



INTERDISCIPLINARY MASTER PROGRAMMES

GRADUATE INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AND DEVELOPMENT STUDIES

GUIDELINES FOR MASTER DISSERTATION | 2018-20 students

(Updated 9 April 2020)

This document presents the guidelines of the Master (MA) dissertation for students enrolled in the Master in International Affairs and the Master in Development Studies. Together with the general [Guidelines for Master Dissertations](#), students will find here the pedagogical objectives and expectations for writing and submitting an MA dissertation as part of the Interdisciplinary Master programmes.

1. General

The MA dissertation is the culmination of the two-year Master programme. It is a piece of independent writing carried out by Master students under faculty supervision. It addresses a (set of) research question(s) that are pertinent to global governance and/or international development, depending on the programme of studies. Students are expected to have a solid grasp on their topic of interest, demonstrate a general command of the relevant literature and the various disciplinary contributions, as well as an understanding of the concepts and methods used to address the research question(s).

2. MA Dissertation (standard version)

The standard version of the MA dissertation requires that students write a paper of minimum 14'000 words to maximum 18'000 words, including footnotes and bibliography, which will be awarded 18 ECTS. The MA dissertation should have the form of a critical discussion of a specific question relevant to global governance and/or international development. It should present an overview of how relevant disciplines have addressed a given research question and provide a comprehensive but succinct analysis of how this research question has been addressed in the literature. Students are encouraged to undertake original empirical or theoretical analysis on the research question.



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3. MA Dissertation (extended version)

Students may request to write an extended version of the MA dissertation of minimum 15'000 words to maximum 25'000 words, including footnotes and bibliography. The extended version is awarded 30 ECTS, which implies that students choosing this option take 12 ECTS less of Free Elective courses. Students will need to present an original research question addressing an issue relevant to global governance and/or international development. In addition to an overview of the literature required by the standard version, and how different disciplinary fields have addressed the research question, students are further required to conduct original research and analysis that can draw on a variety of methodologies that best correspond to the objectives of the inquiry.

Students requesting to write the extended version need to submit an application addressed to the Head of the Interdisciplinary Programmes (by email to mdev-mia@graduateinstitute.ch) before the end of the second semester. The application should include a short description of the project as well as a letter of support from the Professor who has agreed to supervise the work.

4. Supervision and Second Reader

Students may choose a supervisor among any of the Graduate Institute's faculty members. Faculty members are free to accept or decline the supervision request. In the case that students have trouble finding a supervisor, the Head of the Interdisciplinary Programmes will assure that all MIA and MDEV students find a qualified person.

The supervisor then chooses a second reader, as specified in the [Implementation Guidelines to the Academic Regulations](#). A visiting professor or lecturer may also be entitled to supervise a dissertation if s/he teaches for more than one semester at the Institute.

5. Content, Sections and Structure

An MA dissertation for students in the Master in International Affairs and the Master in Development Studies should comprise the below elements (the sections marked with an asterisk (*) apply only to those students choosing the extended version):

Abstract (mandatory): The abstract should be no longer than 150 words. It should state the topic of the thesis, describe the methods used, and give the main results or conclusions.

Table of Contents (mandatory): The table of contents should list the main sections/chapters of the body of thesis.

List of Figures, Illustrations and Tables (facultative): The list should contain all titles or descriptions so readers can locate items using the list (it may not be necessary to include entire figure/illustration/table captions). The list should contain the page number on which each figure, illustration, or table is found, as in a table of contents.

Introduction (mandatory): This section summarises the context and issues at stake, and should typically answer (a subset of) the following questions:

- What is the topic of study?
- How is the topic of study significant in terms of current questions on global governance and/or international development?
- What is the question to be examined regarding this phenomenon?
- What is the overall structure of the MA dissertation?

Literature review (mandatory): This section should locate the topic of investigation within the general literature that has been written on this topic. The student should demonstrate (i) that s/he possesses advanced knowledge of an important subject in the degree field; (ii) that s/he has knowledge and awareness of scholarly bodies of literature in related disciplines; and (iii) that s/he is able to pose and adequately address a significant research question relating to the subject from a perspective suitably grounded in the literatures and methods of one discipline whilst aware and reflective about the other/s. In general, this section should typically answer (a subset of) the following questions:

- How is the question addressed in the literature, and specifically by different disciplines in the social sciences?
- What does the existing scholarly literature say about the research topic and in what ways?
- Does it fall short of satisfactorily addressing the research question, and how?

* **Conceptual/theoretical framework (facultative):** when writing an extended version of the MA dissertation, the student may want to include a discussion that build on the literature review in order to introduce the core concepts, theories and/or models, hypotheses or claims that s/he uses (or posits, makes, refers to) in order to address the research question(s).

* **Methodology (mandatory):** when writing an extended version of the MA dissertation, this section will describe the methodological approach, including a brief discussion on this method's potential strengths and limitations. It will present and discuss the 'data': e.g. spatial, social,



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economic, institutional, political, historical elements considered; sources; general indicators; units of analysis; sampling, etc. If relevant, the data generated through interviews, questionnaires, field research, etc. will also be presented and discussed.

Analysis (mandatory): Findings based on the primary sources gathered during fieldwork, and/or on the secondary literature (for the standard version) will be presented and analysed here. This section should typically answer (a subset of) the following questions:

- What does evidence suggest with regard to the hypotheses (if applicable)?
- How does it relate to the existing literature and on-going scholarly and/or policy debates?
- What does evidence say about current questions on global governance and/or international development?

Conclusion (mandatory): Based on the data and analysis this section should include something useful and creative about the wider implications the subject matter has on wider questions of policy and/or research.

Bibliography (mandatory): This section should include all the primary and secondary sources consulted for the MA dissertation.

Appendix (facultative): this section may include additional documents drawn on in discussing the research question.

6. Format, Quotation Style and Plagiarism

The standard MA dissertation extends from a minimum of 14'000 to a maximum of 18'000 words, including footnotes and bibliography, as well as a 150-word abstract. The extended MA dissertation extends from a minimum of 15'000 to a maximum of 25'000 words, including footnotes and bibliography, as well as a 150-word abstract.

Students can choose a reference style amongst those commonly used *as long as they apply it consistently throughout the manuscript*. It is highly recommended that students work with a standard style guide in order to guarantee consistency, as well as in order to correctly cite references, such as for instance the *New Hart's Rules: The Oxford Style Guide*, edited by Anne Waddingham and published in its second edition in 2014 by Oxford University Press.

Students are particularly reminded to take note of the Institute's [internal guidelines governing citations of sources and plagiarism](#). Students are also encouraged to refer to the Institute's [online repository](#) to consult dissertations submitted in previous years.

7. Sources

Students may use a range of sources, including primary and secondary sources, quantitative and qualitative data, as well as written, oral, audio-visual, and online sources. The use of primary sources or original data generated from own field research is compulsory only for students choosing the extended version of the MA dissertation.

As for secondary sources, students are expected to conduct extensive research and thorough readings. They are further encouraged to make use of documents written in various languages. Strong research ethics is required. Ethical issues such as preserving the anonymity of interviewees or using dubious sources should be discussed with the supervisor.

8. Research Ethics

Students writing their MA dissertation are required to submit to the highest ethical standards, based on the principles of non-discrimination, social responsibility, respect, honesty and integrity. They are expected to respect the dignity, rights and safety of research subjects, collaborating researchers, and communities they work with. Researchers should at all times comply with best practices to minimise risk and avoid harm, protect vulnerable groups and persons, respect confidentiality and privacy, and observe the legal provisions of Switzerland and the countries in which they are operating.

The [Research Ethics Guidelines](#) define the Graduate Institute's position towards [research ethics](#) and contain a series of general recommendations. Together with the [Research Ethics Checklist](#), these documents offer guidance to allow students to self-assess whether their research is ethically sensitive and to take appropriate measures as needed.

9. Evaluation criteria

The evaluation criteria include:

- Originality, clarity and strengths of the research design; clarity in framing the issues, clarity of argumentation.
- Command of the relevant literature and relevance of the context analysis.
- Command and use of appropriate methodology, concepts and theories.
- Analytical skills, critical and nuanced thinking.



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- Writing skills, capacity to synthesise complex issues, structure and format of the text.
- Ability to integrate the comments of the supervisor(s) and to revise the manuscript accordingly.
- Autonomy and initiative.

10. Supervisor's involvement and calendar

Students must upload an electronic copy of their detailed dissertation plan on the Institute's intranet before the end of the third semester (no later than the deadline set up each year by the Director of Studies). The supervisor is expected to give feedback on the dissertation plan in a reasonable timespan.

Students must upload the final version of their dissertation on the Institute's intranet during the fourth semester (no later than the deadline set up each year by the Director of Studies). Supervisors agree with students on a calendar regarding exchanges on work progress and draft(s).

Students should let enough time between submitting a final draft, getting supervisor's feedback and revising the manuscript accordingly before uploading the final version. The timing should be agreed with the supervisor.

Failure to hold deadlines can be disqualifying. Please refer to the Graduate Institute's [Academic Regulations](#) and [Implementation Guidelines](#) for the specific rules and regulations applying to MA dissertations.