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Student guidelines for thesis preparation at the Chair of Landscape Economics

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1 Preface

Dear students,

we are glad that you are interested in our research and that you are considering to complete your study by a degree thesis at our chair.

The purpose of this document is to help you get started and to raise your awareness for your rights and obligations. By writing your thesis, you will set a focus of your study that can influence your future career. Throughout the writing period, you will have to master high requirements that need you to be highly motivated. We therefore recommend that you carefully reflect on all decisions regarding your thesis. Please keep in mind that you are responsible for the implementation and content of your thesis to obtain your academic degree. Thus, your supervisor may only have an advisory or conceptual role, but never an executive one.

Therefore, please read these student guidelines carefully before deciding for a thesis at our chair. You can be sure that the provided information will be useful for your personal interest and will strengthen your topic choice. Please contact us if you have any questions, face any uncertainties or would like to start working. We are looking forward to start working and exchange ideas with you.

You are always welcome to join us.

Your

Chair of Landscape Economics

2 Process

The following table provides an overview of the supervision steps for theses. A detailed description of the individual steps is presented in the following chapters.

Step	Title	Description
1	Contacting	You contact a person at the chair with your supervision request. If applicable, include an idea in which research field you would like to write your thesis.
2	Checking formal requirements	We check the formal requirements for supervision considering your study program, time constraints and previous knowledge from lectures or seminars of the chair.
3	Clarifying the supervision process and idea exploration	In an initial meeting, we will together with you define the scope of our supervision and explore ideas for your thesis. You will explore these ideas further by conducting a literature review. If necessary, further discussions will follow in order to further define and narrow down the topic.
4	Preparation of an exposé	Based on our preliminary discussions, you will write an exposé of your thesis and discuss it with us.
5	Concept presentation in the working group (WG) Landscape Economics	You present your concept at one of our WG colloquia. You will give a presentation of about 20 min on your planned work and receive helpful feedback from members of the working group.
6	Thesis application at the Central Examination Office	A literature review can be registered at the examination office as soon as the exposé is finished. If an empirical data collection is planned, you should apply for the thesis after the data collection.
7	Ongoing work and writing process	You will work independently on your thesis, but you can contact us at any time if you have questions or face problems. We can arrange discussions if you need feedback on an important question, the outline, or intermediate results. At a later stage, we will also read few pages of the thesis on which you would like to have feedback.
8	Results presentation in the working group (WG) Landscape Economics	If your results are more or less fixed, you will again give a presentation of 20 min to the WG Landscape Economics and receive helpful feedback.
9	Finalization and submission	After the results presentation, you can implement the feedback of the WG, finalize and submit your thesis.
10	Grading	In the formal process after submission, the work is sent to us by the examination office, and the supervisors prepare an evaluation report.
11	Feedback before defense (optional)	In some study programs, you have to defend your thesis. This includes a short presentation and discussion involving your supervisors and other interested persons. We will discuss the time frame as well as other organizational and content-related matters with you.

2.1 Contacting

You should get a first idea for your thesis based on your study focus, on conversations with lecturers and staff members or on other suggestions from science and practice. You can find suitable supervisors in advance, e.g. via the chair's website or through discussions. As an alternative to a self-selected topic, you can also choose a proposal from our working group and contact the responsible persons (see for further details: <https://rsf.uni-greifswald.de/lehrstuehle/wiwi/avwl/lehrstuhl-beckmann/lehre/themen-fuer->

[abschlussarbeiten/](#)). Modification of proposals is also possible, but requires precise consultation with the responsible person (see step 3).

2.2 Checking formal requirements

You are generally admitted to the final thesis if you have fulfilled the examination regulations of your respective study program at the University of Greifswald. Usually, you can write a thesis if you can prove that you have sufficient knowledge in economics and landscape economics. You have attained the required knowledge if you have successfully attended lectures of the chair - depending on your study program. In addition, we strongly recommend a successful participation in the associated seminar.

2.3 Clarifying the supervision process and idea exploration

In a first meeting we will clarify the supervision process, which basically follows the steps in the table above. We are interested in intensive supervision and ensuring the quality of final theses, but you are responsible for taking the initiative to contact us during the whole process. Write a short email when you finish a specific step or need feedback. We will reply in terms of content or arrange a meeting.

After clarifying the supervision process, we will start discussing the contents of the planned topic. You can present your ideas or we can develop ideas together. It is advantageous to conduct a short literature search in the selected topic in preparation for the meeting. Knowing the literature in the selected topic helps to clarify which theories and methods can be applied also in your thesis. Knowing the amount of literature is important for assessing the relevance of the topic and finding a realizable scope.

After an initial idea has emerged, you continue working independently, reading literature and clarifying open questions. Usually, several discussions take place until a substantial research idea for a thesis is developed.

2.4 Preparation of an exposé

You write down your research idea in an exposé. This helps to formulate the idea as clearly as possible for yourself and is the final check for us whether the work is feasible in terms of time and amount of work. It is also helpful to refer to the exposé at later stages of the research process to make decisions about further working steps.

An exposé comprises approx. 5 text pages (excluding references). The main components are:

- introduction containing relevance and motivation for the topic
- derivation of research questions
- methods of data collection and analysis
- time schedule until the completion of the thesis
- references

We will read and comment on the exposé, and revisions may also be necessary. Note: If changes to the topic and the research design become necessary during the later process, these can be made

in consultation with the supervisors, regardless of the exposé content. Text modules from the exposé can also be used in the thesis.

2.5 Concept presentation in the working group (WG) Landscape Economics

After the concept of your thesis has been fixed and accepted by your supervisors, you will present it to the WG Landscape Economics. This includes a short presentation (approx. 20 min) and a subsequent discussion (approx. 40 min). Feedback from members of the working group who are not involved in the supervision is very valuable as the conception and approach of the work is reviewed again in an unbiased way and additional aspects can be considered. Further unclear points can be discussed. Take the opportunity to further improve the conception of your thesis. The presentation will not be graded and will not be included in the thesis evaluation – the goal is a productive discussion about content.

2.6 Thesis application

The thesis application at the central examination office sets a time frame you have to submit your thesis (usually three or six months). It should therefore be realistic that you will be able to complete the thesis in the time set. For literature reviews you can apply at the examination office after the exposé is agreed upon. For theses based on empirical data collection, we strongly recommend that you apply at the examination office when the data collection has been completed. During the field phase or data collection, many uncertainties or problems can arise that could affect the writing time of the thesis.

The application is done via an application blank of the examination office. For the application you need a final thesis title, first and second supervisor. You should contact your first supervisor if the second supervisor's appointment is still unclear at this stage.

2.7 Ongoing work and writing process

We support you with our knowledge on the research topic as well as on scientific writing during the work and writing process. Therefore, you are always welcome to ask us for advice, discuss changes, announce innovations or simply inform us about the state of work. We will agree upon intermediate working steps for facilitating discussion, such as an initial outline, initial analytic steps, etc.

In order to avoid misunderstandings in the written work and to guarantee a common understanding of the work's content, you can also submit parts of your thesis for proofreading and further discussion.

2.8 Results presentation to the working group (WG) Landscape Economics

When you have developed and partially written up the results of your research, you present them to the Landscape Economics WG. Similar to the concept presentation, this is an objective look at the results. Often methodological details are discussed again, or suggestions are given for further minor analyses and to improve the presentation of results. Often, points for the discussion part are discussed. The procedure and time requirements correspond to the concept presentation (see step 5).

2.9 Finalization and submission

Following the results presentation, you can complete the written thesis. Please do not underestimate the time for formal completion, including checking the references, checking for spelling errors, formatting the thesis, and printing and binding. Please collect information about formalities of the examination regulations in time. The last step involves submission of the printed and bound thesis to the examination office.

The further process is determined by the examination office. The supervisors receive the thesis and usually have four weeks for the evaluation process and the preparation of an evaluation report. Please inform your supervisors and the examination office as soon as possible if there are time restrictions from your side (e.g. end of the scholarships or visas).

2.10 Feedback before defense (optional)

In some study programs, a thesis defense is part of the examination. After the thesis has been examined, you arrange a date for the defense with your supervisors. We will discuss the time limit as well as other organizational and content-related matters with you. The defense is open to the public and will be announced via mailing lists and notices.

We recommend to obtain feedback from fellow students and conduct a test defense in the designated room to be well prepared for your final performance.

3 Potential problems and other disasters

Theses do not always go according to plans. Problems and difficulties arise in almost every final thesis. It is important that you actively address problems, do not procrastinate, and make decisions in consultation with your supervisors. Your supervisors, in particular, are there to help you overcome difficulties during the process. Here is a list of problems you may experience and how to solve them:

Problems	Possible solutions
During the exploration phase, you realize that the topic you have chosen is not as exciting as you thought.	Your motivation for the topic is a pre-condition for a successful thesis. Try to clarify your doubts first with yourself and think about what could increase your motivation. Discuss possible solutions with your supervisors. As long as the thesis has not been registered at the examination office, an adjustment or a change of the topic is uncomplicated.
You do not obtain the expected data during your empirical data collection, e.g. you cannot find interview partners or experts that provide the required information or you cannot carry out the data collection for logistical reasons.	As already described in section 2, empirical data collection is always subject to uncertainties. Talk to your supervisors about possibilities to carry out the data collection anyway, e.g. by adjusting the research design, the research space, or a different form of data collection.
Your data analysis does not provide the results, e.g. via statistical tests, that you were expecting.	Such results are part of the normal scientific process. Even studies that produce counterintuitive results can be first-class scientific works. It is important that you carefully investigate whether you have made a mistake and, if necessary, try out alternative methods of data analysis. The best way is to decide this together with your supervisors. If the results remain the same despite all checks and further analysis, write down what you have done in your thesis and document your findings. A comprehensible presentation of possible sources of error and results explanations in the discussion part of the thesis are particularly important in this case.
You have writer's block or a tendency to procrastinate, that is, to postpone analysis tasks or writing.	An important aspect of scientific work is patient, regular work on the subject, which often progresses in very small steps. Therefore, do not look for the magic moment in which everything is done just before you submit your thesis. Instead, try to motivate yourself to work for a few hours every day, it doesn't matter where and when you work - at home, in a café or at the library, during the day or at night. You can solve writer's block by starting with small texts that are not related with your thesis at the beginning. Writing books offer good guidance here (see section 4.2).
You move too slowly in the writing process, the submission deadline is getting closer and you still have to write important parts of the text.	You can practice writing more efficiently. Write for only a few hours a day and do it in a concentrated way, instead of reading through the text over and over again and correcting it while you are still writing. Leave the written section until the next day and revise it then. Many tips can also be found in writing books (see Section 4.2). Spelling correction or checking references can also be done by roommates or friends if necessary.
You are unable to submit your thesis in time due to illness or other reasons.	Inform your supervisor as soon as possible and apply to the examination office for a postponement of the submission deadline.

4 Instructions for thesis writing

4.1 Formalities

Concerning the formal structure of your thesis, refer to our document "Tips and guidelines for seminar papers", but also to the literature on the preparation of scientific papers in the library or from your supervisor. In addition, the following page counts apply to the written part of the different types of degree theses:

	Bachelor thesis	Diploma thesis	Master thesis
Processing time	3 months	6 months	6 months
Page count (text)	30-50 pages	50-100 pages	50-100 pages

The lower page count applies primarily to empirical work with a data collection in the field. The upper page count is more applicable to literature reviews or to studies that include an analysis of already collected data.

4.2 Scientific writing and the use of Citavi

Generally, you have already learned the basics of scientific writing in seminar papers during your studies. However, it also makes sense to actively improve your skills in scientific work and writing for your final thesis. Many tips on how to write in a comprehensible way, as well as tricks on how to simplify the process, can be found in books on scientific writing. Here are three examples:

- Blackwell, J. & Martin, J. (2011): *A Scientific Approach to Scientific Writing*. Springer New York: Science+Business Media.
- Bui, Y.N. (2014): *How to write a Master's thesis*. 2. edition. SAGE Publications: California.
- Parija, S.C. & Kate, V. (eds.) (2018): *Thesis writing for Master's and Ph.D. program*. Springer Nature: Singapore.

We suggest to search in the library for keywords such as "academic writing" or "scientific writing". These books sometimes also contain advice on how to organize the entire research process and can provide initial guidance on writing problems.

In addition, we strongly recommend using Citavi software when preparing your thesis. With Citavi you can better organize your data and literature and, for example, create citations and the reference list more easily and quickly. You can download Citavi via your university account on the website of the computer center and install it on your computer. You can use a full version free of charge after registration.

5 Evaluation criteria

Your thesis is a scientific paper and will be evaluated on the basis of appropriate criteria. The following list of relevant aspects provides you with guidance and allows for self-check.

Content:

- (actual) state of research
- theoretical foundations
- presentation of research question(s) and formulation of the objectives
- comprehensible description of the methods
- diligence in the performance of the thesis
- adequate data analysis and correct presentation of the obtained results
- interpretation and critical discussion of the results

- inclusion of relevant literature
- deep understanding of research question(s) and tasks

Language and style:

- logical structure, coherent argumentation
- concise and comprehensive language
- correct grammar and spelling

Formal criteria:

- outline, citation, formatting
- figures and tables
- page count

The following disqualification criteria are applied:

- references are missing or not comprehensible/retrievable
- plagiarism in the text

If your thesis meets one of the disqualification criteria, it will be graded as "failed". Plagiarism will also be reported to the examination office.

Your supervisor could consider specific circumstances during the preparation or writing process when grading your thesis. This would be the case, for example, if you are working under difficult conditions or dealing with special challenges that depend on external factors and are beyond your control. An example would be a limited data base because of a short preparation time for your research concept. You should openly discuss such circumstances with your supervisors and adequately describe them in the methods chapter of your thesis. Another example would be communication or language barriers because you were only able to communicate with interviewees indirectly via an interpreter using a third language, or because cultural differences led to misunderstandings. On the other hand, theses could also be evaluated more strictly because the required supervision went beyond a conceptual or advisory level.

6 Closing comment

The final thesis is one of the highlights of your studies. The completion of your thesis marks the end of your academic education and the awarding of an academic title - an important milestone in your personal career. An excellent final thesis can be the result of a successful and balanced cooperation between you and us, your supervisors. With thorough work you can become an expert in a specific field and create a promising and future-oriented thesis – a process that persons involved will look back on with pleasure.