

MAIR - MA Thesis Seminar 2021

The MA Thesis Seminar will support you in the process of writing your thesis. It is an obligatory part of the curriculum worth 3 credits and consists of three workshops. The **dates** are

- 16 April (9:00-12:00 hrs.)
- 27 (9:00-17:00 hrs.) & 28 (9:00-12:00 hrs.) May
- 29 (9:00-17:00 hrs.) & 30 (9:00-12:00 hrs.) July

It is currently not known whether the seminar will have to be taught purely online, or at least some of the meetings can be held in a hybrid mode, where some participants attend the seminar physically, while others take part in the discussions via Zoom.

Requirements

To obtain the three credits assigned to the seminar participants are required to submit **written reports** on their ongoing thesis project and to serve as discussants for their fellow students projects. The reports must be posted in the **Forum** of the Stud.IP course site.

Participants are required to submit a report for each of the three workshops. (The expectations for these reports including deadlines are detailed below.) Moreover, participants are asked to act as **discussants** for a fellow student's project in the second and third workshops. The discussants' task will be to concisely summarize and comment on the projects assigned to them in no more than 10 minutes. (There will be no oral summaries or presentations by the authors themselves.)

If the number of participants in a workshop exceeds the number of "active" thesis projects (i.e. projects for which reports have been submitted for the workshop), participants who have not been assigned a discussant role are required to **comment** on one of their fellow students' projects **in writing**. The expected length of the written comments is 300 words. The comments are due on the eve of the workshop by noon and have to be posted in the Forum as well. (Other participants are encouraged to voluntarily post comments of their own before or after the

workshops, including responses to other participants' comments.) Discussant responsibilities and projects to be commented on in writing are allocated by the instructors on a first come, first served basis. To maximize the diversity of inputs, participants must discuss (or comment on) different students' projects in the two workshops.¹

The spirit of the oral and written comments must, of course, be constructive, and your observations, criticisms, and suggestions may touch upon everything that is relevant for the success of the project (research question, theory, method, data, style, etc.).

There will be no grades. **Participation** (either physical or virtual) in each of the three workshops **is mandatory**. Exceptions may be granted by the instructors if there are good reasons for a student's non-attendance. Compensations will be required in this case (see below).

Workshop I

The purpose of **Workshop I** is for you to present to the seminar your topic and initial ideas about how to tackle it. The report – due **14 April** – is a short paper of up to 600 words including information on the following:

- the (working) title of your thesis
- the names of your two supervisors (if known)
- a description and justification of the research question: which question do you intend to study in your thesis? why is it worth looking at?
- comments on the state of the art in the field: to your current knowledge, what does the literature have to say about your research question? which, possibly strongly diverging, views, which you may or may not share, are held about it? etc.
- a few sentences about the methods you intend to apply in order to arrive at an answer to your research question and why you think they are appropriate in this case
- a preliminary bibliography: a list of works that are pertinent to your topic and that you have either already consulted or intend to consult while you are working on your thesis
- a list of open questions you would like us to discuss in the seminar indicating problems that you have not yet been able to solve or aspects of your topic or research strategy you are uncertain about

¹ Of course, this restriction does not apply to voluntary Forum postings.

Workshop II

The second workshop is supposed to give you an opportunity to present and discuss your research design for the thesis, i.e. precise statements of

- your (final) research question
- its (normative, scientific, or practical) relevance
- its place in the literature
- the role of theory in your study
- your (working) hypothesis (or hypotheses)
- the methods you are employing and the reasons for choosing them
- the data you are using, etc.

You should also provide the prospective table of contents of your thesis.

The report of 1,500-2,000 words must be posted by **21 May**.

Workshop III

The third workshop is devoted to discussing initial results of your investigation on the basis of a “writing sample”, i.e. a draft of the Introduction or of a key chapter. In addition (and perhaps even more important), an “extended” table of contents should be part of the report, including not only the headings and the order of the chapters but a short summary of each chapter as well, thus indicating the overall argument you are making in your thesis. The feedback you will be given at the workshop is intended to draw your attention to possible shortcomings in your argument (or the way you present it) at a time when you can still do something about it.

The report, i.e. the writing sample cum extended table of contents, must be submitted by **23 July**.

Your **supervisors** will be invited to participate in the discussion of your project in the second and third workshops. Please send them your reports directly. Of course, the discussions in the seminar cannot and are not meant to substitute for timely and repeated bilateral (or trilateral) meetings!

Note that the criteria for evaluating seminar papers also apply to the MA Thesis. Consequently, our discussions at the workshops (in particular II and III) will also take these criteria into consideration. Moreover, the reports are a good opportunity to practice the rules laid down in the **MAIR Style Sheet** (which also includes information about the MA thesis). The criteria for assessing seminar papers and the MAIR style sheet as well as our “MA Thesis Guidelines” can be accessed [here](#).

Output styles for EndNote and RefWorks can be downloaded [here](#) together with documents showing how to use them for the most common types of sources. The styles are “beta versions”, meaning they are not perfect. In particular, they do not include all types of sources that are regulated by the style sheet, although they model the most important ones. You can use the reference type “generic” for sources which are not covered by the styles and adapt the bibliography manually before you hand in the thesis. When you have acquired some familiarity with the bibliographic software you may also amend the style yourself. *Note that you are using these styles (programs) at your own risk and we cannot accept responsibility for any damage they may cause to your computer.* (Not that this has ever happened to our knowledge.)

Non-attendance and compensations

The thesis seminar being an obligatory part of the program we expect you to attend (either on site or remotely) each of the three workshops and to contribute actively to our discussions (including by serving as discussants or posting written comments on projects). Exceptions can be made but only if you give us a compelling reason for your non-attendance well before the date of the workshop. This, however, does not relieve you of the obligation to hand in the required **report** in time. (The reports are legally enshrined requirements for passing the Master Thesis module and hence for achieving the degree – see also the [“MA Thesis Guidelines”](#).)² In addition, you will be required to **compensate** for your failure to contribute to the joint effort to further the thesis projects. To be precise, we want you to comment on two of your fellow students’ projects in writing **within two weeks** after the respective workshop. (If you miss one day of a two-day workshop, you are required to write comments on one project.) It is your choice which projects you are looking at. If you miss more than one workshop your comments must be on different projects. The required minimum **length of the comments** for each project

² Technically, the reports are so-called Studienleistungen, i.e. exams that are not graded but must be passed nonetheless.

is 500 words. (Alternatively, you may comment on three projects in at least 350 words per project.) The comments must be posted on the Forum.

“Irregular” participants

The course setup assumes that the participants have registered their thesis by the recommended date (**15 April 2021**) or will do so soon afterwards. Fourth semester students who have decided to postpone their thesis may nonetheless participate and obtain credits by contributing actively to the joint effort. Given the less advanced stage of their projects, this may require adjusting, with the “advice and consent” of the instructors, the nature of their reports.³ (Students who postpone their thesis by a full year are better served by attending next year’s thesis seminar together with their fellow students of the “junior” cohort. If in doubt they should consult with the course instructors or their academic advisor.)

Note that “irregular” participants are not to be confused with the previously mentioned group of students who are unable to attend (even virtually) one or more workshops and therefore are required to make a substitutive contribution to the seminar. Their obligations are not the same, either. *In particular, only students missing one or more workshops are obliged to provide written comments as compensation, while “irregular” participants incur no special obligations as far as the workshops are concerned.*

Note: You can download the most recent version of the seminar outline from the program website (section “Program”) as well as the Stud.IP course site.

³ Some of these students might submit their reports “out of sync”. For example, they may agree with the instructors to upload the first report by the deadline for the second workshop (and so on). In any case, the three reports are formal requirements and therefore cannot be “skipped” by registering one’s thesis later.