Instructions for Writing Final Theses – Sociology Department, Masaryk University

Finding a Topic and Supervisor

There are two regular terms for submitting final theses at all departments of the Faculty of Social Studies, one in spring and one in autumn semester. See the calendar of the Department of Sociology for the current academic year for more information.

Students who want to start writing their Master thesis must first register for a course called Thesis Project (SOC749) in the information system (IS) one semester before they intend to graduate. This is typically done in the 3rd semester of studies – i.e., in the autumn for a planned spring semester thesis defense. Via this course, you start working with a thesis supervisor on a topic, which involves creating a thesis proposal, elaborating it, and starting the work.

In the Information System you can find all teachers and see their research interests (manifested by publications and teaching). You can also browse a "package" or list of previous topics in the IS – see below the two links for sociology fields. Please, do not apply for a general topic, if you see one; because these are listed simply for your inspiration. If you don't see a topic that is relevant for you, you can contact a potential supervisor with your own suggestion.

It is necessary to contact a potential thesis supervisor and consult with them about the topic at the very beginning of the 3rd semester, or even earlier. You can visit potential supervisors during their office hours or contact them via e-mail to arrange an appointment. You should make an effort to define a **very specific thesis topic**. In addition your thesis title, the supervisor will enter into the IS a **short outline of the thesis and a list of relevant literature**. Together, this information defines your thesis project proposal. Send this information to your thesis supervisor via email or in person during consultation hours. After agreeing on your proposal and plan for doing your thesis work, the supervisor will officially confirm your topic in the Information System.

However, the thesis topic is valid only after being approved by the chair of the Department. In case of any technical problems with your proposal, the chair may suggest clarifications or a change to the topic. You are responsible for making sure that all the information regarding your project proposal is correct in the IS.

Preparation and the Process of Writing

In the 3rd semester of your studies, you should register for the Thesis Project course (SOC749), and in your final semester, you need to register for a course called Thesis Writing Seminar (SOC782). Together these two courses serve as the framework for the initial and the final phases of your thesis work, and credits are awarded for completing these phases according to the course requirements. By the end of the 3rd semester, your thesis topic should be registered by your supervisor in IS under the above-mentioned link.

You should start working on your thesis as soon as the topic is approved by your supervisor, although of course you may have already begun doing research and other preparation in advance. It is advised that you consult regularly with your thesis supervisor and together agree upon a schedule for your work in order to make sure you complete all the tasks to submit a complete thesis on time. It is necessary to plan your work and manage your time well, for example taking into account the need for **library research and literature study, for working out the organization of the thesis, and then for writing the whole text, along with final editing and proofreading**. As you work, keep in mind the Honor Code and the section on Academic Honesty specified in the Student Handbook: it is extremely important to cite all sources of information accurately and avoid plagiarizing.

Attention should be devoted to precise formulation of your research question which, depending on your approach, may include a hypothesis (or hypotheses) to be tested, and the proper organization of the thesis. A written outline with a well-defined plan for your work and structure for the thesis must be sent to your supervisor within one month of the acceptance of your thesis proposal in the IS. This gives your supervisor time to give you necessary feedback at the very beginning of your writing. The outline should **clearly state your research question(s) and the structure and the content of the thesis, including methodology**. Your supervisor should review and comment on your plan. While your supervisor is available for consultations, ultimately, it is your responsibility to make sure you follow the plan and have enough time to do the research and write the thesis.

It may be helpful to find opportunities to discuss your research with friends and colleagues. Listen carefully to their questions. See if you are able to communicate to them your project in a clear and coherent manner. Are there aspects of your research that are particularly confusing and need further clarification? Are there things that you forgot to say? Could you change the order of the information presented and have it become more understandable?

Library Research and Sources

An important first step for a thesis project is to find and study relevant literature. It is recommended to use not only secondary literature, but also to find and make use of primary sources, whenever available sources make this possible. In addition to printed materials, such as books and academic journals, it is useful to search for electronic sources which are available in the Faculty library. A wide range of foreign journals and other materials is at your disposal in the online e-sources database. Students and employees can use these resources for free.

After completing a literature search, it is vital to plan enough time to read literature which may be new to you. It is often the case that students underestimate the time it takes to find and read literature, before the writing process even begins.

Plan Enough Time for Writing

Time management is of key importance for a successful thesis project, and it's vital to anticipate how much time you'll need to prepare all the different chapters of your thesis. A helpful way to do this is to keep in mind the final deadline for submitting the thesis and work back from that date to see what you must accomplish in every month during your 3rd and 4th semesters. It helps to work regularly, re-read the text after you finish each chapter, and reflect on it. As you progress is preparing the thesis, consult with your supervisor to see if s/he can read and comment on each chapter as you finish them. Leave some time before the final deadline for one last proofreading of the whole text to correct mistakes and revise unclear parts. It is very important to make sure there are no errors in your use of citations. Be sure that every source cited in the text is listed and properly formatted in the bibliography. If you finish early, your supervisor may be able to read the whole text and comment on it, which can help you make improvements. Before finally submitting the thesis, you should make sure the final graphic design of the text is correct, and all formalities and technical requirements set by the Department have been met.

The whole process depends on your initiative for productive **consultations with your supervisor**. Regular consultations will help you to keep to a schedule and make steady progress on the thesis. To be effective, you should be in contact regularly with your supervisor. It helps to agree from the start of your project on a plan for communication about your progress and for meeting to discuss your work. It is not so helpful if you contact the supervisor just before a deadline. Good communication with your supervisor presupposes that you give them enough time to read and comment on individual chapters, which you send gradually. If by some chance your supervisor is going to spend a longer period of time abroad or out of Brno, you should agree together from the start about how to remain in contact.

Before Submitting the Thesis for Defense – Complete the Thesis Seminar (First Thesis Draft)

Before officially submitting your thesis for defense, you must successfully pass the Thesis Writing Seminar (SOC782). This basically means your supervisor has approved of your thesis (which must be almost finished), and has entered your grade for the Seminar into the IS, thus granting you credits for the course.

1. Your thesis must be uploaded into the Homework Vault for the Thesis Writing Seminar in the IS before the deadline stated in the schedule of the Department of Sociology. You submit the thesis in the file under the name of your supervisor.
2. At the time of submitting to the Homework Vault, the thesis must be at least 80 per cent finished (i.e., contain no less than 80 percent of the total number of required characters).
3. Although the thesis may be only 80 percent complete, the text must be coherent in terms of its content and organization and must include all the chapters as agreed with the supervisor (including the conclusion). It is also expected that the research question(s) have been answered.
4. The footnotes do not need to be completed.
5. The list of references (bibliography) does not need to be completed.
6. It is not necessary to include appendices.

After the deadline for submission passes, the Homework Vault will be closed. It is your responsibility to make sure the thesis is submitted in time and in the appropriate folder.

The supervisor then reads the text as it was submitted, and decides on whether to grant credit for the Seminar, and will give written feedback within seven days.

Formalities of the Final Draft

For your thesis to be accepted and eligible for defense, the final version of the manuscript must meet a number of formal requirements such as being correctly formatted, of the proper length, making correct use of quotations and notes, properly citing all sources, and including the signed declaration of authorship on page 2. The total length of your thesis should be **no less than 126,000 and no more than 162,000 characters**.

The text of the final thesis can be printed on white or recycled paper. Double-sided printing is acceptable. However, the title page and all the initial pages must be single-sided.

The title page should state the name of the university, Faculty, Department and study field, title and type of the thesis, name and UČO (university I.D. number) of the author, and the place and date of publication.

The text of the thesis should be double-spaced or space and a half. Exceptions for which you may use single spacing are the table of contents, footnotes, charts, graphs, tables, block quotations, captions, glossary, appendices and the bibliography.

The formatting of the text should help organize the contents of the text and facilitate easy comprehension of the presentation of information and analysis.

You must follow the **American Sociological Association (ASA) guide for in-text citation and the reference list (bibliography)**, 4th edition or higher. You may contact Nadya Jaworsky (jaworsky@fss.muni.cz) to obtain a copy.

Following the reference list (bibliography), there should be a **name index**, listing all authors cited, with page number(s).

You can find examples of previous, passing theses in the IS to use as models for formatting your own thesis.

The English language level of the thesis must be a refined as possible and represents an important criterion for evaluating the thesis. The language usage should be coherent and there should be no formal mistakes. Accordingly, please leave enough time to proofread for any spelling, grammar and punctuation mistakes.

Submitting the Thesis

Submit the thesis before the deadline set in the department calendar and post it in the information system in STUDENT menu: Final State Examination and Thesis/Dissertation Archive

https://is.muni.cz/auth/student/szz_a_thesis.pl?

First, you need to fill in the archive with abstracts (enter the English abstract twice) and key words, and confirm that the printed and electronic versions are identical. Then only you continue to the archive and submit the full text in pdf or text form.

The full instructions of working with theses in IS from the start (topic registration) until the final submission can be found in the Help section under the heading

Theses/Dissertations = https://is.muni.cz/auth/help/student/prace

Theses submitted later will not be accepted for defense. **The thesis submitted in hard copy and the electronic version in IS should be identical**, which is the responsibility of the student. The title of the thesis stated in the Thesis Topic list in the information system will be stated in Diploma Supplement, so confirm the final title with your supervisor when you submit the 80% draft. In case of any problems, contact the department secretary.

Two printed copies (signed) identical with the electronic copy must be submitted to the department secretary by the deadline given in the departmental calendar. The printed thesis copies must be bound in hardcover, circular binding or thermo-binding (in Czech: pevná, kroužková vazba nebo termovazba).

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