

Guidelines for the Master Degree Thesis in Polar Law School of Humanities and Social Sciences,  
University of Akureyri, Iceland

Approved by the School Council on August 18, 2010.

## **INTRODUCTION**

A supervisor is an expert in the area of a student's research topic. It is desirable that he/she has proper educational qualifications (Ph.D. degree) but, in exceptional cases, a qualified expert without this degree can be assigned to supervise a student.

A student must be registered for the Polar Law Programs, and he/she must have passed all required courses before completing the master thesis.

A master thesis is an individual student project that meets all the requirements of graduate level research as set forth below.

The person in charge of organizing the LL.M.- and M.A.-programs will assist students in finding a supervisor and obtain his/her consent, and the organizer will convene the examination committee.

The examination committee consists of two persons, that is an external expert and the thesis supervisor. The external expert serves as chairman.

The defense procedure is oral and open to the public. The student is asked to give a 15 minute presentation about his/her research, a question period will last no longer than 15 minutes, and 15 minutes are reserved for the committee's discussion on a final thesis grade. The estimated duration of the defense and the evaluation is thus approximately 45 minutes. If a student is unable to attend the defense, he/she may defend the thesis in a conference phone call that allows the committee members to listen the student's presentation and to ask questions.

A graduation ceremony will be held for the LL.M. and M.A. degree recipients in June 2011. Students who are unable to be present at the ceremony should request their diplomas from the office manager by mail.

## **GENERAL INFORMATION**

Candidates who are seeking to complete the final stage of an LL.M. degree (writing a thesis) should register for the course LLH 1715 on Master Thesis in Polar Law studies before 1 August; M.A. candidates should register for the course MAH1715 before 1 August or the course MAH2715 by 1 November (see the University website for a description of these courses).

A master thesis is the culmination of the studies for the Master Degree in Polar Law. The thesis accounts for 30 ECTS (LL.M. degree) or 60 ECTS (M.A. degree). A master thesis is always an independent research project of a student for which he/she is responsible. It is important to think about the research topic at an early stage of the master studies. Before selecting a research topic, students should read a variety of materials relevant to the subject of their possible thesis and consult with instructors. Students are expected to identify their research interest and notify the master program organizer about their possible topic by 15 January. The organizer will assist students in finding a supervisor in consultation with instructors of the program and faculty members. Students

are expected to link their research topic to one or more courses taught in the Polar Law programs, and students are encouraged to approach instructors on an individual basis. A supervisor has to approve the topic for a thesis; this approval is based on the student's research proposal. The student is expected to work on the research proposal in close consultation with an approved supervisor. Topics and supervisors should be approved by the head of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences.

A master thesis can be completed and defended at any time. For participation in the graduation ceremony, a thesis must be submitted to the supervisor by early April. In writing a thesis students should consult the Rules of the University of Akureyri on Penalties for Plagiarism (see the University website).

## **RESEARCH PROPOSAL**

A research proposal for a master thesis should be 300-500 words. It should contain a brief description of the thesis, both structure and contents as well as a time plan. A research proposal should be ready not later than 1 February.

## **LENGTH OF THESIS**

An M.A.-thesis should contain 50,000-60,000 words (excluding bibliography, tables and photographs), and an LL.M.-thesis should contain 30,000-35,000 words (excluding bibliography, tables and photographs). A master thesis should be prepared in an academic and scholarly manner and include footnotes for all quoted and otherwise employed materials.

## **THESIS CONTENTS**

As an independent research project, a thesis should reflect the following points:

- a. a brief introduction with an explanation of the main chapters of the thesis, its objectives, the reasoning behind the selecting the topic, and identification of the main research question(s);
- b. outline of the method of research, its advantages and limitations;
- c. a literature survey should reflect a profound knowledge of existing sources on the thesis subject and could also indicate novelty and topicality of the research questions;
- d. each chapter should contain strong argumentation in relation to the research question(s) and summary of findings for these questions;
- e. conclusions should reflect the main findings of the thesis;
- f. the bibliography should contain full name of the author, full title of an article, full title of a book or journal, the publishing house, year of publication, and page numbers. Electronic resources should contain the website and the date when this source was accessed;
- j. appendix may contain f.ex. copies of research licenses if required for interviews, tables with data, etc..

## **THESIS STRUCTURE**

It is foreseen that the thesis follow this structure:

- table of contents
- an introduction
- the method of research
- literature survey
- substantive chapters
- conclusion
- bibliography

## **SCOPE OF THESIS**

The master thesis topic has to be relevant to the Polar Law Programs or courses taught in this programs. M.A. candidates should focus on topics of inter- or multi-interdisciplinary research and not select 'purely' legal topics. LL.M. candidates should demonstrate their legal skills, although an inter-disciplinary approach is permissible. The thesis should address topical developments or issues in Polar Law. Students should be able to defend the choice of the selected topic.

## **SUPERVISION**

The role of the supervisor is to provide guidance to a student on the writing of a master thesis. The supervisor provides a student with information and rules about the writing of the thesis and guidance on substance. A student is expected to interact on a regular basis with his/her approved supervisor who should actively guide the student's work. However, the student is responsible for writing a research proposal and the thesis. Likewise, the quality of the thesis is the responsibility of each student. Specifically, the supervisor's responsibility is to:

- approve the choice of topic for the thesis based on a student's research proposal;
- communicate with the organizer of the programs regarding a student's final topic;
- advice the student regarding all aspects of the thesis, including its structural organization;
- most importantly, read the thesis, preferably chapter by chapter as they are produced, for substantive comments (not for editing or English language proofreading);
- guide the student towards required reading materials and other sources;
- guide the student towards an oral defense; and
- notify the organizer if a student is seriously falling behind schedule or failing to fulfill his/her obligations,

## **CHANGING A SUPERVISOR:**

In exceptional circumstances, a student may ask for a new supervisor. In those cases, and when a supervisor leaves office, a student and a supervisor should notify the organizer of the program. Supervisors are not going to be replaced if a student decides to change his/her topic after a supervisor was assigned and the supervision already took place for 4 weeks or more.

## **SUBMISSION OF THESIS**

The final thesis should be submitted to the office manager by mail (3 copies, one on a disk) and by e-mail (1 copy). The office manager provides examination committee members with copies of the thesis. The external examination committee member should receive the thesis at least two weeks before the date of defense. For a copy to the University Library, follow their rules.

A supervisor may determine, for reasons of substance, that a thesis is not ready for defense. In an instance of this kind, the student may nevertheless demand that a defense take place.

## **EVALUATION OF THESIS**

After a student finishes his oral presentation, members of the examination committee ask the student questions on the subject of his/her thesis, followed by a closed door discussion and evaluation of the student's performance. The grades by the supervisor and the external examinee carry equal weight. The grade for the thesis will be announced after the defense is over. The assessment is based on the thesis (quality of research and the writing) - 75% and the oral defense - 25%.

The university regulations will be used to define the final thesis grades. For further guidelines see "grading criteria" indicated above.

The general grading scheme is as follows:

48-52% 5,0

53-57% 5,5

58-62% 6,0

63-67% 6,5

68-72% 7,0

73-77% 7,5

78-82% 8,0

83-87% 8,5

88-92% 9,0

93-97% 9,5

98-100% 10,0

The following commentary renders further clarification on the grading scheme:

5-6: Satisfactory but deficient. The structure of the thesis is loose and the difference between principal and minor points is not clear enough. Language and style are flawed to some extent.

6,5-7: Adequate. A rather well written thesis reflecting some competence in data gathering and logistical interpretation. Neither very independent nor original.

7,5-8: Good. Sources and the student's own knowledge and experience are well utilized and most points are well dealt with.

8,5-9: Very good-Excellent. The thesis attests to meticulous research, originality and good command of language and thinking. Meticulous execution without substantial flaws.

9,5-10: Outstanding. Creative fresh thinking founded on solid academic knowledge, research and writing and theoretical and practical aspects. All contents are dealt with very well.

Furthermore, the examination committee in its evaluation may take into account the following factors:

- How well the thesis is presented and supported by argumentation;
- How clearly the significance of the subject of the thesis is explained, including its theoretical and practical value;
- How well sources are selected and used to answer research questions
- How clearly objectives, research questions and controversies are explained;
- How well the selection of research methods is explained and research data is analyzed;
- How new the topic of the thesis is and what is its contribution to existing discourse;
- How original and topical the thesis is;
- How analytical and comprehensive is the thesis;
- How relevant the thesis is to Polar Law; and
- How well a student knows the subject of his/her research and general issues (his/her ability to answer questions)

## **FINISHING TOUCHES**

With respect to the finishing of A Master thesis, special rules and guidelines apply.

Front page. The name of the University, Faculty, Department and Program at the top on the left or centred. The title of the thesis is to be situated in the middle in larger lettering. Underneath comes the subtitle, if there is one, but in smaller lettering than the title of the thesis. The thesis title should preferably reflect its content. The author's name is situated in the middle, low on the page, and there underneath the month and year of submission.

Contract with the Library: Comes next to the front page (this applies only to the bound copy, of course it is permissible to insert a photocopy in copies owned by others).

The following page is the title page: Same information as on the front page but above the month of submission there is to be in addition: Master thesis submitted as part of studies for the M.A. or LL.M. - Degree in Polar Law. The title page is unnumbered.

Page ii: Declaration by the examination committee that the student has passed the defense. The original of the declaration shall be in the bound copy of the University; a copy of it is to be in loose leaf form.

Page iii and iv: Brief abstract in English, ranging from half a page to a whole page, using minimum line spacing.

Page v: Prologue: Words of thanks from the author and/or personal comments.

Page 1: Itemised table of contents in the same lettering and with the same line spacing as the main body of the thesis.

Followed by List of tables and illustrations, if there is such a list. Illustrations and lists in the main text are to be listed in sequential numerical order.

Followed by Chapter 1 begins: Introduction.

Following the introduction, the main text of the thesis, divided into chapters, beginning with the 2nd chapter. All chapters are to be numbered. Main chapters begin with a heading on a new page approx. 2–3 cm farther down the page than the main text on a normal page.

A precise, itemised bibliography is to be at the end of the thesis. If a list of names and/or an index are provided, they come after the bibliography.

Appendices are to be last and they can either follow the page numbering of the thesis itself or each of them can have an independent numbering system.

Format: The thesis is to be numbered on A4 pages. A line spacing of 1.5 is to be used and margins of at least 2.5 cm at the top and bottom, but at least 3.5 cm on the left and from the bottom. Lettering of 12 p. preferably Times New Roman, but otherwise comparable serif font lettering. Every text page is to have a pitch count of 1,800–2,000. The first line of each chapter is to begin at the forward most point in the line, but the first line in the following paragraphs is to be indented. There is to be no space between paragraphs. The text is to be aligned on the page, both left and right.

## **LIBRARY CONTRACT**

According to the Act on Authors' Rights no. 73/1972, a student has the right to his/her intellectual property and this right is superior to the requirement of publishing research and research conclusions. An author can prohibit the reading of his/her thesis in part or in its entirety.

Students are obliged to conclude a written contract with the Library of the University of Akureyri on the treatment and use of their master thesis there, in accordance with the applicable laws and

regulations. A form for the contract is on the University home page, library pages. The contract with the Library is to be concluded before the thesis is submitted.

Use of a final thesis of students is permitted at the Library, they can be saved in electronic form on the University Web and other students can be referred to them as sources, provided that authors have not specifically disallowed it. Thesis access on the University Web will be controlled by contracts with the authors concerned. A printed copy of the thesis can only be borrowed from the Library, provided that there is a hand-written authorisation of the authors. If students do not want their theses to be accessible at the Library, they are to be specifically marked and placed in storage (depository). The Library is authorised to photocopy the final thesis, if needed for purposes of renewal or maintenance of its copies, but the number of copies must never be more than two.

#### Appendix 1: Sample of the title page of a master's degree thesis

University of Akureyri,  
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences,  
Master Program in Polar Law

Thesis Title  
Subtitle (if available)

Author's Name  
Master's Degree Thesis Submitted as Part of Studies for the M.A. or LL.M. Degree in Polar Law

Akureyri

Month (year)

#### Appendix 2: Sample for the Examination Committee

Master Thesis  
Student's Name  
Identification Number:

Thesis Title  
(subtitle if available)

Supervisor's Name:

is hereby approved as part of studies towards the M.A. or the LL.M. degree in Polar Law Studies

Akureyri in (month) of 2011

Master Degree Examination Committee Members

Appendix 3: Description of the core courses MAH 2715 and LLH1715 – Master Thesis in Polar Law (see the University website for the course descriptions and further details)

As specified by the supervisor's deadlines, the student submits chapters in progress, preliminary drafts and the final thesis to the supervisor for comments and criticism. The thesis is graded by the examination committee. The thesis should reflect: a) a solid command of language and written expression; b) student's independent research of the topic related to Polar Law and; c) a profound knowledge and analysis of a topic which points to its novelty.

Learning outcomes:

- the student learns how to undertake independent research in Polar Law;
- the student improves his or her research and analytical skills;
- the student acquires in-depth knowledge of the research topic; and
- the student masters his/her academic writing skills and oral presentation skills.