

**European History, Politics and Society MA Program  
Columbia University  
Thesis Guidelines**

A Master's thesis is the capstone of the European History, Politics and Society program. In researching and writing the thesis, students bring the knowledge and skills they have learned through their classes to bear on a topic of their choice. The thesis is both "broad," in the sense that all of your studies are in the background, supporting your work, and "concentrated," as an intensive, extended analysis of a single topic. You should start thinking about possible topics, and building relationships with potential faculty advisors, early in the program. Your original ideas probably will change as you take more classes, do research for seminar papers, and talk with members of the faculty. The journey from your initial plans to a polished thesis is an important part of your studies.

**Deadlines**

The deadlines for each term are listed on the MA website on the [Thesis](#) page. There are three deadlines to note:

1. For you to submit your prospectus and Thesis Registration Form to the EI.
2. For your advisor to submit the Thesis Evaluation Form to the EI.
3. For you to deliver final paper and electronic copies of your thesis to the EI.

**The Process**

The process of completing the thesis can be divided into five stages. The MA Colloquium is designed to guide you through the process by introducing you to topics in the study of modern Europe, training you in research and writing, and helping you refine your ideas into a thesis prospectus. The first stage is *identifying a topic*. You may arrive at Columbia with a sense of the fields that interest you most, whether modernist poetry, the European banking system, the history of religious communities, or trade unions. You should also reflect on what grabs your attention in your classes or as you read international news. Talk with your instructors, and ask if they can suggest some reading. You will need to do some initial research to see if a topic is substantial enough to be the focus of your thesis.

The second stage is *developing a prospectus*. A prospectus is a carefully organized discussion of your "prospects" for the thesis. It outlines a topic, identifies your sources, summarizes the important scholarship on the topic, and outlines a research plan. It should convey the topic's importance, which may be different for, say, a thesis on immigration and one on the British avant-garde. You will dig further into your topic—the second stage of research—to complete the prospectus. Your thesis advisor and the MA Faculty Advisor will give you feedback. The entire prospectus, including a bibliography, will be around ten double-spaced pages. Your thesis advisor must approve it before you can register to write the thesis. Some topics will require a second advisor, who also must approve. Note that there are deadlines for submitting your prospectus to the Program Manager in order to register to write in the following semester. (See "Deadlines" and "Registering to Write.")

Next is a stage of *intensive research*. By the time you get here you will be ready to dive in. You will have learned the methods appropriate for your topic through your classes, while you will have planned your research through your prospectus. Some topics will require visiting archives in Europe, others obtaining EU and national data, while the research for some is best conducted in a library. (See "Research Grants.") Full-time students normally complete intensive research in the summer between their first and second years. Regardless of your schedule, this is the stage when you will not only build up your knowledge but also test your ideas, so that you begin to frame your topic in an argument.

The fourth stage is *writing and follow-up research*. A well planned prospectus and thoughtful research will bring you to the point where can you put the findings of your research, and your argument about them, onto paper. Full-time students generally write their thesis in the Fall semester of the second year. As you write, you probably will discover that you need to do some follow-up research, for example to support a part of your argument that is more important than you initially thought. These minor gaps in your knowledge will appear as you write. For this reason you should not think that you have to exhaust every possible line of research before you begin writing. Keep in close contact with your advisor as you write. Theses usually are 13,000 to 16,000 words long, excluding notes and bibliography (approximately 40 to 50 double-spaced pages).

The final stage of your thesis is *evaluation and possible revisions*. You will submit your finished thesis to your advisor(s) who will evaluate it and assign a grade. Your advisor may decide the thesis needs to be revised before it can be considered complete. You will receive a grade, and graduate from the program, only after completing the revisions and re-submitting the thesis for approval. When your thesis is complete and approved, you will deposit a print and an electronic copy with the European Institute. Take note of the deadlines for the Institute to receive the Thesis Evaluation Form and final copies in order to graduate in a given semester. (See "Submitting Your Thesis" and "Deadlines.")

### **Finding an Advisor**

You are responsible for finding your thesis advisor. The Program Director and MA Faculty Advisor can help by directing you to members of the faculty with expertise in the topics you are considering. Advisors must be current faculty members of a relevant department at Columbia or Barnard, and must hold a PhD or other comparable degree. You should start thinking about advisors in your first semester. Introduce yourself to your instructors and talk with them about your interests. Look through the faculty directories on department websites, and make appointments to talk with professors who teach or do research on topics you are considering. Some topics, such as a study of Dante's influence on Beckett or a comparison of agricultural policy in the EU and China, will require two advisors. In some cases you should talk with members of the faculty who might not work on Europe, but would be familiar with your topic in other ways. An anthropologist who writes on kinship in Central America, for example, could be a valuable resource for a thesis on kinship in the Balkans. Your advisor will be most important to you for *intellectual* guidance, on the background of your topic, sources, and research methods. You should not expect your advisor to read all of your drafts.

## Research Grants

The European Institute offers competitive grants to European History, Politics and Society students who want to conduct thesis research in Europe. The thesis grants may be used for travel, living expenses, and research expenses such as library fees and copying. A variety of projects are eligible, including library and archival research and field work. The application process opens at the end of the Fall and Spring semesters and is announced through the MA Colloquium and the MA program mailing list. Students may also request information from the Program Director. A version of the prospectus is the main component of the application. While this does not have to be the final version, you should plan accordingly. More information is available on the [Thesis Grants](#) page of the MA web site.

## Registering to Write

You will write your thesis, and receive course credit, through EHPS GR6999, Supervised Individual Research. Registration for this course is blocked. To register, you will need to submit the Thesis Registration Form (available on the [MA website](#)) and your approved prospectus to the Program Manager by the appropriate deadline for the Summer, Fall, or Spring semesters. The Program Manager will provide you with a call number that you will use to register.

## Submitting Your Thesis

When you and your advisor agree that your thesis is ready to be evaluated, you need to assemble it according to the guidelines below ("Physical Structure of the Thesis") and complete the top part of the Thesis Evaluation form (also on the [MA website](#)). Give the Thesis Evaluation Form and a copy of the thesis to your advisor. If you have a second advisor, give him or her a copy of the thesis; the primary advisor will coordinate the evaluation. Be sure to allow your advisor enough time to give your thesis a thorough evaluation. We recommend giving your advisor *three to four weeks* before the deadline for submitting the evaluation to the Program Manager. Only your advisor may submit the evaluation. We will not accept evaluations delivered by students. If the evaluation form indicates that you need to make minor revisions, you must complete them before depositing the final thesis copies with the Institute. When you have finished the revisions, if any, you must deposit both a print and an electronic copy of your thesis to the EI. If the form indicates major revisions, or you miss the deadline, you will receive an Incomplete. You will have about 6 months to finish the Incomplete; check the GSAS Student Guide page on [Grading System-Incompletes](#) for exact deadlines.

## Institutional Review Board Approval for Research on Human Subjects

Under Federal and New York State law, no one may undertake research that involves human subjects, including interviews, surveys, or related methods, without *prior review and approval* or evidence of exemption from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). IRB guidelines and applications are available at [columbia.edu/cu/irb](http://columbia.edu/cu/irb).

### Physical Structure of the Thesis

The final version of the thesis marks the end of your work in the European History, Politics and Society program. As public testimony of your scholarship, a digital copy is stored online on the [MA website](#) and a physical copy is deposited in the European Institute, where it is available to other students and scholars. Therefore its physical appearance is a matter of some importance to you and to the program.

- The final version should be approximately 13,000 to 16,000 words long (40 to 50 double-spaced pages), excluding notes and bibliography.
- Your notes and bibliography must be in a single, accepted style. The choice of style is up to you and your advisor. The most common styles are MLA and Chicago (see the *MLA Handbook* and the *Chicago Manual of Style*). You must use the same style throughout the thesis.
- For the text, use one standard paragraph style and font size throughout. Double-space the text. Long quotations should be single-spaced and indented; footnotes and bibliography should be single-spaced.
- The title page should not be numbered, but all other pages should be numbered sequentially.
- Margins should be consistent throughout: 1½ inches at the top and left sides and 1 inch at the bottom and right sides.
- Print your thesis on good-quality 20 lb. bond paper (acid-free if possible).
- Bind the thesis with a transparent front cover and an opaque back cover. The binding should be strong, permanent and durable. Velobind, which uses a plastic strip and "rivets," is the best type of binding available at most copy shops.

[SAMPLE thesis title page]

Columbia University  
Graduate School of Arts & Sciences

MASTER OF ARTS IN EUROPEAN HISTORY, POLITICS AND SOCIETY

< TITLE >

a thesis by

< YOUR NAME >

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of  
Master of Arts

< month and year of degree conferred >