

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

The Master's thesis is the capstone of the European History, Politics and Society program. The thesis must be a substantive text of original research that requires critical examination of a research question related to the study of modern Europe. The thesis should make an original contribution to the relevant literature by producing new data and/or new analysis on the thesis topic. In researching and writing the thesis, students bring the knowledge and skills they have accumulated throughout their course of study to bear on a topic of their choice. The thesis is both "broad," in the sense that all of a student's studies are supporting their work, and "concentrated," as an intensive, extended analysis of a single topic.

Students should start thinking about possible topics and building relationships with potential faculty advisors early on in the program. Most students' thesis topic will change as they take more classes, do research for seminar papers, and interact with members of the faculty. The journey from initial plans to a polished thesis is an important part of a student's 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 the student to submit a prospectus and Thesis Registration Form to the EI.
2. For the student's advisor to submit the Thesis Evaluation Form to the EI.
3. For the student to deliver final draft and electronic copies of the thesis to the EI.

The Process

The MA Colloquium is designed to guide students through the process of writing their Master's thesis by introducing them to topics in the study of modern Europe, training them to do academic research and writing, and helping them refine their ideas, prepare a thesis research plan, and write a prospectus.

The first stage of developing the Master's thesis is *identifying a topic*. Students may arrive at Columbia with a sense of a field or topic of interest, whether modernist poetry, the European banking system, the history of religious communities, or trade unions. Students should also reflect on what grabs their attention (that is, what's surprising or noteworthy) about this topic when examining it in classes or when following relevant news and research. Students are also encouraged to discuss their topics with their instructors and ask for their advice on turning the topic of interest into a research question. Students should further ask their instructors for suggestions on readings that would further the student's understanding of the topic. Students will then need to do

independent research to see if a specific topic is substantial and viable enough to be the focus of their thesis and whether they can reasonably expect to make an original contribution to the relevant literature.

The second stage of developing the Master's thesis is *developing a prospectus*. A prospectus is a carefully organized discussion of a student's research plans for the thesis. It is to present a student's thesis research agenda, justify its academic and/or applied significance, and outline the student's plans for conducting the proposed study. The prospectus outlines a specific research question and summarizes the important scholarship on the topic, including a persuasive justification of the theoretical, methodological, empirical and/or applied need for answering the question posed. It also offers a coherent and compelling presentation of the (tentative) argument and possible alternative arguments. The prospectus further conveys a detailed research design, describing the information to be collected and the analysis to be performed to answer the main research question in the thesis.

A student's thesis advisor and the MA Faculty Advisor will provide their feedback. The entire prospectus, including a bibliography, should be around ten double-spaced pages. The student's thesis advisor must approve it before the student can register to write the thesis. Some topics will require a second advisor, who must also approve the prospectus. Note that there are deadlines for submitting the prospectus to the Program in order to register to write the thesis. (See "Deadlines" and "Registering to Write.")

Next is a stage of *intensive research*. Students will have learned the methods appropriate for their thesis research through classes and discussions with their thesis adviser and will have planned their research through the MA Fall and Spring colloquium sequence. The research for some theses is best conducted in a library, whereas other topics will require fieldwork, such as visiting archives, conducting interviews or oral histories in Europe, obtaining EU and national data, and/or collecting images or actual objects, etc. Full-time students normally complete intensive research in the spring and/or summer of their first year.

The fourth stage of developing the Master's thesis is *writing and follow-up research*. Diligent and active participation in the MA Fall and Spring colloquium sequence and disciplined and well-executed research will help students put the findings of their research, and their argument about them, onto paper. Full-time students generally write their thesis in the summer semester of their first year. As they write, students often discover that they need to do some follow-up research, for example to support a part of their argument that is more important than initially thought. Students should keep in close contact with their advisor as they 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 developing the Master's thesis is *evaluation and possible revisions*. Students submit their finished theses to their advisors who will evaluate them and

assign grades. The advisor(s) may decide that the thesis needs to be revised before it can be considered finalized. Students will receive a grade, and graduate from the program, only after completing the revisions and re-submitting the thesis for approval. When the thesis is complete and approved, students 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

Students are responsible for finding a thesis advisor. The MA Faculty Advisor can help by directing students to members of the faculty with expertise in their topics of interest. Advisors must be current faculty members at Columbia or Barnard. Students should start thinking about potential advisors in their first semester. Students should introduce themselves to their instructors and other faculty and discuss their research interests. Students could look through the faculty and class directories on department websites or attend faculty research presentations on campus in order to identify faculty who teach or do research on relevant topics. Some topics, such as a study of Dante's influence on Beckett or a comparison of agricultural policy in the EU and China, might require two advisors. All students are strongly encouraged to talk with members of the faculty who might not work on Europe, but would be familiar with the theoretical debates central to their research or the research methods to be used in the students' theses. An anthropologist who writes on kinship in Central America, for example, could be a valuable resource for a thesis on kinship in the Balkans. The advisor will provide *intellectual* guidance on the background of the topic, literature, sources, and research methods. Students should not expect their advisor to read all 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. 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. A prospectus is the main component of the application. More information is available on the [Thesis Grants](#) page of the MA web site.

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.

Registering to Write

Students will write their theses, and receive course credit, through EHPS GR6999, MA Thesis. Registration for this course is blocked. To register, each student will need to submit a filled out Thesis Registration Form (available on the [MA website](#)) and approved prospectus to the Associate Director by the appropriate deadline for the Summer, Fall, or Spring semesters. The Associate Director will provide a call number that students will use to register.

Submitting the Thesis

When the advisor and student agree that the student's thesis is ready to be evaluated, the student needs 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](#)). The student should give the Thesis Evaluation Form and a copy of the thesis to their advisor. If a student has a second advisor, they should also receive a copy of the thesis; the primary advisor will coordinate the evaluation. Students should be sure to allow their advisor(s) enough time to give the thesis a thorough evaluation. We recommend giving the advisor(s) *three to four weeks* before the deadline for submitting the evaluation to the Associate Director. Only the primary advisor may submit the evaluation. The Program will not accept evaluations delivered by students. If the evaluation form indicates that the student needs to make minor revisions, those must be completed before depositing the final thesis copies with the Institute. When the student has finished the revisions, if any, the student must deposit both a print and an electronic copy of your thesis to the EI. If the form indicates major revisions, or the student misses the deadline, the student will receive an IN or CP grade. The student will have about six months to finish their work on the thesis; check the GSAS Student Guide page on [Grading System-Incompletes](#) for exact deadlines.

Thesis Instructions

The final version of the thesis is the culmination of a student's work in the European History, Politics and Society program. As public testimony of scholarship, a digital copy is stored in the European Institute's online archive 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 each student 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 the student and the thesis advisor. The same style must be used throughout the thesis.
- For the text, a single standard paragraph style and font size should be used throughout the thesis. The text should be double-spaced. 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.
- The thesis should be printed on good-quality 20 lb. bond paper (acid-free if possible).
- The thesis should be bound 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.
- In order to meet the requirements for the degree, the thesis must further:
 - Be a work of original research that makes a meaningful contribution to the relevant literature and uses primary sources over secondary ones whenever possible (however, students are not necessarily expected to conduct field research);
 - Demonstrate mastery of the current literature relevant to the topic and critically engage with different viewpoints within that literature;
 - Present clear arguments and strong supportive evidence that are persuasive to a reasonable and interested but initially uncommitted non-expert reader;
 - Follow a clear and logical narrative structure and a clear and accessible style of writing, free of colloquialisms and unnecessary jargon, with

correct references and citations as well as correct orthography, punctuation and syntax;

- Be of a sufficient quality to receive the mark of C or higher. The thesis adviser will review the final thesis to ensure that the above-minimum requirements are met before approving the thesis.
- These are *suggested* guidelines to assist thesis advisers in their evaluation of the thesis:
 - C+ suggests that the thesis meets the thesis standards above.
 - Moving up from a C+, the work is characterized by more originality, better execution, greater narrative clarity, or other distinguishing features beyond adequate fulfillment of the requirement.
 - Moving down from a C+, the argument is incomplete, unclear or imprecise at certain points, or is not clearly organized, and/or the evidence is insufficient to establish the argument, or the thesis contains a level of technical writing errors that interferes with reader comprehension.
 - A grade of C- does not meet the minimum requirements of the thesis outlined above.
 - An A+ is given rarely if the work is of exceptional quality.
 - Advisors may recommend and specify minor revisions to be made in theses that earn a grade between A and C. These minor revisions must be completed by the student and the final thesis deposited in the program office before graduation.
 - If the thesis requires major revisions, the student should be given the grade of IN or CP. The student must submit the revised thesis within six months to the first advisor, who then determines the letter grade, completes the evaluation form, and submits all paperwork to the program.
 - If the thesis submitted to the adviser is of a C quality, but the student's actual grade is a C- or lower due to a grade deduction penalty, the student will still be able to graduate.
 - Grades of D and F are failing grades. A student who receives a D or F will not be certified for the degree, although they may submit for consideration a new proposal for a thesis. In such cases, the GSAS policies regarding re-taking courses in which a student receives an F will apply.

Prospectus Instructions

The prospectus should include:

- Intro – An attention-grabbing introductory hook or puzzle and a brief background on and introduction to thesis topic.
- Research Question – A specific, narrowly-focused, and clearly-stated thesis question as well as a justification of the significance of this thesis: How does it make an original contribution to and build on the existing literature? What are the advantages of the thesis analysis in comparison to alternative and previous interpretations and approaches? (Note: Remember, a gap or bias in the literature is not necessarily a sufficient justification for a thesis – Why is it important for that gap to be addressed?) The key concepts in the research question should also be defined and historically contextualized.
- Literature Review – This section should include a critical classification and discussion of the relevant literature on the research question as well as a summary of the theoretical framework that would guide the thesis analysis. What is the relationship of the thesis question to the previous literature? What closely related scholarly ideas and concepts will the thesis build on? What are the gaps the thesis might seek to address or debates it might advance or reconcile?
- Argument – A coherent and compelling presentation of the (tentative) main argument and possible alternative arguments. The latter could come from the student's literature review, theoretical framework, or be otherwise deductively or inductively constructed.
- Methodology – A detailed research design, describing the information to be collected and the analysis to be performed on it. What are the sources of this information and how will it be obtained? Is there sufficient data to answer the thesis research question, can this data be reasonably accessed, and can it be feasibly collected over the course of the semester? Will the thesis rely on a quantitative, qualitative, or a mixed-methods approach? What's the specific analytical technique to be used? And what information would substantiate the main and alternative arguments?
- Conclusion – A summary of the main findings of the thesis and its implications.

Additional notes:

- The information referenced should be properly referenced. Notes and bibliography must be in a single, accepted style.
- The proposal may be altered after submission, with approval of the adviser, if research indicates that a different direction would be more productive.

Thesis Adviser and Advisee Agreement

The following is based on the GSAS Effective Practices for Faculty Mentors.

The thesis adviser agrees to:

- Advise on identifying an original and sufficiently narrow research question that can be addressed in a MA thesis;
- Suggest pertinent bibliographical sources and approaches for students' research;
- Provide advice on thesis research (choice and implementation of methodology) and writing (argument, theoretical framework, and thesis organization). (Note: Students are themselves responsible for the style and format of the thesis.)
- Read and return written work to advisee with constructive comments within two weeks of receipt of drafts;
- Communicate with the MA Faculty Adviser regarding students' progress and specific matters as they arise (for example, if the student does not meet agreed upon deadlines, does not make sufficient progress on the thesis, or is encountering difficulties that may prevent the timely completion of the thesis).

M.A. advisees agree to:

- Propose a work plan, including a set of written deliverables with deadlines and a schedule for regular meetings with the adviser;
- Meet the deliverable deadlines and attend meetings with the adviser at the agreed-upon time;
- Respond fully to adviser's comments and critiques, including incorporating agreed-upon changes and revisions;
- Proofread and edit thesis drafts, especially the final version of the thesis so it is as polished as possible;
- Notify as soon as practicable the thesis and MA Faculty advisers regarding significant developments that require changes to the work plan or that more broadly affect the student's progress on the thesis.

[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 >