



OÑATI INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE  
FOR THE SOCIOLOGY OF LAW

—  
OÑATIKO LEGE-SOZIOLOGIAKO  
NAZIOARTEKO ERAKUNDEA

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INSTITUTO INTERNACIONAL  
DE SOCIOLOGÍA JURÍDICA DE OÑATI

## INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS: THESIS WRITING & EXAMINATION

The IISL's International Master's in Sociology of Law consists of two components. First, students attend intensive courses from generally the last week of September until the last week of March. Second, students work on their Master's thesis projects from usually beginning of April to late July. The defence procedure takes place in early September.

The coursework period includes student participation in a thesis research seminar, in which students receive support by the Scientific Director in finding a relevant research topic and developing suitable research questions, putting together an appropriate research design and writing a thesis research proposal of **2,500** words. In the thesis research period, students work on their own, but with the support by academic supervisors, on their projects and submit, at the end, a Master's thesis of **15,000** words reporting on their research and findings.

This document provides guidance for students regarding the thesis research project and the related requirements. See the last page for important dates!

### Thesis requirements

The thesis contributes one-third of the credits for the degree (20 ECTS). It is graded separately, and the grade for the thesis is stated on the certificate of the degree.

The thesis should be of the style and substance of a substantial journal article. It has a maximum word length of **15,000** words, including footnotes and bibliography/list of references, but excluding Appendices. You are strongly encouraged to adopt a condensed style of writing, focusing on what is essential for the thesis. In practice this means, in many cases, that you will have to cut down on lengthy parts, which reflect your earlier work in progress, but could be reorganised and rewritten to more directly bring your message across. If your thesis exceeds the word limit without good reasons, which are to be discussed with the Scientific Director beforehand (e.g., minimum length requirements regarding the recognition of the degree in certain countries of origin), this may negatively affect the grading process.

The thesis should normally be written in English. The use of other languages officially used at the institute (e.g., Spanish, Basque, French) may be approved if appropriate supervision and examination can be arranged.

The form of the Master thesis is an important criterium for assessment. Here are some examples of relevant and frequently used styles to choose from in the writing of Master theses:

- the Chicago Manual of Style (CMOS) for reference entries and in-text citation ([https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools\\_citationguide/citation-guide-2.html](https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide/citation-guide-2.html))
- you may also consult the CMOS guidelines for manuscript preparations, if you plan to use figures, tables and photos (<https://press.uchicago.edu/resource/emsguide.html>)
- American Sociological Association (ASA) style ([https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research\\_and\\_citation/asa\\_style/references\\_page\\_formatting.html](https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/research_and_citation/asa_style/references_page_formatting.html))
- American Psychological Association (APA) style (<https://apastyle.apa.org/instructional-aids>)

Obviously, the Master's thesis has to comply with the standards of good academic practice, especially as regards use and citation of sources. **All sources must be properly cited, and any**



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**quotations must be clearly marked as such. Failure to mark quotations or cite sources may be treated as plagiarism** and lead to the Master's thesis not being accepted. Serious cases of plagiarism will be sanctioned by exclusion from the programme / expulsion from the university.

Moreover, the use of **ChatGPT or other AI-based software** by students in preparing any part of their theses is generally considered as **unauthorised aid** and, hence, as cheating. Exceptions may be made in specific individual cases, e.g., if the performance of AI-based text or data generative software is subject of the thesis and its analysis methodologically framed and explicated. Such exceptions always require prior authorisation.

A teacher or examiner who identifies or suspects bad academic practice or plagiarism should report the matter to the Scientific Director, who may investigate by any means considered appropriate. If a prima facie case is found, the student will be notified of the details and given an opportunity to explain. The decision on the grade to be awarded or penalty will be taken by the Scientific Director and, depending on circumstances and the severity of the case, reported to relevant authorities, such as the Academic Committee of the Master's programme and, in the case of completed Master's theses, to the Board of Examiners. These internal rules may be complemented or superseded by procedural regulations by the University of the Basque Country.

Research for the Master thesis must comply with the ISA Code of Ethics ([http://www.isa-sociology.org/about/isa\\_code\\_of\\_ethics.htm](http://www.isa-sociology.org/about/isa_code_of_ethics.htm)). Consideration of ethical issues should be included already in the outline of the thesis and research proposal, and where relevant, should be discussed within the final version of the Master's thesis.

For a Master's thesis in the Sociology of Law the following aspects have to be observed:

- Identify a particular **socio-legal** problem or issue and formulate relevant research questions on the basis of an extensive literature review and / or detailed empirical observations;
- Translate the problem into a conceptual framework, involving key concepts and methods;
- Create a research design that allows for the operationalisation of the key concepts both in the collection and interpretation of your data, and that provides a clear strategy of how to answer your research questions;
- Start writing at an early stage of the research; rewriting and editing are integral parts of the writing process;
- Reflect on the relevance of the research, your role as a researcher, and possible ethical issues as well as how you approach them.

### **Thesis evaluation criteria**

1. Choice of topic and title (relevance of topic for the field of socio-legal studies)
2. Style (reference entries, in-text citations, lay-out, page numbers)
3. Language (spelling, grammar, punctuation, range of word use, readability)
4. Relevance and clarity of research question/s
5. Selection of relevant primary sources / data and literature review
6. Methodology / research design
7. Logical construction of argument / structuration of the Master thesis



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8. Reflexivity (positioning of the argument in relevant debates) and self-reflexivity (situating oneself as researcher and author, also in relation to ethical issues)
9. General and specific knowledge of the Master candidate
10. Master candidate's own contribution in terms of new perspectives, synthesis, insights, methodology / approach

### **Supervision of Master's theses**

Each student is appointed one or, exceptionally, two individual supervisors. The appointment will take place in consultation with both the candidate and the supervisor(s) in question. The Scientific Director is the main contact in this respect overseeing the process. Students may consult course teachers for advice about their thesis topic, and may also ask a course teacher to act as supervisor for the thesis. Consultation should start at least four weeks prior to the appointment. In many cases, supervisors will be teachers of the IISL Master programme and related UPV/EHU faculty, although students wishing to conduct research on a topic that falls outside the topic area of courses taught and/or requires particular expertise may be assigned an external supervisor.

Supervision may entail helping students focus on a suitable topic, suggesting literature and other sources, discussing the theoretical approach and methodology in relation to the research questions, commenting on the student's literature review and other draft chapters of the thesis, and approving the final draft for submission. Students are asked to keep in regular contact with the supervisors, usually by email/Skype/Zoom/WhatsApp, etc., and to agree with them on a timeline for the various stages in accordance with the general deadlines below. The individual timeline should allow sufficient time for the supervisor to comment on drafts according to their own schedules. If students decide not to follow any of the advice given by the supervisor, they should explain their reasons to the supervisor.

Supervisors are not asked to examine the thesis, which is the task of the Board of Examiners. However, supervisors will be asked for a short report (one page maximum) once the thesis is submitted. The report should include the supervisor's view of the quality of the thesis (see thesis evaluation criteria above), as well as any issues or circumstances that the supervisor feels relevant to be considered in the defence (e.g., unforeseen problems in collecting data, which should be mentioned in the thesis as well).

### **Submission of Master's theses**

According to general regulations applied by the University of the Basque Country, students shall benefit from two assessment calls (*convocatoria*) per academic year to submit and defend their Master's theses. These two assessment calls are covered by the tuition fee for the academic year they are enrolled in.

If students do not complete the Master's thesis research module (20 ECTS) within one of these calls (i.e., if you do not submit your thesis in time or if you do not successfully defend your thesis), they will not be able to obtain the degree without incurring further costs, and finishing the programme will be delayed. In practice, this means that students who do not submit and defend their theses in the first year have to move to the second year and pay additional fees (for the Master's thesis research module only) in order to be able to make use of further assessment calls (the earliest option being an additional assessment call towards the end of the calendar year).

As the Master's thesis project is the final assignment after all the coursework is completed, the two assessment calls we hold are targeted for thesis submission towards the end of the academic



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year, with thesis submission being due either in June (1<sup>st</sup> call) or July (2<sup>nd</sup> call) and defences taking place right before the Spanish summer break (mid-July) or right after (early September).

If you take part in the 1<sup>st</sup> call (which is sort of the “fast track”), you have a few weeks less to focus on your thesis project, but you will be able to defend your thesis already in July. You may thus consider your studies as complete, and we may also provide you with a preliminary certificate, before the Spanish summer holidays, even though the formal degree will only be granted upon conclusion of the academic year end of September.

In case you make use of the 1<sup>st</sup> assessment call but do not successfully defend your thesis, you will be able to take part in the 2<sup>nd</sup> call covered by your tuition fees. The submission deadline in the 2<sup>nd</sup> call can be slightly adapted in this case, subject to approval by the Scientific Director and agreement with all three examiners.

If you make use of the 2<sup>nd</sup> call only (which is the “main road”, which most students will take), you will have a few weeks more to conclude your thesis research project and submit the thesis, but you will only be able to defend your thesis in September. This is because we cannot organise any defences in the month of August, when our staff is on holiday, and we also need to factor in more time for internal examiners to read a greater number of Master’s theses to be defended at the end of the academic year.

Please note that the **thesis submission dates**, in both calls, are **hard deadlines**. If a thesis is not submitted by the indicated dates, students cannot expect the examination process to be organized in time for them to graduate in July (1<sup>st</sup> call) or September (2<sup>nd</sup> call), respectively. If they miss the deadline of the 2<sup>nd</sup> call, they would have to register again for the thesis module in the following academic year, which would incur an additional fee to the UPV/EHU.

For organisational reasons, we will ask you early on which of the two regular calls you are aiming at (1<sup>st</sup> call / “fast track” or 2<sup>nd</sup> call “main-road”) for first submitting and defending your thesis. If you prefer to take the 2<sup>nd</sup> call with more time to complete your thesis project, the 1<sup>st</sup> call will be formally registered as rejected (*renuncia*).

Importantly, this does not count as a “failed” try and it does not reduce the formal number of chances you have to pass the Master’s thesis research module (four calls altogether). It just means that you did not choose that call, and if you go for the 2<sup>nd</sup> call instead, it has no further consequences. Only if you do not take (and pass) the 2<sup>nd</sup> call either, you will have to move to the next academic year and pay additional fees to complete the Master’s thesis research module.

Students in the *second* academic year who want to finish their Master’s thesis project early on can request an advance call, which allows them to defend their thesis towards the end of the calendar year (thesis submission in November). Otherwise, the regular assessment calls apply, with thesis submission being due in June/July and the defence taking place before or after the summer break.

### **Examination of Master’s theses**

Apart from the Scientific Director, two additional examiners – an internal examiner of the UPV/EHU and an external examiner – are appointed for grading each individual thesis. The Scientific Director can be replaced by an UPV/EHU colleague in some cases (e.g., for organisational reasons). An additional internal examiner will be nominated as a substitute (fourth member of the Board of Examiners). The prerequisite for becoming an examiner is a doctoral degree. The examiners will assess the thesis in question on the basis of the thesis evaluation criteria listed above. Supervisors may attend the defence but are not jury members.



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The Master's thesis defence takes place in the form of an **oral defence (viva)**, which can be organised **face-to-face** (on-site at the IISL), **virtually** (online, using a video-conferencing platform), or in a **dual mode** (i.e., in hybrid form, with some participants being on-site and others online). For the oral defence, a day and time will be arranged with the Master Coordination Team, at which all parties are available, including the Board of Examiners, the candidate in question, as well as IISL support staff. Two video-conference rooms will be used, one for the public act, which the student will be able to share with up to twenty people (who have to remain silent throughout the whole event), and a second, which will only be accessed by the Board of Examiners for their deliberation.

The oral defence procedure will take approximately 90 minutes. The scheme will be as follows: (1) words of welcome by the Scientific Director and decision on who is chairing the defence; (2) summary of the most relevant aspects of the thesis by the candidate (ca. 15 minutes); (3) interventions by examiners (no more than 10 minutes each); (4) candidate's response to examiners' comments and remarks (up to 30 minutes and, if needed, additional but short comments by examiners); (5) the examiner team withdraws to deliberate for no more than 15 minutes; (6) the examiner team returns to the room and the Scientific Director or the chair of the defence communicates the result of the deliberation, i.e., the final grade of the thesis; (7) at the end, the supervisor, if present, may be invited for a short statement on the candidate's work.

With video-conferencing tools being widely available today, the **oral defence is the default mode** even if candidates and examiners are in different countries at the time of the defence.

In the past, written defences were used as an alternative mode, which can still be resorted to in exceptional, well-justified cases. In the case of a written defence, all examiners provide an evaluation of the thesis in writing including comments and questions to be sent to the student. Students are requested to give written replies to the examiners within one week of receiving their comments. The reply should aim to succinctly answer to the questions and concerns raised by the examiners. The reply should not restate the argument of the thesis. After reading the written replies, or defence, the examiners assign a definitive grade.

As in the coursework, the Spanish grading scale is applied. Accordingly, the grade awarded to a student should be a numerical grade out of 10, with 5.0 being the passing mark.



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## IMPORTANT DATES 2024

January 27 <sup>th</sup> , until 11:00pm	Provisional thesis title and short outline (1,000 words) by students submitted to Moodle
March 30 <sup>th</sup> , until 11:00pm	Thesis research proposal (2,500 words) by students submitted to Moodle; students announce whether they will take the 1 <sup>st</sup> or 2 <sup>nd</sup> call; based on this: appointment of supervisors & examiners for the respective periods
May 15 <sup>th</sup> , until 11:00pm	First progress report by students submitted to Moodle (supervisors download them from Moodle themselves)
June 15 <sup>th</sup> , until 11:00pm	Second progress report by students submitted to Moodle (supervisors download them from Moodle themselves)
1 <sup>st</sup> call: 27 <sup>th</sup> June, until 11:00pm	Final thesis submission by students who opted for the 1 <sup>st</sup> call to Moodle (supervisors and examiners can download the theses from Moodle on their own, examiners begin reading); <u>no submission needed if students have opted for the 2<sup>nd</sup> call</u>
1 <sup>st</sup> call: 15 <sup>th</sup> to 19 <sup>th</sup> July	For students in the 1 <sup>st</sup> call only: oral defences in person or online to be scheduled within this period; finalisation of the grades by the examiners
2 <sup>nd</sup> call: July 25 <sup>th</sup> , until 11:00pm	Final thesis submission by <u>students in the 2<sup>nd</sup> call</u> to Moodle (supervisors and examiners can download the theses from Moodle on their own, examiners begin reading)
1 <sup>st</sup> call: July 29 <sup>th</sup>	IISL sends grades & documentation of the 1 <sup>st</sup> call to UPV/EHU administration, prepares preliminary certificates if requested
September 2 <sup>nd</sup> , until 11:00pm (in case of written defences only)	Comments and questions by examiners submitted to Moodle (examinees download them from Moodle themselves)
September 9 <sup>th</sup> , until 11:00pm (in case of written defences only)	Written replies by students Moodle; in the next three days: finalisation of the grades by the examiners
2 <sup>nd</sup> call: September 2 <sup>nd</sup> to 12 <sup>th</sup> (period for oral defences)	Oral defences in person or online to be scheduled within this period; finalisation of the grades by the examiners
2 <sup>nd</sup> call: September 13 <sup>th</sup>	IISL sends grades & documentation of the 2 <sup>nd</sup> call to UPV/EHU administration