Guidelines for Drawing up a Master’s thesis in the Faculty of Communication, Culture and Society

Legal Basis (from the Study Regulations 2008/09)

Art. 17 – Master’s thesis: a) nature and objectives
1. The Master’s thesis is a rigorously researched and argued academic essay. The student is guided in his/her work by a supervisor, a teacher on one of the courses that is worth a minimum of 3 ECTS points and is taught as part of the Master’s curriculum. The thesis examines a topic chosen by the candidate in agreement with the supervisor and the Master’s Director.
2. The Thesis is expected to present the findings of academic research on a subject relevant to communication sciences within the disciplinary area covered by the Master’s programme, and must be suitably rigorous and original.

Art. 18 – b) conditions
1. To be admitted to the oral examination, the Master’s student must have passed all the required examinations and satisfied any other requirements prescribed in the study plan.
2. The title of the Master’s thesis must be notified to the Examination Secretary at least six months before the date of the oral examination; should the title need adjusting to better fit the thesis, this must be done no later than a month before that date.
3. The oral examination must be passed by the end of the eighth semester from admission to the Master’s programme, at the latest.
4. Failure to comply with these rules will result in the student’s exclusion from the Faculty.

Art. 19 – c) assessment
1. The Master’s thesis is examined orally before a commission comprising the supervisor and co-examiner, appointed by the Master’s Director.
2. A commission that rejects a Thesis may make the following recommendations:
   a. the candidate is invited to revise his/her Master’s thesis on the basis of the remarks and criticisms made by the commission members. In this case, the student must hand in a new thesis within three months.
   b. the candidate is invited to present another proposal, with a new topic and a different supervisor within a month from such an invitation. In this case, the student must hand in the new thesis within six months.
**Value in ECTS**
The Master's thesis corresponds to 18, 21 or 30 ECTS, depending on the Master's programme.

**Choice of the thesis supervisor (and co-supervisor, if required) and of the co-examiner**
The person in charge of the Master's programme (the Director) is responsible for checking that the topic of the Master's thesis relates to the supervisor's area of competence, as well as that there is a suitable distribution of Master's theses among the various professors on the Master's programme.

Should it be considered necessary, a co-supervisor may be appointed. The name of the co-supervisor should be communicated to the Dean's office when the thesis title is registered.

The Director of the Master's programme nominates the co-examiner in agreement with the thesis supervisor. The co-examiner's name should be communicated to the Dean's office when the thesis is handed in.

Only professors who have an official course at USI (worth at least 3 ECTS) and/or post-doctoral researchers may be co-examiners.

**Registration of the title and definition of the topic of the Master's thesis**
The title must be registered with the Dean's office at least 6 months before the evaluation using the appropriate registration form (see “Form for submitting a Master's thesis title”). Once it has been registered, the title may be reformulated only to better specify the topic of the research. Any modification of the title, authorised by the Thesis supervisor and made for serious reasons, should be communicated to the Dean’s office by email. Any major modifications to the topic or change of supervisor require a new registration of the title at least 6 months before the thesis is handed in.

Key questions for identifying a relevant topic:
- What are my research questions?
- How will my Master's thesis answer them?
- What do I expect the new element, on a scientific level, to be?

**Layout and binding of a Master's thesis**

*Length:* A Master's thesis worth 18 ECTS should be at least 26,000 words long, corresponding to about 65 pages (the abstract, index, bibliography and any appendices are excluded from the word count). A Master's thesis worth 21 ECTS should be at least 30,000 words long, corresponding to about 75 pages (the abstract, index, bibliography and any appendices are excluded from the word count). A Master's thesis worth 30 ECTS should be at least 37,000 words long, corresponding to about 92 pages (the abstract, index, bibliography and any appendices are excluded from the word count).

*Language:* The Master's thesis is normally written in the official language of that Master’s programme (Italian or English); valid reasons and the approval of the Master's director are required for the use of any other language.

*Layout:* The Master's thesis must be laid out vertically on A4 paper. It must be set in a 12 point font, with a line spacing of 1.5. The title page, which must be set out according to the indications provided by the faculty (“Master's thesis title page”) must be numbered as page 1 of the thesis.

*Binding:* The Master's thesis must be bound as a hardback book (spiral binding is not allowed).
**Structure and content of the Master's thesis**

The Master's thesis is a written argument in which a specific research topic is presented with reference to the scientific literature, explored with appropriate methodology, and discussed in consideration of the literature. In the presentation of the argument, the author's voice is therefore very important in that it guides the reader and makes the various parts of the Master's thesis consistent.

A rough framework (particularly appropriate for empirical Master's theses) – to be adapted according to the specific requirements of the needs of the Master's thesis and the thesis supervisor's indications – could be as follows:

**Abstract:** Summarises the topic of the thesis, the research questions, the method used, and the main conclusions and contributions that have emerged (100-250 words).

**Contents list:** Lists all the chapters with their respective page numbers.

**Introduction:** Introduces the main argument, the research question, the relevance of the argument to the relative field, and specifies the procedures followed and the structure of the Master's thesis.

**Literature Review:** This review of the relevant scientific literature offers a critical outline of previous work in the field, laying out its shortcomings and the controversies regarding the topic chosen. On the basis of this reading, the research questions are modified to make them more precise.

**Methodology:** Describes the field in which the research was carried out, the methods and criteria by which the data were collected, and the analytic criteria employed in establishing the results.

**Results:** The data gathered and results of the analyses carried out are explained and illustrated. It is not enough to give the raw data, imagining that they speak for themselves, or to make unfounded affirmations. It is instead necessary to display the data and insert them into the argument of the thesis, for example, by organising them according to the analytical themes (or the variables) discussed in the literature review section.

**Discussion:** The author discusses and reflects critically on the data and on the results described in the previous chapter, bringing out the contributions of the Master's thesis.

**Conclusions:** A brief synthesis of the work done and the results that have emerged, the limits of the Master's thesis, the implications for theory and practice.

**Bibliography:** Bibliographic references presented according to a conventional standard (usually APA or Chicago style).

**Appendices:** If present, appendices are supplied along with a clear list of their contents.

**Submission of the Master's thesis**

The following should be submitted to the Dean's office during opening hours (10.00-12.00):

- 3 hard copies (4, if there is a co-supervisor);
- The specific form for submission of the thesis, signed by the supervisor, co-supervisor and co-examiner (see “Form for submitting a Master’s thesis”) (This form can be countersigned only after the anti-plagiarism check);
- The form approved by the library (see “Form – for Library”).

By countersigning the form for the submission of the Master’s thesis, the supervisor certifies that he/she has followed and read the thesis and considers it accepted. The Dean's office will not accept a Master's thesis with one or more of the required documents missing.

The Master's thesis may be handed in only when all the exams in the study programme have been passed.
The Dean's office will distribute copies of the Master's thesis to the supervisor, to the co-supervisor if there is one, and to the co-examiner.

**The anti-plagiarism check (Turnitin)**
The anti-plagiarism check must be carried out at least two weeks before the thesis is handed in, following the procedure indicated below:
- Enter www.icorsi.ch through "Login USI"
- Choose the link for your Master's in the section: “Courses USI” > “COM” > “Corsi master COM” > “Consegna della tesi – Thesis submission”
- Click on “Submit paper” and upload the final version of the Master's thesis as a PDF or as a Word file.

Once the antiplagiarism check is completed, the student will automatically receive an e-mail confirmation. Afterwards, the student will be informed by e-mail that the Master's thesis can be submitted.

**Oral examination and evaluation**
The oral examination of the Master's thesis takes place in front of a commission made up of the supervisor, the co-examiner and, if there is one, the co-supervisor.

The oral examination of the Master's thesis takes the form of a debate, in which the candidates first of all summarise their work (10/15 minutes) and then discuss the topic with the commission.

As well as the indication of the final mark, the supervisor, co-examiner and co-supervisor can record observations and comments. The written text is the main factor considered in awarding the final mark. In the oral presentation, the candidate’s presentation skills and ability to answer the questions adequately are taken into account.

The Master’s thesis oral examinations are organised by the Master’s assistant in agreement with the members of the commission.

The invitation to the presentation is sent by the Master’s assistant by email, with a copy to the Dean’s office.

The oral examinations are normally organised during the two semesters (Fall and Spring) and the three exam sessions, not less than three weeks after the submission of the thesis to the Dean’s office. Presentations planned outside these periods are possible only on condition that the commission is available.

The supervisor is responsible for the correct completion of the minutes and for returning them to the Dean’s office.

**University fee and deadline for submission of the Master’s thesis**
The Fall fee covers the period from the first day of the Fall semester until the last Friday before the beginning of the Spring semester.

The Spring fee covers the period from the first day of the Spring semester until the last Friday before the beginning of the Fall semester.