

MA Thesis Guidelines

This document outlines the procedures and requirements pertaining to registering, writing, and submitting an MA thesis in the MA International Relations: Global Governance and Social Theory.

1 - Preparing the Thesis

During the third semester you should begin to think seriously about your MA thesis. You should consider potential topics and research questions, and you should ask yourself who might be most suitable for supervising the thesis. You need two supervisors and both must be nominated when you register your thesis and the countdown to the deadline begins. The *Zentrale Prüfungsamt (ZPA)* (registry) will only accept suggestions that are consistent with the guidelines endorsed by the Joint Commission. Accordingly, all current and previous members of the [MAIR faculty](#) qualify as supervisors. In addition, other professors and lecturers from Jacobs University (JU) and the *Fachbereich Sozialwissenschaften* (Department of Social Sciences) at the University of Bremen (UB) are accepted if they possess relevant expertise. Only under exceptional circumstances and with the prior explicit consent of the program chairs¹ can instructors and researchers from other departments, universities, or research institutes be nominated as second² supervisors, and we do not encourage students to choose an external supervisor even if his or her expertise is beyond doubt. At least one of your two supervisors must be a member of the MAIR faculty. (In the [annex](#) to this document you will find a list of professors and lecturers who are accepted by the *Prüfungsamt* as supervisors without further ado.)

You should start to talk to potential supervisors early on, and some amount of “supervisor shopping” (talking to several people, possibly about several potential topics) is perfectly fine as long as you come up with a topic and two supervisors in time. You should not only seek the consent of the professor to supervise your thesis but also have a first substantive discussion with him or her about your topic before the thesis is registered. The supervision should not only begin when you are halfway into the thesis!

¹ The program chairs are currently Klaus Schlichte (kschlich@uni-bremen.de) and Marco Verweij (m.verweij@jacobs-university.de).

² The form you need to use for registering your thesis (see [below](#)), distinguishes between your first and second supervisor (*erste und zweite Betreuerin*). There are a few situations in which this may matter formally, e.g. when you wish to change the title of your thesis after registration. For the most part, there is no formal difference, though. In particular, the grades chosen by the two supervisors carry the same weight. Practically, the first supervisor will often be the one with whom students consult most intensely before and after the registration of the thesis. This said, you should also seek to benefit as much as you can from your second supervisor’s advice during the process of writing the thesis.

2 - Registration of the Thesis

Having found a topic and two supervisors, you may formally register your thesis, provided you have acquired at least 75 credit points. To register your thesis fill in the required form, which you can find [here](#) (“Application for admission to the B.A./M.A. thesis phase” under “Forms for the B.A./M.A. thesis phase”) and send or take it to the *Prüfungsamt*.³ Note that both you and your supervisors have to sign the form.⁴ Once the *Prüfungsamt* has processed the application it will officially notify you of your deadline (which is 22 weeks after this notification). There are also forms you should use if you wish to involve an external supervisor (“Request for external supervisor for the thesis”) (see [above](#)) or in order to request an extension of the deadline because of illness (“Notification of illness etc.”).⁵

Note that for the **thesis topic** (as expressed by the title on the registration form) to be accepted it has to come under the broad umbrella defined by the three overlapping subject matters that enter into the name of the program: (positive and normative) international relations (including peace and conflict studies), global (and regional) governance, (international) social theory. If you are uncertain whether your topic meets this criterion, contact the program chairs about this before you ask your supervisors to sign the registration form.

It is advisable to choose a title that is not overly specific and hence is likely to still fit if you have to modify your initial agenda in the process in consultation with your supervisors.⁶ If, however, it turns out to be necessary to **change the title of your thesis** at some point, you can do so by turning to the *Prüfungsamt* and requesting a modification.⁷ Note that modifying the title of one’s thesis sometime between registration and submission is different from “returning a topic”. According to the general rules of the university (*Allgemeiner Teil der Masterprüfungsordnung [AT-MPO]*, § 10, 7),⁸ students may once and within eight weeks after the registration took effect give up their topic, i.e. ask to be allowed to switch to a new one. This is on the condition that they can make a convincing case that the topic is not tractable for substantive reasons (*aus fachlichen Gründen*) within the designated period of time. Switching to a new topic in this manner entails that the student continues with the same attempt (“returning one’s

³ The *Prüfungsamt* is located on the “Boulevard” between the Central Library and the Mensa. (Its postal address can be found [here](#).)

⁴ Note that the simplified procedure, adopted during the Covid-19 pandemic, that allowed digital signatures in some cases is no longer in place.

⁵ Unfortunately, the forms are in German. We are told that translations are in preparation. In the meantime, you can rely on the English instructions [here](#) or ask a German-speaking fellow student to give you a hand. When you are given a choice between a PDF and a Word version, choose the former. Clicking the PDF option may cause your browser to open a new tab with a page informing you that there is a problem. To solve this problem download the file and open it in the Acrobat Reader.

⁶ Thus, while the thesis title may be identical with your (initial) research question, this can come at a cost in terms of flexibility further down the road.

⁷ The procedure is informal: send (or take) a letter to the *Prüfungsamt* asking for the title to be changed. It should, of course, include your name and matriculation number, and both you and your first supervisor must have signed it. It is up to you when you file this request and it is even admissible to attach the letter to the thesis when submitting it. In lieu of the physical letter the ZPA also accepts a digital copy.

⁸ The AT-MPO can be accessed [here](#) under “Formalities”.

topic” being different from a fail!) and the 22-week period allowed for writing the thesis starts anew.

To finish the program within the regular study period (*Regelstudienzeit*) of two years you should register your thesis by **15 April**. Students who register their thesis no later than 15 May are allowed to participate in a walkthrough at the **Graduation Ceremony** at Jacobs University. (Students who register their thesis at a later point are entitled to participate in the year after.)⁹

Note that you must be enrolled (matriculated) at the university (UB) when you register your thesis, but not necessarily when you submit it. Hence, you need not re-enroll with the university if your deadline is in the following semester. **(Re)matriculation** is not required even if you fail in your first attempt and have to write a new thesis on a new topic. The option to refrain from re-enrolling (or to ask to be disenrolled) after the registration of your thesis is not available, however, if there are other modules that you still have to pass: taking exams other than the thesis necessitates that you are (still) enrolled in the program.¹⁰

3 - Additional Formal Requirements

The thesis has to be written in English. The upper word limit for the thesis including the bibliography is 35,000 words. Appendices (annexes) do not count towards the word limit. There is no lower limit, but students should be aware that a much shorter thesis may be vulnerable to the charge that parts of their work could have benefitted from elaboration. For further information including style requirements of the thesis (title page,¹¹ formatting, citations, quotations, footnotes, reference list), please consult the [MAIR Style Sheet](#), which can be downloaded from the program website. Endnote and RefWorks output styles are available on demand (see [outline](#) of the MA Thesis Seminar).

The program’s [examination policy](#) (EP) (*Prüfungsordnung*) grants the possibility of (no more than) two students writing a joint thesis as a group (*Gruppenarbeit*) (EP § 6, 4). This is on the condition that in the thesis each author’s contribution is recognizable, distinguishable, and gradable (*erkennbar, abgrenzbar und bewertbar*). Typically, this is achieved by attributing, in the table of contents, chapters or sections to individual authors. The upper word limit for a joint thesis is 70,000 words (including the bibliography but not annexes if applicable).

4 - MA Thesis Seminar

While working on their thesis, students attend the MA Thesis Seminar, which is intended to

⁹ Students who are expected to graduate this year are contacted by JU’s Student Records Office and invited to register for the Graduation Ceremony (if they meet the requirements).

¹⁰ The ZPA urges students who have decided not to re-enroll for the next semester to register their thesis no later than a month before the end of the semester. This is to make sure that students will not be in trouble if unexpected obstacles to registration come to light, when the ZPA processes their request. For more on the university’s rules regarding disenrollment see [here](#).

¹¹ A form you can use to create the cover sheet is available [here](#).

support the working process in various ways. The seminar is an obligatory part of the curriculum and consists of three one- or two-day workshops, which usually take place in mid-April, end of May, and end of July, respectively. Participants inform each other about their projects, discuss issues of research design, and present intermediate results. Supervisors are invited to attend and contribute to the discussion of their supervisees' projects, although this is of course not intended to replace bilateral meetings.

Technically, the MA Thesis Seminar and the MA Thesis are the two parts of the module "Master Thesis". The module is worth 30 CP with 27 CP being obtained by passing the thesis and 3 CP being obtained by passing the MA Thesis Seminar.¹² To pass the (ungraded) seminar participants must submit three "reports" of varying length, which inform about the nature of their project and the progress of its implementation. For details see the seminar outline or the module catalogue. (Both documents can be accessed [here](#).) Students sign up for the module by registering their thesis (i.e. there is no need or possibility for registering for the master thesis module via PABO).

5 - Deadline Extension

Should you fall ill during the period in which you are working on your thesis (i.e. between the official date of registration and the deadline), you can request an extension of your deadline by the number of days for which your inability to work is confirmed by your physician. Send the doctor's note together with the completed notification of illness form (see [here](#) and [here](#)) to the *Prüfungsamt*, who will subsequently inform you about the new deadline in writing. Note that if you wish to base a request for an extension of your deadline on a medical certificate, you must do so "without delay" (*unverzüglich*) after receiving the certificate.

In addition, the Joint Commission as represented by the two program chairs is authorized by the [examination policy](#) to grant students an extension of the deadline by up to seven weeks (EP § 6, 3). Such a concession may be made only once and only at a well-founded request by the student. Students who need additional time to finish their thesis must send a signed letter to the *Prüfungsamt* in which they explain in some detail the reasons that necessitated their request and specify the number of extra days or weeks they are asking for. This letter is passed on to the program chairs, who, after consulting with the two supervisors, make a decision, which is then, once again via the ZPA, conveyed to the student. You should be aware that the purpose of this provision in the examination policy is not to de facto prolong the time students are given for writing their thesis; rather it is meant to provide the program chairs with some flexibility in special cases when students get into trouble for reasons not entirely under their control. It is therefore very important that you plan your work well with your deadline always firmly in view. If your agenda turns out to be too ambitious, deliberate with your supervisors how you might reduce it to doable proportions.¹³

¹² Nonetheless, the grade for the thesis contributes 25% (corresponding to 30 CP) to the final GPA (see EP § 7).

¹³ If the thesis title is no longer adequate as a result of this operation, you can apply for a revision (see [above](#)).

6 - Submission of the Thesis

According to the general rules of the university (AT-MPO § 10, 10), students are required to submit three hard **copies** (bound printouts) of their thesis as well as a soft copy (pdf, docx, or rtf) saved to a USB stick to the *Prüfungsamt*. You can take the hard copies and the USB stick to the ZPA in person, ask someone to do this for you,¹⁴ or send them via traditional mail. Note that, regardless of which option you choose, what matters for meeting the deadline is the day the thesis is *received* by the ZPA.¹⁵ (The ZPA's postal address can be found [here](#).) In addition, after submitting your thesis to the ZPA, send your supervisors a digital copy of the thesis by email.

Each submitted copy of your thesis must include a completed and signed **copyright declaration**. The three-part form ("Copyright declaration_thesis") can be downloaded [here](#). Please fill it in completely and add your signature as requested. (There is also a document – "PlagScan_Information for students" – explaining the background and purpose of the part where you are asked to consent to an electronically-aided plagiarism check of your thesis.) Usually, the declaration is placed at the very end of the thesis. To make sure you are fully aware of what constitutes **plagiarism** and hence must be avoided in any scientific work including seminar papers and theses, please read the relevant section in the [MAIR Stylesheet](#). If you have questions regarding the copyright declaration or the meaning of plagiarism turn to one of the program chairs.

7 - Assessment of the Thesis

According to the general rules of the university, the supervisors are expected to review and grade the thesis within eight weeks (AT-MPO § 10, 12). The grading system is the same that applies throughout the program (see "[Manual for Students](#)", sec. 5). In most cases, the grade for the thesis is simply the average of the grades chosen by the two supervisors. There are two exceptions, however. If the supervisors' evaluations differ by two grades or more (e.g. one choosing 4.0, the other 2.0) or one of the two supervisors rates the thesis *less* than "sufficient" (4.0), a third examiner will be brought in by the Joint Commission, and the final grade will be the average of the best two out of the three grades. Only if both of these grades are 4.0 or better has the thesis been passed.

A failed thesis can be made up for *once*. The student must choose a new topic and register the new thesis within three months after being informed about the (insufficient) final grade for the first thesis. The same rules apply as with the first attempt – except that there is no additional attempt should this one be unsuccessful as well.

¹⁴ You (or your trustee) can use the ZPA's mailbox 24/7. If you (or your trustee) hand(s) in the thesis at the ZPA's Service Point or with a member of staff you (or your trustee) can obtain a confirmation of receipt. There is a form which can be downloaded [here](#). (For an explanation see [here](#).) For the ZPA's office hours see [here](#).

¹⁵ Note also that the "penalty regime" that is in place for final papers in seminars does not carry over to the thesis. In other words, if you fail to hand in your thesis in time, there will be no automatic extension at the price of a grade reduction; rather, you have failed the thesis and have to write a new one on a new topic.

After receiving the supervisors' reports the *Prüfungsamt* enters the grades into PABO and the result can be accessed by the student. In addition, the supervisors are permitted and encouraged to make their reports available to the student after sending them to the ZPA.¹⁶

Annex: List of Potential Supervisors

The following persons are accepted by the *Prüfungsamt* as supervisors of MA theses in the MAIR without further ado. If you wish a professor or researcher to supervise your thesis who is not on this list please get in touch with the program chairs. Note that one of the two supervisors must be a member of the [MAIR faculty](#) (see also [above](#)).

Name	Affiliation	Status
Sebastian Fehrler	UB	non-faculty
Jakob Fruchtmann	JU	non-faculty
Manfred Hinz	JU/UB	faculty
Jude Kagoro	UB	non-faculty
Roy Karadag	UB	faculty
Rosine Kelz	UB	non-faculty
Katarina Kušić	UB	faculty
Mandi Larsen	JU	faculty
Kerstin Martens	UB	faculty
Peter Mayer	UB	faculty
Dennis Niemann	UB	faculty
Martin Nonhoff	UB	faculty
Heiko Pleines	UB	non-faculty
Berenike Prem	UB	faculty
Klaus Schlichte	UB	faculty

¹⁶ If you consider objecting to the grade, you should turn to the ZPA, which will inform you about the steps to take. Having said that, if you are convinced that your work is underrated, it makes sense to first ask your examiner(s) for an appointment enabling them to explain to you more fully the reasons for their evaluation of your exam. (This applies as much to “normal” module examinations during the first three semesters of the program.)

Susanne K. Schmidt	UB	non-faculty
Margrit Schreier	JU	faculty
Philipp Schulz	UB	faculty
Karen Smith Stegen	JU	non-faculty
Tobias ten Brink	JU	non-faculty
Julia Timpe	JU	faculty
Alex Veit	UB	faculty
Marco Verweij	JU	faculty
Adalbert Wilhelm	JU	faculty
Dieter Wolf	UB	non-faculty
Anna Wolkenhauer	UB	faculty
Arndt Wonka	UB	non-faculty

Note: The most recent version of these guidelines can be downloaded from the program website (section: [Guidelines](#)).