

Master's Thesis - Student Information Sheet

Institute for Social Anthropology

February 2024

An MA thesis constitutes the final part of the MA major programme. The student will carry out an independent piece of research. This entails formulating a clearly defined research question as well as an original argument and analysing those by taking into account the current state of research in social anthropology. An in-depth review of the existing literature and a critical reflection thereof are essential. MA major students are required to carry out at least two months of ethnographic field research. MA minor students submit a written thesis but conduct shorter or no field research.

The topic of the MA thesis is determined in agreement with the supervisor. The thesis amounts to between 200,000 and 275,000 characters in length and must be completed in six months. It may also include multimodal elements, in which case the length of the written part will be determined individually.

Please register online for the MA thesis: [Continue to online registration.](#)

The registration and submission deadlines for the thesis as well as the registration form can be found on the faculty website

(https://www.philhist.unibe.ch/studium/bachelor_master/masterabschluss/index_ger.html). Note that there is only one registration deadline per semester. Registration is binding and cannot be retracted.

Procedure

- Students contact members of the Institute of Social Anthropology in their area of interest. All professors and postdocs can be contacted.
- The topic of the thesis is determined in agreement with the supervisor. The topic can be freely chosen; it may be inspired by a course or a research project of the supervisor.
- The thesis engages with a **social anthropological topic**. It primarily draws on social anthropological literature and concepts.
- At least two months of ethnographic field research is obligatory.
- The thesis can be written in German or English. In agreement with the supervisor, the thesis can also be submitted in other national languages.
- The **submission deadline** is set by the faculty. Students should find out about the deadlines early on and set themselves realistic deadlines (please avoid extensions!).
- At the beginning, a **proposal** is written (4-5 pages). It contains a brief introduction to the topic, a (provisional) research question, an argument, possibly a rough outline of the content, a bibliography of the literature used in the proposal and an indication of the agreed submission

Master's Thesis - Student Information Sheet

Institute for Social Anthropology

February 2024

deadline (schedule). If possible, the proposal also contains a list of further literature that will be relevant for the thesis and a provisional title (working title). The proposal should also address the methodological approach to data collection (access, research locations, type and number of interviews, participant observation, document analysis, etc.) and analysis.

- The supervisor gives oral/written feedback on the proposal.
- The supervisor does not revise the rough draft of the thesis but is available by appointment to read a chapter and to answer questions on content and form during the writing process.
- The thesis must be submitted in both paper and electronic form to the Dean's Office and to the supervisor.
- The faculty approves the evaluation report of the thesis at the first faculty meeting of the following semester. After this meeting, you can request the report from your supervisor.
- The supervisor will provide **feedback on the grade of** the thesis in written form (evaluation report) and, if needed, in a personal meeting.
- The supervisor forwards the grade of the thesis to the degree programme coordinator. The grade is entered in the KSL by the degree programme coordinator or the Dean's Office.
- CREOLE students also have a 30-minute oral examination in which the thesis is presented and discussed, together with the supervisor and another professor. This examination must take place before the deadline for submission of the report, as the oral grade is included in the final grade (25%).
- The grade for the data collection is identical to the grade for the thesis; both grades only appear in the study profile after the start of the following semester. Please note: the application for the MA diploma may have to be submitted earlier.

Formal requirements

- **Length MA Major and MA Mono students:** 200.000 – 275.000 characters including spaces, footnotes and annotations (excluding bibliography, title page, appendices etc.).
- **MA minor students:** 35.000 – 50.000 characters including spaces, footnotes and annotations (excluding bibliography, title page, appendices, etc.).
- The **title page** contains the following information:
 - Title and subtitle of the MA thesis
 - University of Bern, Institute for Social Anthropology
 - First and last name, e-mail address, matriculation number and subject combination (MA Major or MA Minor programme) of the author

Master's Thesis - Student Information Sheet

Institute for Social Anthropology

February 2024

- First and last name of supervisor
 - Submission date
 - Number of characters
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- The **thesis contains** a title page, table of contents, introduction, main body, conclusion and bibliography. Optionally, a list of abbreviations and figures and tables can be included, and further documents can be added to the appendix. Examples of transcripts do not have to be attached but can be discussed during supervision if needed.
 - The guidelines for **citation style and bibliography** can be found here:
https://www.anthro.unibe.ch/studium/pruefungen_termine/index_ger.html
 - **The paper contains a declaration of independence**, the content of which must be adapted depending on whether artificial intelligence (AI) was used or not. The templates can be found here:
https://www.philhum.unibe.ch/unibe/portal/fak_humanwis/content/e8/e230183/e230227/2305_Erkl_Masterarbeit_ger.pdf
 - **Artificial intelligence (AI):** Competent and critical use of new tools is welcomed by the university and the Institute of Social Anthropology. It is at the discretion of the supervisor to decide whether to allow the use of AI tools and, if so, what needs to be taken into account. The university's guidelines on the matter can be found at the following link:
https://www.unibe.ch/unibe/portal/content/e809/e878/e880/e915/e36136/e1368980/e1383230/20230516_LeitlinienKI_datiert_ger.pdf

Evaluation criteria

Research question

Developing a good research question is a process: literature research → reading → topic selection → identifying the problem → in-depth literature research and reading → narrowing down → research question → field research → writing process (→ Possibly reformulate research question)

Tips for formulating a scientific research question (see also worksheet on developing a research question):

- The question should not require a purely descriptive answer (e.g. "What is the Kula swap?").

Master's Thesis - Student Information Sheet

Institute for Social Anthropology

February 2024

- Do not pack two sub-questions into one question.
- It is better to ask an open "how?" question than a closed "why?" question.
- The question should be clearly defined according to the scope of the work. (e.g. not: "How can ... be explained?" Better: "From the perspective of...how can we understand...?")
- It makes sense to start with a question that relates to a manageable sub-area within a broader topic. It is helpful to look for ongoing debates (special issues) on the topic and to formulate a question based on those.
- To narrow down a topic, you may want to ask: What problem or aspect of a subject area am I interested in? What research interest or goal am I pursuing with my investigation? Also: What am I not interested in? Which methods and which theoretical concepts are suitable for dealing with this field of research?

Evaluation criteria:

- Is the research question formulated precisely and carefully? (i.e. does the question make it clear which findings are to be obtained)
- Is the question appropriate to the task? (i.e. can it be answered within the given scope and based on the existing literature?)
- Is the research question relevant from a social anthropological perspective?)
- Are the connections between the question and the argument clear?

Argument

Developing your own argument is a central process of academic writing. The argument illustrates the original contribution of the work to the production of knowledge.

Tips for formulating a scientific argument:

- In an academic paper, the aim is to work out similarities and differences in the positions of several authors and to position oneself in an academic debate (empirically and theoretically) on the basis of one's own argument.
- The argument describes the process of departing from a question and reaching a possible answer. Several arguments can be weighed up against each other.
- The argumentation should not be based on personal convictions, but on scientific criteria and the author's own data.
- The argument should be derived developed in the introduction ("In this thesis I argue that..."), structure the thesis and be critically reflected in the conclusion.

Master's Thesis - Student Information Sheet

Institute for Social Anthropology

February 2024

- The argument does not present facts ("I argue that the European external border is increasingly militarised") but illustrates the author's specific approach and contribution to knowledge production ("I argue that X can be used to analyse the everyday consequences of the militarisation of the European external border").

Evaluation criteria

- Is the argument relevant and original?
- Does the argument address the relevant literature and locate the thesis within it?
- Does the author have the necessary data to convincingly develop the argument?
- Does the argumentation link the different chapters and is it revisited in the conclusion?

Literature research

The literature review is an integral part of a Master's thesis. If no suitable (i.e. relevant and scientific) literature on the topic is found, please contact the supervisor. The question and argument may need to be adapted.

Evaluation criteria:

- Does the literature used fulfil scientific criteria?
- Is the literature relevant for answering the research question and argument? (i.e. does the work reflect an examination of the current state of research on the chosen topic in social anthropology)
- Are the topics addressed by the argument convincingly and sufficiently discussed?
- Was AI used and if so, is it clearly demarcated to what extent it supported and influenced the research process?

Literature discussion and writing process

Evaluation criteria:

- Is the literature used discussed clearly and critically? (i.e. no lengthy summaries, but a precise rendition of the relevant theses and arguments in an abstract form)
- Has the current state of research been sufficiently and critically considered; possibly taking into account different scientific positions?
- Is there a comprehensible and consistently recognisable link between the question/argument and the literature discussed?
- Is the literature used presented correctly and precisely?

Master's Thesis - Student Information Sheet

Institute for Social Anthropology

February 2024

- Are your own position and the data generated put into a dialogue with the literature used? (i.e. is it clearly recognisable to what extent your own argumentation differs from the argumentation of other authors, or to what extent it refers to them?)
- Correctness of content
- Was AI used and if so, is it clearly demarcated to what extent it supported and influenced the analysis process?

Ethnographic research and empirical data

Evaluation criteria:

- Were anthropological research methods correctly implemented and applied?
- Is the data collection process (including field access, difficulties, etc.) related in a comprehensible way?
- Were questions about positionality discussed in relation to data collection?
- Has the data been processed conclusively?
- If the data has been coded, is it possible to understand how this contributes to the analysis and argument?
- Has the data skilfully been "written" into an ethnography?
- Could the data be convincingly related to the existing and relevant literature (empirical and theoretical)?
- Is it clearly argued to what extent this data and the argumentation contribute to knowledge production?

Language

Evaluation criteria:

- Does the language meet scientific standards? (i.e. precise choice of words, no colloquial language)
- Are the sentences clearly formulated? (not the more complex, the better)
- Is the text orthographically and grammatically correct?
- Was AI used and, if so, is it clearly demarcated to what extent it supported and influenced the writing and editing process?

Master's Thesis - Student Information Sheet

Institute for Social Anthropology

February 2024

Formal quality

Evaluation criteria:

- Does the Master's thesis fulfil the formal requirements for a scientific paper? (i.e. all direct and indirect quotations are clearly labelled, the citation style is consistent, the bibliography is correct and complete)
- Is the layout standardised and clear, is all the important information available?
- Does the thesis comply with the required word count?

General evaluation criteria:

- Is the text structured logically and coherently? (i.e. introduction, main part and conclusion build on each other and are clearly and argumentatively connected)
- Is the argument nuanced and scientific?
- Are key terms and concepts precisely defined and used carefully and consistently?
- Is all necessary, but no superfluous information available?
- Is the question answered and the argument discussed?
- Are quotes discussed and included in the argument?
- Are the different sections linked? (i.e. the transitions between paragraphs are smooth and the argumentative relationship between sentences or paragraphs is clearly formulated)
- If AI was used, was a critical analysis of its use included?