

The Master's thesis and the role of the tutor/thesis supervisor in the new Communication Science Master's programme

Graduate School of Communication, October 2010

As of September 2010, both the Master's thesis requirements and the role of the thesis supervisor have changed for new Master's students.

The Master's thesis is now considered a 'graduation project' and in this sense is similar to a seminar for which clear deadlines are set by the lecturer and the School. This means there are consequences for missed deadlines.

Furthermore, the thesis supervisor also acts as tutor for the thesis students and will be involved in the process right from the start of the Master's programme. On the one hand, the changes are intended to improve the thesis students' study success and, on the other, to provide thesis supervisors with a clear guideline for establishing deadlines and holding students to them.

Tutor supervision

What this form of tutor supervisions entails is that the supervisor acts as the point of contact for students for study related questions and problems. An important aspect of the tutor role is helping students take charge of their learning and ensuring they complete the Master's programme within a year. Another aspect is to act as sparring partner in making study choices.

We emphasise that the tutor should not take on the role of the study adviser or psychologist or act as complaint officer. Questions regarding timetables and choice of study programme or profession, or help and advice on personal issues are not part of the tutor role. However, a tutor can urgently advise students with study or personal problems to consult the study adviser or student psychologist, or urge that they take their problems or complaints to the *ombuds* student, the *Opleidingscommissie* or the *Examencommissie*.

Thesis supervision

The role of the Master's thesis supervisor has for the most part remained unchanged in the new Master's programme. As earlier, the thesis supervisor ensures that the student executes and reports on a thesis research project that is relevant to the academic field, that the student displays sufficient mastery of the relevant theories and research methods and applies these at a sufficiently high level, and that the level at which the process and outcomes are reported on is sufficiently high to earn a Master's degree in Communication Science.

What has changed is the clear demarcation of the period of time supervision will be provided. The Master's thesis is considered a 'graduation project' and in this sense is similar to a seminar where clear deadlines have been set by the lecturer and the School. This means there are consequences for missed deadlines.

In the current set-up, students are required to choose a thesis topic and roughly formulate a hypothesis before the start of the Methods seminar (in block 3 of each semester). A detailed hypothesis, description of the proposed methodology and use of theory and a provisional bibliography are due before the start of the second semester. Finally, the thesis must be submitted by the end of the seminar, i.e. before the end of the semester. The rules that apply if a thesis student misses the deadlines or receives an unsatisfactory mark are described towards the end of this memo.

Process

The programme is as follows:

Semester 1 / block 1 (Sep-Oct) or (Feb-Mar)

- In this part of the programme, students follow compulsory specialisation seminars.
- In the first month of the first semester, students are appointed a tutor/thesis supervisor within their specialisation track.
- The tutor/thesis supervisor meets with the students to discuss the Master's programme, study scheme and thesis topic. Follow-up meetings are planned which will also provide room for tutor supervision in addition to thesis supervision. It is up to the supervisors to choose to conduct either one-on-one meetings or group meetings.
- During this phase, students determine the thesis topic in consultation with their supervisor.

There is some limited room for lecturers to swap thesis students to achieve a better match between students and supervisors.

Semester 1 / block 2 (Nov-Dec) or (Apr-May)

- In this part of the programme, students follow compulsory specialisation seminars.
- End of S1, block 2: Deadline preliminary outline.
An elaboration of the thesis topic and broad formulation of the research question must be submitted to the tutor/thesis supervisor by the end of the second block of the first semester.

Semester 1 / block 3 (Jan) / (Jun)

- Method seminar
In this part of the programme, Master's students follow the compulsory Methods seminar.

Semester 2 / block 1 (Feb-Mar) or (Sep-Oct)

- In this part of the programme, students follow elective courses.
- The official deadline for the definitive outline of the Master's thesis is three weeks before the end of S2, block 1. The research question, a description of the proposed methodology and use of theory, and a provisional bibliography are due before the end of the first period of the second semester.
- The Graduate School will check with thesis supervisors/tutors whether the deadlines have been met. Students who miss the deadline will be called to a consultation with the study adviser. In consultation with the study adviser, the thesis supervisor and thesis coordinator will determine whether and how the student may proceed with their thesis.

Semester 2 / block 2 and block 3 (Apr, May, Jun) or (Nov, Dec, Jan)

- In this phase, students exclusively focus on completing their thesis.
- The following activities are carried out: finalising the methodology and research outline, data collection, analysis, reporting.
- End of S2, block 3 Final thesis deadline.
The final thesis must be submitted to the thesis supervisor by the end of the third period of the second semester. The thesis is assessed by the thesis supervisor and, subsequently, by the committee 'Handhaving Kwaliteit Scripties' (Thesis Quality Maintenance).

Re-testing

Students who failed to submit their thesis by the end of the third period of the second semester or who received an unsatisfactory mark are no longer entitled to thesis supervision.

Retesting is possible on a once-only basis. In this case, students are given the opportunity to submit their rewritten thesis to the thesis supervisor before the end of the first block of the new semester (Semester 1 / Block 1). The thesis is re-assessed by the thesis supervisor and, subsequently, by the HKS committee. However, the highest possible mark for a rewritten thesis is a 6.0.

If a rewritten thesis is still unsatisfactory, the student can re-enrol in the thesis seminar the following semester.