Master in Political Science

Academic year 2012-13

Master Thesis Guide

UAB

Universitat Autònoma
de Barcelona

Contents

1 What is the Master's Thesis?

The Master's Thesis (MT) is a substantial piece of academic work that proves the student's competence to carry out research autonomously at a Masters level. In the MT students should present:

- a research question related to any of the topics dealt with in the substantive modules of the master,

- a well structured theoretical framework that proves good knowledge of the literature and the debates involved in the research question,

- a suitable research strategy involving methods learned in the methodological modules of the master.

The MT must show that the student is capable to carrying out sound and rigorous academic research and has the ability to evaluate research conducted by others. Students are encouraged to include their own empirical analysis in their MT.

The MT must be between 8,000 and 12,000 words long, including appendices and bibliography. It involves 250 of student work. It can be written in English, Spanish or Catalan.

2 Personalized supervision

Each student will be assigned a tutor from the UAB faculty who would guide him or her in a personalized way during the development of the MT. Students are advised to explore potential tutors early in the academic year.

The following schedule for tutorial meetings is advised **as a minimum**:

- October/November: initial contact, discussion of potential topics.

- January/February: MT scheme approval including tentative research question and bibliography.

- March/April: supervision of MT development.

- May/June: discussion of MT draft.

Note that tutors are not available for supervision during the month of August.

A scheme with bibliography of the MT must be approved by the tutor and submitted to the MT module coordinator before 1st March.

Tutors

In this list you will find professors available for MT supervision and their respective lines of research. Their contact details can be found on the department's web page. It is also possible that external professors supervise a MT, but this has to be authorized by the MT module coordinator.

Tutor	Lines of research
Xavier Ballart	Public Administration. Public policies. Policy evaluation.
Joan Botella	Political ideas. Political and electoral behavior. Comparative Politics (Western Europe).
Quim Brugué	Analysis and management of public policies. Citizen participation. Local Governments.
Alexandre Casademunt	Social movements.
Gabriel Colomé	Political communication. Political Parties.
John Etherington	Nationalism, national identity and territory. State formation. Territorial governance in the EU.
Ana Mar Fernández	EU's institutional system. European decision-making. EU's external representation.
Nuria Font	Environmental governance. Europeanization of policies. EU Institutions.
Raquel Gallego	Analysis of public policies. Governance and administration reform. Decentralization and social policies.
Mike Jensen	Political attitudes. New technologies. Political behavior.
Joaquim Molins	Lobbies. Interest groups.
Francesc Morata	European governance. Intergovernmental relations. Public policy.
Jordi Muñoz	Nationalism. Voting behavior. Attitudes and political culture.
Eva Østergaard-Nielsen	Politics of migration in Europe. Transnational politics. Political participation. The role of migrants in the process of development and democratization. Citizenship and transnational networks of civil society.
Guillem Rico	Attitudes and political behavior. Political leadership.
Joan Subirats	Analysis of public policies. Social exclusion.
Josep M.Valles	Political culture. Political communication. Electoral systems and electoral behavior.

Collective tutorials

In addition to regular meetings with the tutor, all students will attend weekly discussion sessions during the second term, which will provide additional methodological supervision. In these sessions students will present and discuss their ongoing MT. Students should send a MT draft a week before their scheduled presentation, and actively discuss each-others work. Attendance at these tutorials is **compulsory** for all students enrolled in the MT module.

3 Writing an academic paper

The MT is an academic paper. It involves the following tasks:

- Define a research question

- Read what has been written on the subject

- Organize ideas in a theoretical framework

- Define a research design

- Gather and analyze your data

- Write a draft

- Prepare the final version

Define a question

Normally you start considering several possibilities, often too broad and ambitious. You must be precise and realistic when identifying a question that is relevant and about which we need to know more. The research question must be related to the existing academic debates in the discipline. The definition of a research question therefore requires a great deal of prior work reading the literature on the subject that interests us.

Read what has been written on the subject

The first step to obtain information on a subject is to perform a bibliographic search, usually based on keywords or authors who have worked on the subject. The study of this literature serves different purposes in the MT. First, it helps to define precisely our research question. Second, it provides information on how

this issue has been studied before: concepts involved, explanations provided, theoretical approaches, and methods of analysis applied. Third, it may also provide secondary data that can be used to test our hypotheses. Fundamental and revolutionary theoretical contributions are not expected in a MT. But a thorough understanding of the academic debates regarding the research question **is** expected. Reading is thus fundamental.

Organize a theoretical framework

Contrary to what is generally believed, a review of the literature is not a theoretical framework. The theoretical framework involves the answers that, from previous knowledge and our own contribution, can be proposed to the research question. These answers are the working hypotheses. Within these hypotheses all concepts should be clearly defined, particularly if they are controversial.

Define research design

The MT should propose a research design for hypothesis testing, specifying what part of reality will be observed and how. The crucial question in this section is to argue how the proposed analysis is adequate to answer our research question and test our hypotheses.

Gather and analyze your data

Students are encouraged to gather and/or analyze their own data, with a realistic approach that takes into account the limited time and resources available for a MT.

Write a draft

The work should be structured into several sections. The following scheme applies to any MT:

- Research Question: What do I want to know and why is it important?

- Theoretical Framework: What do I already know about this question? What are my expectations?

- Research Design: How will I analyze this question? Which cases and data will be considered?

- Data analysis: Which empirical evidence provides answers for my question and tests my hypotheses?

- Conclusions: What are the main findings and contribution of my MT?

Having defined the structure within each section, develop one idea per paragraph.

When presenting theoretical arguments, it is essential to relate them with existing previous research through citations (see section below).

When analyzing data, make sure to cite the sources where these came from. Any tables or figures must be discussed in the text.

Prepare the final version

The final version should take special care of the language and formal matters (see section below). The final version does not include everything that you have written or analyzed, but only the most important aspects. It is advisable to use a neutral, impersonal and clear style of writing, avoiding poetic or literary styles.

4 Plagiarism, citations, and bibliography

Each time you use an idea or information from another author, source or institution, you must include a citation. This practice is essential for two reasons:

- It is a basic principle of honest academic work to acknowledge other people's work. Otherwise you would be committing plagiarism.

- You must offer your readers the chance to go to the original source to verify the information or to complete it.

> **PLEASE NOTE: MT without an adequate system of quoting and referencing will not be assessed.**

Plagiarism

We are committing plagiarism when (see http://www.plagiarism.org/):

- We present the work of others as our own;

- Words or ideas are taken from other authors without due recognition (e.g. no mention);

- We do not use quotation marks around a direct quotation;

- We give incorrect information about the true source of a quotation;

- We paraphrase a source without mentioning it (e.g., without quoting)

- We abuse of paraphrasing, even if the source is mentioned (e.g., "rehashed")

Please check the slides on plagiarism at the Virtual Campus.

> **PLEASE NOTE: Professors in the Masters are concerned with and actively seek for potential cases of plagiarism. Plagiarism in the MT will entail a fail in the MT module.**

How to cite

You must use a bibliographic manager such as Endnote, Refworks, or Zotero to ensure a systematic production of bibliographies. The UAB library provides RefWorks training sessions. Using Zotero (free software for Firefox users) is very simple and can be learned autonomously.

There are several ways to cite. You can follow the recommendations of any academic journal. The point is to have a homogeneous system of quoting and referencing. APA recommendations are particularly thorough and useful. See http://www.apastyle.org/learn/quick-guide-on-references.aspx .

At the end of the MT include the complete **reference of all works cited in alphabetical order by author's last name**. The character, style and punctuation are important and should also be uniform. It is recommended not to use bold or underlined fonts.

5 Formal criteria

MT must:

- Be typed, stapled or bound (without clips).

- Include page numbers.

- Include a cover page with author's name, title, date, tutor's name and the text "Master Thesis presented with a view to obtaining the degree of Master in Political Science, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona".

- Include a table of contents.

- Include titles and numbers for each table or figure.

- Have passed several spelling and grammar revisions.

- Include an adequate and homogenous system of referencing and a final list of the complete references used.

- Have a homogeneous style (font, titles, etc.). 12p font and 1.5 spacing are advised.

> **MT that do not comply with these requirements will not be considered for assessment.**

6 Assessment

The module MT will involve three assessment components:

- the MT itself (80%)

- the presentation and defence (10%) and

- the participation in collective tutorials (10%).

The MT must prove that the student has:

- Ability to guide research towards the fruitful analysis of a particular relevant question. This will be assessed considering the definition and justification of the research question.

- Knowledge and a critical understanding of the academic debates around this specific question. This will be assessed considering the theoretical framework of the MT.

- Ability to relate theory and empirical analysis. This will be assessed considering the definition of an appropriate research strategy and the data gathered and analyzed.

- Ability to assess other researchers' work. This will be assessed considering how the MT takes into account previous research on the matter and in the students' contribution to collective tutorials.

- Ability to communicate both in writing and orally. This will be assessed considering how the MT is written and defended.

The MT will be evaluated by two professors of the department and will be defended publicly in July or September.

A MT can obtain the following marks:

- Excellent (10-9 out of 10): A very well written MT, compelling and original, based on thorough reflection and rigorous analysis, including detailed knowledge of the literature, a solid research design and data analysis appropriate to answer the research question.

- Good (8-7 out of 10): Interesting argument and good knowledge of the literature. Includes a research design and data analysis reasonably appropriate to the question posed.

- Pass (6-5 out of 10): The knowledge of the literature is sufficient but could be improved. Some minor limitations are found in the proposed methodology and/or in the data analysis.

- Fail (4 or less out of 10): Severe problems with the research question, theoretical framework, research design or data analysis.

7 Submission and defence

A tentative scheme with bibliography approved by the tutor should be submitted to the MT module coordinator before 1st March.

The MT shall be submitted both on paper and by e-mail to the module coordinator (eva.anduiza@uab.cat), to the professors participating in their assessment (to be confirmed), and to the tutor either before the 20th of June (for July defences) or before the 1st September (for September defences).

In the public defence, students will have 15 minutes to present the most important aspects of their MT and then professors taking part in the evaluation committee will comment on them. This defence will be taken into account in the assessment of the MT module (see above).

Submission deadlines

Master Thesis scheme and bibliography: 1st March.

Master Thesis to be defended in July: deadline for submission is 20th June.

Master Thesis to be defended in September: deadline for submission is 1st September.

Note that tutors are not available for supervision during the month of August. Students are thus encouraged to present their MT in the June call if possible.

8 Useful References and Resources

Anduiza, Eva, Crespo, Ismael y Méndez, Mónica 2009, *Metodología de la Ciencia Política*, Madrid:CIS

Chulià, Elisa 2012, *Cómo se hace un trabajo de investigación en Ciencia Política*, Madrid: La Catarata

Hanké, Bob 2009, *Intelligent Research Design*, Oxford: Oxford University Press

General advice:
http://www9.georgetown.edu/faculty/kingch/Teaching_and_Learning.htm

How to write an academic paper:
 http://www1.aucegypt.edu/academic/writers/

How to write a dissertation and other tips:
http://www.cs.purdue.edu/homes/dec/essay.dissertation.html

The illustrated guide to a Ph.D.
http://matt.might.net/articles/phd-school-in-pictures/