proposal form should include the provisional title of the thesis and a brief description of the topic. The Proposal must be approved and signed by the supervisor. It is then submitted to the Board of Examiners no later than three months before the planned graduation date. The Board will inspect the thesis proposal to ensure that it is of an appropriate academic level and will appoint the second reader.

Research and Writing

Students should start out by formulating a clear plan for the structure of the thesis (outline), in consultation with their supervisor. Only then can they begin writing. Keep in mind that you may need to narrow your proposed topic in order to make the thesis viable. It is important to be precise and systematic in writing down one's sources; this avoids wasting time in having to check the sources and notes again at a later stage. Quotations from the literature must always be identified as such, and page numbers must always be noted. **Plagiarism must at all costs be avoided.**

Handing in the Thesis

Students are expected to hand in the chapters of the thesis one by one and incorporate the comments of their thesis supervisor in revised drafts. Check with your supervisor for guidelines regarding format of thesis lay-out and citation style. Format and citation styles will also be discussed in the thesis seminar.

When the thesis has been approved by the supervisor, print two copies of the final version (one copy for the supervisor and one for the second reader), unless your supervisor and/or second reader prefers an electronic copy. After the defense, an electronic version should be sent to the student administration and uploaded in the Thesis Repository (archive).

Assessment method

In assessing the quality of the thesis, the following aspects play an important role:

- The originality and clarity of the research questions and thesis statement
- The critical analysis of source materials;
- Clarity and structure of argumentation;
- Integration of secondary sources into the argument;
- Language use, structure and style;

- The degree of independence displayed during the research and supervision process.

For detailed assessment criteria, see Assessment form for the MA thesis North American Studies.

Thesis Defense

Once the final version of the thesis has been submitted, the supervisor and the second reader meet the student for an oral thesis defense, during which the student is expected to provide adequate answers to the questions related to the thesis stated by the thesis readers. The defense may influence the thesis grade.

See also:

- MA Thesis Supervision Procedure and Guidelines North American Studies (BB thesis seminar)
- Regulations MA North American Studies (OER): <http://hum.leiden.edu/north-american-studies/regulations-north-american-studies/ma-rma.html> (scroll down)
- Avoiding plagiarism <http://hum.leiden.edu/north-american-studies/regulations-north-american-studies/plagiarism.html>).