

Procedure Master's Thesis *Christianity and Society*

Master's thesis *Christianity and Society*

The Master's thesis (15 ECTS) is the result of the student's own research regarding themes that form part of the Master's program *Christianity and Society*. The problem statement of the Master's thesis must relate to these themes or must be attuned to a course that is offered within the framework of the Master's program *Christianity and Society*.

The thesis consists of 8,000 to 12,000 words¹. The thesis must meet certain requirements with regard to presentation (readability, style), structure and organization (introduction, coherent chapters, concluding remarks, bibliography, footnotes) and content (clear problem statement, adequate positioning of theme and problem statement in the program and in relevant disciplines, clear description of used concepts, justification of methods).

The methods used in the thesis should be methods that are taught and trained in this Master's program. Should a student on the basis of previous academic study be able to use other methods, he/she is allowed to do so on two conditions:

- a) these methods must be assessed by the supervisor or a for this purpose designated second supervisor;
- b) these methods cannot be the main methods of the thesis.

The requirements made for the thesis are further described in the appendix 'Directives Master's thesis *Christianity and Society* for supervisor(s), examiner and student'.

Part 1: For Students

1. Thesis Seminar

The student is required to follow the course 'Thesis Seminar' at the beginning of the thesis track. In this course, students prepare for writing a Master's thesis. This will result in a two-page research plan in which students: select a research topic, formulate the leading research question, specify their research method(s) and draw up a provisional table of contents and a basic bibliography. During the actual research and writing process, there will be three meetings in which students will present their work in progress and give feedback to each other.

2. Thesis writing

After the Thesis Seminar, the student continues his or her research and thesis writing. This takes 15 ECTS. The supervisor has 40 hours of supervision available per student during a period of 6 months. During the writing of the thesis, the student regularly confers with the supervisor and also meets a few times with fellow-students who work on a Master's thesis.

¹ Or 20 to 30 pages A4 (line spacing 1.5)

3. Assessment

The student must timely confer with the supervisor(s) about the time span between handing in the final version of the thesis, the assessment and the examination. In order to receive the Master's degree before 1 September, the thesis must be handed in before 15 June. As soon as the thesis is of a sufficient quality according to the supervisor(s) - see for assessment criteria the document 'Directives Master's thesis *Christianity and Society* for supervisor(s), examiner and student' - it will be submitted to the examiner who will conclude the assessment within ten work days. When the examiner assesses the thesis as insufficient, the supervisor will inform the student of the criticism, after which the student – in consultation with the supervisor(s) – is required to improve the thesis. Subsequently, the thesis will again be submitted to the examiner who will assess it once more.

If the supervisor(s) and the examiner do not reach an agreement about the quality and grade of the Master's thesis, the procedure described in paragraph 10 will be followed. The thesis must be assessed by the supervisor(s) and examiner as being sufficient before the student is allowed to take the examination.

When the supervisor(s) and the examiner assess the quality of the thesis as sufficient and agree on a preliminary grade of 6.5 or lower, they will need to contact the Examining Board. The Examining board will appoint a second examiner, who will assess the level of the thesis. If the second examiner assesses the thesis as sufficient, a graduation date can be planned. If the second examiner assesses the thesis as insufficient, the thesis must be revised. The revised version of the thesis will be assessed by the second examiner. Only if the second examiner, appointed by the Examining Board, assesses the thesis as sufficient, a graduation date can be chosen. The second examiner, appointed by the Examining Board, cannot be part of the graduation committee.

The quality of the defense of the thesis during the examination can influence the final grade. The student receives a copy of the assessment matrixes and a copy of the assessment report in which the supervisor(s) and examiner underpin and explain their assessment.

4. Confidential thesis counselor

Tilburg School of Catholic Theology appoints a confidential thesis counselor who mediates in a dispute between the student and Master's thesis supervisor(s).

5. Examination

The student, who, according to both supervisor(s) and examiner, has written a thesis of sufficient quality, can – in consultation with the supervisor(s) and examiner – choose a date on which the examination will take place. Subsequently, the student can submit a request for an examination date, on condition that he/she has also met all other requirements. This request must be registered at the Student Service Desk at the latest 3 weeks before the examination date.² The defense of the thesis is, by choice of the student, private or public and takes place before the

² See: <https://www.tilburguniversity.edu/students/studying/lectures/graduation/graduation-master>

graduation committee, consisting of the supervisor(s) and the examiner. The examination will be included in the determination of the final grade for the thesis.

6. Archiving

The student is requested to hand in two copies of the thesis (or three copies in case of a second supervisor). One copy is meant for the supervisor (or two copies in case of two supervisors) and one copy is meant for the examiner. The student must also hand in a digital version of the thesis (in PDF-format) at the secretary's office of Tilburg School of Catholic Theology. The student sees to it that the digital file meets all specified requirements and does not include personal information (e.g. email or postal address, phone number).³ The secretary's office looks after the thesis archive of the faculty and makes sure that a digital version of the thesis is sent to the university library.

Part 2: For Teachers

7. Tasks Master's program coordinator

The Master's program coordinator shall act as thesis coordinator. In that capacity, he/she:

1. coordinates the designation of a supervisor (or supervisors) to a student. Usually one of the two following situations occurs:
 - a. *The student has chosen a supervisor (or supervisors)*. In this case, the Master's program coordinator checks if the chosen supervisor(s) has/have enough time and is/are indeed available.
 - b. *The student asks the Master's program coordinator to designate a supervisor (or supervisors)*. In this case, the Master's program coordinator looks for a supervisor with matching expertise and available time and designates a suitable supervisor (or supervisors) to the student;
2. sees to it that the methods used by the student are assessed by the supervisor, and, if needed, designates a second supervisor for this purpose.

8. Tasks (first) supervisor

After consultation with the Master's program coordinator, a member of the tenured staff⁴ who teaches in the Master Christianity and Society can supervise a student writing a Master's Thesis.

The (first) supervisor:

1. determines at the start of the thesis project, in consultation with the student, whether it is desirable to seek a second supervisor for his/her specific expertise;

³ See: <https://www.tilburguniversity.edu/about/university-library/writing-and-information-skills/publishing-theses>

⁴ Postdoctoral researchers and PhD students can only supervise a thesis under the final responsibility of a member of the tenured staff.

2. chooses at the start of the thesis project, after consultation with the student, a non-supervising examiner (hereafter examiner) and invites him/her;
3. plans regular appointments with the student during the process of thesis writing to evaluate the progress and make necessary adjustments to the research plan. Agreements about the way of supervision are made in the early stages of the thesis project;
4. evaluates the research plan that the student has drafted at the end of the course 'Thesis Seminar';
5. consults in the final stage of the thesis project with the examiner and (when applicable) the second supervisor about the sufficiency of the quality of the thesis;
6. checks the final version of the thesis by means of automatic plagiarism detection;
7. if the examiner and/or second supervisor assess(es) the thesis as insufficient: communicates the criticism to the student and assists the student in improving the thesis;
8. contacts the Examining Board, if the thesis is assessed as sufficient, but the agreed preliminary grade is 6.5 or lower;
9. chooses in consultation with the student and the examiner (and the second supervisor) an examination date and communicates the examination date to the secretary's office;
10. is a member of the graduation committee;
11. fills out the assessment matrix;
12. signs the form 'Results of an Examination' which states the final grade for the thesis;
13. writes an assessment report (preferably by means of a continual report with headings covering the criteria (see appendix 1)) with the examiner (and the second supervisor) and sends it to the School's secretary's office with the report of the automatic plagiarism detection. These reports are archived and can be shown to a visitation committee. After the examination, the student receives a copy of the assessment report.

The supervisor's tasks have an average scope of 10% of the student's study load. For a Master's thesis of 15 ECTS this amounts to 40 hours. The examiner's tasks have a scope of 7 hours per Master's thesis of 15 ECTS.

9. Tasks second supervisor (where applicable)

If the thesis research is multidisciplinary in nature, it is possible to appoint a second supervisor on the basis of his/her specific expertise to complement the required supervision of the thesis. The second supervisor is preferably a member of the tenured academic staff of Tilburg School of Catholic Theology and a teacher in the Master's program.

The second supervisor:

1. provides additional supervision in consultation with the first supervisor. The first supervisor has overall responsibility for the entire supervision;
2. evaluates the research plan that the student has drafted at the end of the course 'Thesis Seminar';
3. is involved in the final stage of the project in the consultation of the first supervisor with the examiner about the sufficiency of the quality of the thesis;
4. fills out the assessment matrix;
5. is co-author of the assessment report;
6. is a member of the graduation committee.

The scope of the tasks of the second supervision is determined in consultation with the first supervisor. The 40 hours available for supervision are distributed proportionally among the supervisors.

10. Tasks non-supervising examiner

To guarantee the quality of the assessment, an examiner who plays no part in the supervision of the thesis is involved in the assessment. The examiner is invited by the first supervisor. He/she is a member of the tenured academic staff of Tilburg School of Catholic Theology and is preferably a teacher in the Master's program.

The examiner:

1. evaluates the research plan that the student has drafted at the end of the course 'Thesis Seminar';
2. is involved in the final stage of the project in the consultation about the sufficiency of the quality of the thesis and determines the grade in collegial consultation with the supervisor(s);
3. fills out the assessment matrix;
4. is co-author of the assessment report;
5. is a member of the graduation committee.

If the supervisor(s) and examiner do not reach an agreement about the quality and grade of the Master's thesis, the vice-Dean for Education will ask an independent third party to assess the thesis and to mediate between supervisor(s) and examiner. If the mediation is not successful, the third party will unilaterally determine the final grade, making sure to take the views of the supervisor(s) and the examiner into account.

The examiner's tasks have a scope of 7 hours per Master's thesis of 15 ECTS. The tasks of the independent examiner are considered to be a part of the normal activities of the faculty.

Date of entry into effect

This procedure replaces all earlier procedures regarding the Master's thesis *Christianity and Society* and enters into effect on 1 September 2019.

Adopted by the Examining Board on 13 June 2019.

**Appendix to Procedure Master's thesis *Christianity and Society*:
 Directives Master's thesis *Christianity and Society* for supervisor(s), examiner and student**

CRITERIA	DESCRIPTION
1 Problem statement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Is the problem statement well-defined? - Is the problem statement introduced in a clear and analytically competent way? Are presuppositions made explicit? Is there a transparent and clear formulation of the problem statement? Are the applied concepts clearly formulated and defined? Do the sub-questions link up with the research question? Are any hypotheses adequately formulated? Are the choices made in the formulation of the problem statement well-justified? Is the problem statement original? - Are the scientific relevance and any societal and ecclesiastic relevance of the research well-expressed and made plausible?
2 Theory and literature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Is the theory described relevant within the framework of the problem statement? - Is the (secondary) literature of a recent date, representative and of a sufficient academic level? - Does the use of (secondary) literature indicate a critical outlook (identification of relations, contradictions, flaws or inconsistencies in the literature)?
3 Method	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Is the description of the method(s) clear and adequate? Is there an explanation why certain methods are chosen over other methods? Is the research plan valid and sufficiently specific in light of the research question? Is the way of collecting material adequate?
4 Results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are the qualitative and/or quantitative data clearly classified within a specific ordering principle? - Are the data correctly analyzed and interpreted within the chosen research method(s)? - Do the analysis and interpretation show creativity and originality? - Do the results link up with the problem statement?
5 Conclusion and discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Are the conclusions clear and do they result from the findings of the study? - Do the conclusions adequately link up with the problem statement? Do the conclusions provide a clear answer to the different (sub-)questions and possible hypotheses? Is there a feedback to theory? - Does the thesis provide new insights? Is attention paid to the generalization of results and the practical and theoretical implications of the conclusions? Is there a critical attitude towards the performed research and its results? Are recommendations and new research questions indicated?
6 Form and structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do the thesis and its divisions (chapters, sections, paragraphs) have a clear and logical structure? - Does the thesis show unity? Is there a clear coherence between the parts? Is each part well-balanced and clearly structured?

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Is there a clear difference between main issues and side issues? Is there a good balance between the total scope of the thesis and its real content?
7 Style and presentation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Is the length of the thesis in accordance with the requirements (a thesis of 15 ECTS requires 8,000 to 12,000 words)? Is the length congruent with its contents? - Are there any/many typographical and grammatical errors? - Is the text easy to read? What is the quality of English writing (style, word choice, spelling etc)? Are the titles of the thesis as a whole, its chapters and its paragraphs adequately chosen? - Are appendices and footnotes used appropriately? Are quotes, references and acknowledgements made correctly and are they complete? - Is the bibliography adequate? - Is the quality of the summary and/or abstract sufficient?
8 Work process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Does the student show initiative and independence and does he/she make a substantial contribution to the realisation of the different parts (problem statement, approach and method, data collection and analysis) of the thesis? - Does the student show sufficient decisiveness and does he/she make sufficient progress? Is the thesis written with vigor and what is the scope of the work that is done? Is the planning efficient? - Does the student have sufficient overview and control of the entire research and writing process? - Does the student take the supervisors' criticism serious and does he/she handle it judiciously?

* The thesis will be assessed as insufficient, if the assessment of one or more of the criteria 1 to 8 is assessed as insufficient.

Explanation

Directives for assessment are:

- Problem statement
- Theory and literature
- Methods
- Results
- Conclusion and discussion
- Form and structure
- Style and presentation
- Work process

Code of conduct regarding grades

Six is marked as a mediocre Master's thesis. For eight or higher, the following points must be well-implemented: (1) the chapters about theory and method, as well as (2) the description, analysis and interpretation of data (of any type). Moreover, also (3) the relations between (parts of) these two groups must recur in a chapter of conclusions and discussion. This leads to the following global guideline:

6	=	mediocre in all aspects;
6.5	=	sufficient;
7	=	more than sufficient;
7.5	=	good Master's thesis, but one of the parts mentioned above (theory/method, results, conclusion) has only been sufficiently elaborated upon;
8	=	good in all parts;
9	=	very good in all parts;
10	=	excellent in all parts, innovating/ground-breaking.

The quality of the student's defense during the examination can lead to an adjustment of the grade with half a point up or down.

Recording the assessment

The supervisor(s) and examiner record the assessment by means of a continual report with any subtitles per directive. The (first) supervisor sends a copy to the secretary's office of the Tilburg School of Catholic Theology. The report is archived and retained and, for example, can later be retrieved by a visitation committee. The student receives a copy of the report after the examination.