

AG2500 Master's Thesis for IAGG

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1. Learning outcomes

After completing the course the students is expected to be able to:

A. Knowledge and understanding

- Understand and independently apply the requirements and standards of social science research in order to complete an original research project relevant to international administration and global governance;

B. Skills and abilities

- Independently plan, carry out, and present a medium-scale research project that meets academic standards of reliability, validity, originality, organization and effective communication;
- Creatively, critically and independently identify, formulate and delimit an original scientific question of relevance to international administration and global governance,
- Creatively and independently select an appropriate methodological approach to answer a specified policy or social science question;
- Systematically and critically gather, compile empirical data and/or identify and evaluate existing empirical data, and determine whether the data are sufficient and appropriate to answer a research question and with what level of confidence;
- Communicate the results, orally and in writing, to different audiences, both in academic and policy contexts;

C. Judgment and approach

- Critically evaluate the reliability of conclusions and findings of academic research and policy evaluations;
- Identify and critically assess ethical issues related to research on human behaviour.

2. Schedule

See on Canvas for the final version (there could be some tiny change):

12/11 Introductory Lecture AA Room B009

4/12 Hand in Abstract 10:00

11/12 8-10 AA_MN Room C217

11/12 10-12 GX_MN Room C217

11/12 13-15 AA_GX Room C217

January/February Hand in Research Proposal TBA

January/February Seminars TBA

February 3rd Submission deadline for earlier students Master's thesis

February 11th seminars earlier students Master's thesis Rooms TBA

April Seminars TBA

April 27th If you want to hand in your thesis in May, e-mail Maria the preliminary title of your thesis and the name of your supervisor

May 25th Submission deadline for Master's thesis

June 2nd, 3rd and Possibly 4th seminars

3. Thesis Course content

Each student will formulate, plan and complete a Masters thesis in a given span of time. Writing the Masters thesis will develop students' ability to plan and manage large projects, and collect and analyze social science data to answer an original research question of relevance to international administration and global governance. Each student will receive support and substantive guidance from a thesis advisor. Students will present and defend the thesis at a final seminar, as well as act as a discussant on another student's thesis.

In addition to the guidance from the thesis advisor, the student will receive feedback from the faculty of this course:

Georgios Xezonakis

Marina Nistotskaya

Amy Alexander

...and, more importantly, from other students.

This feedback will take place in three different settings:

georgios.xezonakis@pol.gu.se

marina.nistotskaya@pol.gu.se

amy.alexander@gu.se

A. Seminar to discuss your Abstract

You are encouraged to think about your thesis as soon as possible. Ideally, you should condense your preliminary thoughts in a concise abstract, between 200 and 500 words.

The abstract should indicate the research question and needs to cover the following:

1. Research question, both the policy area and geographical focus if possible
2. Design and data
3. Some brief and basic idea of what research already exists on this topic

A few words on each:

1. Research question

There are several things to keep in mind in the early stages of formulating a research question. The question needs to be viable/executable. It is important to verify at an early stage that the research question can be analyzed with the available data/methods.

Further, the question needs to be limited in scope. If the chosen approach is quantitative, does sufficient data exist? If the method is qualitative, will it be possible to gain access to relevant sources? It doesn't matter how interesting the research question is if no conclusions can be drawn. You might also want to consider the following:

First, it is important to remember that there is no single most important / relevant / exciting issue to study in any given area of research. The idea that you might select the wrong topic can make it exceedingly difficult to select a topic. Similarly, keep in mind that throughout most of life as a student, you have read studies that have been selected because they are groundbreaking and seminal in a specific area of research. Such major advances are by definition rare and build on numerous smaller contributions that explore more specific aspects of social, economic and political life. Your topic should be realistic in scope – i.e. a question that can be answered in 20 weeks of work – and, most importantly, deal with an issue you find interesting.

Second, the thesis topic must relate to the field of international administration and global governance. As you very well know by now, the range of issues dealt with in the international community is vast, including the myriad specific questions related to human well-being and ecological sustainability. The common element in these issues, and what makes them relevant topics for an IAGG masters thesis, is that they are discussed, formalized in agreements, treaties, policy declarations, or policy agendas at the international level with the intent of bringing about change at the national, regional or local level. Thesis topics can focus on any aspect of this complex reality, dealing with questions such as:

- The content of a specific international agreement (or treaty, policy declaration, policy agenda etc), or a single country's foreign policy. The focus might be on the content of an existing policy, but also on the lack of a policy in an issue that one can argue needs policy attention at the international level. In other words, a thesis can examine and provide an analytical description of an economic, political, or social phenomenon that arguably needs to be addressed.
- The process leading up to the formulation of such an agreement. What actors were involved, who was included and excluded, who exerted influence and who was unable to shape the policy agreement?

- The implementation and effects of international or foreign policies. Unless it is stillborn, every policy decision affects some aspect of some group of individuals' social, political and economic life, and most have unintended as well as intended consequences.

This may not be an exhaustive list, but the topic should in some way relate to adding to our understanding of the problems generally dealt with in policy discussions and efforts, or the policies themselves.

Finally, one must consider the possibility that the results of the analysis may not be in line with the hypothesis in the research question. This is not necessarily a problem, but it is important to consider at an early stage how this would affect the thesis. Finally, though certainly not a requirement in any way, choosing a topic of which you have prior knowledge, either in terms of the subject area or the geographical focus, can be advantageous. Building on earlier coursework is, for example, a good way to jumpstart the thesis writing process.

2. Design and data

For the abstract, indicate what would be an ideal design to answer your research question. If, for example, you would like to do a country comparative study to determine whether the design of the judiciary shapes the level respect for human rights in a country, then it is enough at this stage to describe the *kinds* of countries you think you would need to compare to shed light on this issue. Should the countries be similar or different, and in what regard?

Similarly, if you do not know at this point exactly what data are available or exactly how you intend to collect the needed data, indicate what would be the ideal data and how it could be collected.

At the seminar, we will discuss each of the topic proposals in turn. The abstracts will be circulated to the others in each seminar group and you are expected to read and prepare constructive questions and suggestions on the others' topics. You will also receive suggestions for possible advisors for your thesis project.

3. What do we know about the topic

Reading abstracts of articles and book reviews can quickly give you an idea of what research has been done on a specific topic and geographical region. Google scholar (<http://scholar.google.com/>) is an excellent place to start. Samsök on UB's website also allows you to search through several academic databases, each indexing numerous journals, at the same time. It may be hard at this point to determine exactly where the frontier of research lies and define your own contribution, but it is good to figure out early on whether 1) some research exists on the issue you would like to explore as well as whether 2) a huge amount of research has already looked at the issue you would like to explore. In the first case, you may need to formulate your question in more explorative terms. If the latter is true, you may need to refine your research question and make it more specific.

You will get feedback on your abstract by two instructors.

B. Seminar to discuss your Research proposal

In January we will hold a seminar to discuss your Research Proposal

The research proposal could be inspired by the Methods paper, but should be focused on what the research of your thesis will be, not what you have done so far. This research proposal should have a length between 500 and 1,500-words – i.e. improving and expanding upon the same points covered in the abstract. In particular, it should reflect a greater familiarity with the relevant research and a more detailed description of the planned empirical investigation. Students should meet and discuss their topic with an advisor before writing the research proposal.

You will get feedback on your research proposal by two instructors.

C. Seminar to freely present your research up to that point

In April you will have the opportunity to present what you have done so far to other students. This is a totally voluntary, but useful chance to get feedback on your work up to that point. Each student will be able to present her or his thesis in 5 minutes in front of a tutor and the rest of members of her or his group, who, in turn, will offer their view on the research conducted and suggestions on how to proceed. This setting does not replace for the supervision, but can complement it, since it is a unique opportunity to “test” how you present your research to “third” parties in an environment that recreates the seminar where will defend your thesis later on.

3.Evaluation of Theses

A. Grading procedure

The theses will be graded by two members of the faculty, a principle grader and a secondary grader, neither of whom can be the thesis advisor. Each thesis will be discussed at a seminar in which a student, designated as discussant, comments on the thesis and the principle grader, as well as any other students in attendance, provide feedback on the text (see separate section on the seminar). After the seminars, all the faculty members involved in grading the theses will meet to discuss each student’s work and assign grades. Should any disagreement arise in assigning the grade, a third faculty member will read and evaluate the thesis as well. This procedure is intended to minimize the risk of conflicting assessments of theses depending on the department of the advisor and grader.

In addition to the notification of the grade, the principle grader will complete an evaluation form (see below). The evaluation form will reflect both the principle and secondary graders’ evaluation of the thesis on each of the grading criteria.

Each student is also required to act as discussant for one other student’s thesis, as well as attend a minimum number of other thesis seminars. More on each of these below.

B. Evaluation criteria

The most important attribute of a good thesis is the extent to which it is clear and internally cohesive. While seemingly straight-forward, this overarching criterion contains a number of component points that will all be considered when the thesis is evaluated.

Research aim and question

The research aim and questions should interrelate to one another such that answers to the individual research questions will result in fulfilling the aim of the study. Also, are the aim and questions of the research project:

- sufficiently specific for a study of this scope?
- relevant to the field of international administration and global governance?
- presented in the light of existing research such that the contribution made to academic and policy discussions is made clear?

Theoretical discussion and review of earlier research

Does the theoretical discussion and literature review:

- lay the foundation for the empirical investigation to follow?
- define relevant concepts and are these definitions in line with the operationalization and measurement of these concepts (generally discussed in the methodology section)?
- situate the study in a research field and use this review to specify and explain the relevance of the research question?
- identify, if relevant, possible alternative explanations to be taken into account in the empirical analysis?

Does the thesis operationalize the theory, in other words does it stipulate how the theoretical concepts are measured/captured/identified in the empirical analysis? Is the operationalization of concepts (or analytical framework) sufficiently specific so as to be useful in determining whether, and to what extent, the conceptual phenomena exist in the context(s) studied?

Methodological approach and design

Does the methods section provide:

- a clear and concise description of the method and design of the study, including an evaluation of data, material and sources?
- a discussion of the power and limitations of the methodological approach used?

Analysis and results

Are the empirical analyses and discussion and interpretation of results:

- presented clearly and effectively?
- reasonable?
- reflect an awareness of the validity and reliability of results?
- carried out in accordance with standards specified by the methodological approach employed?

Conclusion, discussion of results

Does the concluding discussion:

- relate the findings of the study to the research field?
- consider the policy implications of the study?

Overall quality

Does the thesis:

- demonstrate an ability to think critically and analytically, and to engage independently both with empirical material and in research debates?

- communicate effectively and in language appropriate for a research or policy analysis audience?

The table on the next page summarizes these criteria.

C. Grades and Grading

A thesis may receive the grades Pass with distinction, Pass, Pass with minor changes, and Fail. The section below provides further information on the distinction between 'Pass with minor changes' and 'Fail'.

The grading of theses is not a mechanical exercise. The thesis grade will reflect an assessment of all of the points above. Strengths in one area can compensate for shortcomings in others. In the cases in which the grade for the thesis is on the borderline between two grades, a student's responses at the seminar may influence the grade. As an example, if the text leaves questions unanswered regarding problems with the data, and a student is able to demonstrate an awareness of these problems verbally at the seminar, this may help to convince the grader to assign a higher grade. Keep in mind, however, that this occurs quite rarely; the text should contain the relevant information about the study.

D. Pass with minor changes versus Fail

Unlike most other graded assignments in the IAGG program, students whose master's theses do not receive a passing grade only receive one chance to revise their work and raise it to the standard of a passing grade. The principal grader will provide the student clear and concise feedback regarding what needs to be done to the thesis such that it can receive a passing grade. The required changes should be of a scope and scale that they can be addressed and remedied in approximately a week's time. If the thesis requires work that is greater than approximately a week's work, the thesis will receive a failing grade. A failing grade means the student must submit a new version of the thesis at the next deadline for submission and once again present the thesis at a seminar.

E. Summary of evaluation criteria

	Pass with Distinction	Pass	Fail
Research aim	Highly original and relevance to policy and social science debates clearly explained.	Original and relevant to policy and social science debates.	Research aim not clearly presented or not linked to rest of the thesis.
Theoretical discussion and review of existing research	Thorough and clear presentation of previous research relevant to the research aim. Very clear and appropriate definitions of key concepts.	Clear presentation of previous research relevant to the research aim. Clear and appropriate definitions of key concepts.	Discussion of previous research lacking or not relevant to the research question.
Research questions	Clearly formulated, and justified and explained in terms of existing research.	Clearly formulated and linked to existing research.	Unclear or not set in relation to existing research.
Methodological approach and design	Original and innovative, and highly suitable for answering the research questions.	Sound and suitable for answering the research questions.	Research methods insufficiently discussed or not suitable for answering the research questions.
Data and material	Very clearly presented and relevance to theory explained. Insightful discussion of strengths and limitations of the data.	Presented and relevance to theory explained. Discussion of strengths and weaknesses of the data.	Selection and evaluation of data and material falls short of scientific standards or not discussed at all
Results	Thorough and in-depth exploration of and clear answers to the research questions.	Thorough and in-depth exploration of the research questions.	Research questions not answer in a clear manner, or answers not set in relation to research aim.
Analysis	Research method correctly applied in a way that indicates ability to think independently and analytically.	Research method correctly applied.	No description of how answers to research questions are arrived at, or research method not applied correctly.
Conclusion and discussion of results	Clearly present the answers to the research questions, consider the generality of the findings, and explore the policy and theoretical implications of the study	Clearly present the answers to the research questions.	Unclear or no discussion of the findings of the study in relation to research questions and previous research.
Overall quality	Well structured and eloquently written.	Good or acceptable readability.	Unclear or difficult to understand.

F. Seminars and the role of the discussant

The primary function of the seminars is to receive feedback from the two graders and for students to discuss each others' work. Feedback from the graders is also given in writing. The seminars will be 1 hour and 15 minutes long.

The role of a discussant entails two main tasks, providing a brief summary of the thesis and a thorough commentary on the thesis.

The summary should cover all the main point so the thesis: the aim and research questions, the design and methods, and the main results. The reason for this summary is two-fold, first so that all those attending the seminar become familiar with the study, and second so that the discussant shows they have understood the thesis. The author of the thesis will have the opportunity to add or clarify the summary.

The second role of the discussant consists of discussing the strength and weakness of the study in a constructive manner. The discussant should first mention which points they intend to address so that others attending the seminar can, if desired, raise other questions related to the thesis. In general, discussants should consider the same criteria for evaluating theses mentioned above:

- Are the aim and research question of the thesis relevant to scientific and policy debates and is this relevance clearly explained?
- Does the thesis build on previous research and does the thesis convince you that the research questions address a question not answered in this previous research?
- Are the questions of the study reasonable, presented clearly, and do they all help to fulfill the overarching objective of the study? Are alternative explanations sufficiently taken into account?
- Are the research design, methods and data/materials appropriate to answer the research questions? Is it clear how the study has been carried out? Is there anything that could have been done better?
- Are the analyses and results clear and do they address the research questions posed? Do the conclusions follow from the analysis? What are the possible implications of the results? Does the author discuss these?

Feedback regarding minor errors can be provided to the author after the seminar. Focus on what you think needs clarification, could have been done better, or other issues related to the study that you feel perhaps should have been discussed in the thesis. If possible and appropriate, try to end each comment with a question rather than simply stating what you think could have been done better. This opens up for a discussion that can yield new insights.

The key to being a good discussant is to be as clear and constructive as possible. If you find it uncomfortable to offer and receive criticism on your work, it may help to remind yourself that you are not criticizing or calling into question the person per se, but rather offering rigorous and well thought out input on a text they have written.

You will be graded on how well you carry out the role of discussant, though you can only receive the grades Pass or Fail. A failing grade means you will have to submit comments on the thesis in writing within a week after the seminar.

G. Seminar attendance

You are expected to attend all of the thesis seminars. However, if you for some reason unable to attend all the seminars, there is a minimum requirement, which is 6 seminars including the seminar at which your own thesis is discussed and the one at which you act as discussant. Make sure that you sign the attendance sheet at each seminar that you attend.

4. Formal requirements

A. Length

The thesis should be between 6000 and 20,000 words, including all footnotes and references in the text, but not the bibliography, the abstract, title page or any appendices. These limits are strict and a thesis will not be accepted if it exceeds either the upper or lower limit. It is important that the title page to indicate the exact number of words in the thesis.

The thesis must comply with all the formal requirements of academic writing. All theses will be scanned digitally for signs of plagiarism. If plagiarism is detected, the thesis will receive a failing grade and the student *will be required to write a new thesis on a different topic*.

B. Abstract

A 250 word abstract should accompany the thesis. The abstract should present the research aim, the design and methods used, and the results of the analysis in very general terms.

C. Title Page

Please use the template provided on Canvas.

D. Submission guidelines

The deadline for confirming that you will submit your thesis is around three weeks before the deadline for uploading it on Canvas. There is a tool on Canvas (i.e. a “project group” you can join) in order to register your name and preliminary title of your thesis.

The deadline for submissions is usually one week before the final seminars, and must be uploaded to Canvas as a .pdf document. More detailed instructions will be available at Canvas. We also ask you to complete the form granting the department permission to publish your thesis electronically. Turn the form in to Maria Lilleste. This is, however, voluntary.

All of the thesis turned in by the deadline will be available for everyone to download on the next day, along with a schedule of seminars, which also indicates who will be discussant on which thesis.

E. What happens if I miss the deadline?

If you are unable to submit the thesis by the deadline, you will have to wait until the next round of seminars to submit the thesis. Unless otherwise indicated, there will be one or two opportunities per semester to submit your thesis. Keep in mind, however, that you must be present in Sweden to defend your thesis at the final seminar and submitting later than your intended date of graduation may result in visa complications or additional costs if you have to return to Sweden at a later point in time to attend the seminar.

F. Additional Information

If you plan on handing your thesis in, in September be aware that you may have less access to and feedback from your supervisor due to the summer break. The version of the thesis you hand in is the final version. If you find typos or other errors, you cannot change this and upload a new version after the deadline. If you are given the grade Revise and Resubmit after handing in May/June, your revision will not be evaluated until after the summer break. This

means that you will not receive a grade until late August and you will receive your diploma late.