GUIDELINES FOR MASTER’S THESIS

MASTER’S PROGRAMME IN GLOBAL MEDIA STUDIES

DEPARTMENT OF MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION STUDIES

KARLSTAD UNIVERSITY
INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY

Master’s Programme in Global Media Studies (MSSc in GMS) will only accept theses and accompanying articles submitted in paper form. For electronic publishing guidelines at Karlstad University (KaU), please see http://www.bib.kau.se/?q=node/view/10114&_lang=en

Master’s theses must be written in English, comply with the format guidelines of KaU, and candidates must include their full name in the thesis and all other forms and documents as it officially appears in KaU records.

Students must have obtained at least 60 ECTS credits within the GMS Programme to be eligible for consideration for the Master’s Thesis course. As detailed in the course plan (please see course plan for MKAE02), Master’s candidates are required to carry out an advanced level research project on an individual basis. In order for the candidates to qualify to carry out a research project that will lead to a Master’s thesis, completion and submission of a detailed research proposal to their assigned thesis advisors is mandatory. The proposal should be deemed sufficient and approved by the advisor for the research project to start. The research project should materialize into two documents to fulfil the requirements of MKAE02: a full-length master’s thesis; and, a paper summarizing the key results and arguments of the thesis and ready to be submitted to a peer-reviewed journal.

Instruction takes the form of supervision and mandatory thematic seminars that cover issues such as identification of research agenda, formulation of research questions, theory-building, research on human subjects and ethics, questions of methodology and academic writing, and scholastic honesty and copyrights. Master’s thesis and accompanying article are to be presented and orally defended at a seminar arranged at the end of the course.

RESEARCH AND WRITING PROCESS

Thesis Proposal

Master’s candidates sign up for the MKAE02 course to pursue a topic and research project of their own choosing that will result in a Master’s thesis. Submission, to the thesis advisor, of a detailed written account of the project to be pursued constitutes the first step in the course of the overall project. The process leading up to the proposal stage should take the form of preliminary research by the student to determine and further specify the thesis topic, and consultation with the advisor to discuss the viability and scope of the project. The proposal should include the following:

- an introduction identifying and presenting the research agenda (i.e. main argument, research questions, goals, theory/ies and method/s to be used, and a brief discussion of the expected contribution—of the proposed project—to the field);
- a summary discussion of the theoretical scope of the thesis and preliminary literature to be used; and,
- a brief account of the methodological framework to be adopted in the project.

As such, the proposal should take the form of a very first draft of the introduction chapter of the eventual thesis. While length, in and of itself, is not a determining factor and depends on the nature of the project, generally and formally speaking, a 10-15 page proposal should be considered reasonable for the purposes of providing a roadmap and work plan for the thesis work. The proposal should be submitted by a deadline determined jointly by the student and the advisor. Upon evaluation and if necessary, critique and further suggestions
for improvement should be provided by the advisor. If and when the proposal is approved by the advisor, the second step of the process, the research phase, may ensue.

**Research and Data Gathering**

The research phase follows the guidelines and timeline formerly agreed upon by the student and the advisor. Structure and length of the research process are determined jointly by the student and the advisor based on the nature of the work to be carried out. At least two scheduled meetings are arranged by the advisor during which the student reports the work done up to that point. Additional supervision is provided as necessary. Fieldwork involving the use of human subjects (e.g., qualitative interviews, surveys, etc.) shall comply with the ethical requirements of KaU, be administered by the student her/himself and overseen by the advisor.

**Writing Process**

The thesis and the accompanying article are to be written following the structure formerly adopted in the form of the thesis proposal and approved by the advisor. Any changes or alterations that arise due to the research process and/or unforeseen circumstances are to be discussed with and approved by the advisor. In essence, all master’s theses are to include the following components: an introductory chapter (see above); a theory and literature review chapter; a methodology chapter; a results and analysis chapter; and, a conclusions chapter (chapters may be entitled differently and in various ways depending on the thesis work). Student-advisor contact (in the form of either face-to-face meetings or electronically) assumes a regular structure during this phase, allowing the advisor to oversee the writing process and provide timely feedback. While it is not mandatory for the student to eventually submit the article to a journal for peer-review, the article is to be written in accordance with the scientific and academic journal standards and scholarly criteria of the field.

Both the thesis and the article are to be written in English. Language-editing and proofreading responsibilities belong to the student, and she/he may seek additional help provided that the advisor is made aware of the situation.

**Submission of Thesis/Article and Presentation of Work**

The final drafts of both the thesis and the article are to be submitted to the advisor at least three weeks in advance of the prescheduled defense (thesis seminar) date. A faculty member assigned by the GMS Programme Director acts as examiner of the written work and is to receive the thesis/article material at least two weeks in advance of the scheduled defense date. In addition, the GMS Programme requires that a fellow master’s candidate acts as opponent at the seminar by way of providing an oral summary of and critique for the thesis material. The opponent is to receive the final drafts at least two weeks in advance. To provide an optimum seminar environment, at least two theses are scheduled for defense at the same seminar, where the master’s candidates act as opponents for each other. When necessary, an alternative structure may be arranged by the GMS Programme Director.

The seminar, which is open to public attendance, commences with the opponent summarizing the thesis work and providing critique/feedback to which the master’s candidate responds. The seminar attendees and the examiner may ask questions/offer comments. Collegiality remains essential. The examiner provides a written assessment of the work to the advisor after the seminar, who schedules a meeting with the student to offer an overall evaluation.
EXAMINATION

Examination of the Master’s candidate’s work is based on the performance of the candidate in (1) the thematic seminars; (2) the written work (thesis and article); and, (3) the presentation and oral defense of the project and the thesis material at the final seminar. The final grade is jointly decided by the advisor and the examiner and one of the grades of Distinction (VG), Pass (G) or Fail (U) is awarded in the examination of the course. For international students the Swedish grades are interpreted to the international ECTS-scale.

Factors Taken into Consideration When Evaluating a Master’s Thesis

- Presence of a clearly articulated research question/problem
- Relevance of topic
- Placement of the research into intellectual/disciplinary context
- Complexity and relevance of theory and linkage of theory to the research question/s and methodology
- Complexity and relevance of methodology and clear articulation of the methods employed
- Level of research independence
- Language and structure
- Referencing and use of primary and secondary sources
- Data gathered (volume and quality), and relevance/appropriateness of conclusions drawn based upon such data, and relationship to theory
- Evidence of intellectual originality, creativity and rigor
- Academic skill illustrated and degree of difficulty/complexity of the thesis
- Level of critical thinking/critical analysis
- Contribution to understanding of the question/issue under analysis

RESPONSIBILITIES AND DUTIES

Master’s Thesis Advisor

The role of the Master’s Thesis advisor is to guide the student through the thesis process, giving advice, support, critique and opinion. It is important to note that the Master’s Thesis is, first and foremost, the work of the student, and, as such, it is not the function of the Thesis Advisor to choose a topic for the student or design her/his project. At the thesis level, it is expected that the students have acquired intellectual and academic skills and that they are fully prepared to undertake a significant piece of independent research. With these issues in mind, the following are the basic roles and responsibilities of the MA thesis advisor:

1. to establish an appropriate timetable for the undertaking and completion of the thesis, as well as establishing a basic schedule for meetings;
2. to work with students to specify an acceptable, realistic and relevant topic for a full thesis, and to ensure that the topic is manageable in terms of size and scope;
3. to evaluate and give feedback on the main research question(s);
4. to evaluate the student’s selection of theoretical focus and methodology (in terms of appropriateness, relevance and student’s experience), and to give critical feedback if and when needed;
5. to give advice and feedback before and during the process of data gathering;
6. to evaluate the structure of the thesis (in terms of argument as well as layout), and to make sure that there is a clear intellectual thread running through the thesis and that the various sections hold together;
7. to carefully and thoroughly read through the final thesis draft, make suggestions for changes, and, in consultation with the student, give approval (or not) for the thesis to go to defense; and,
8. to provide help to the examiner as needed.

**Responsibilities of the Master’s Thesis Student**

In addition to the responsibilities of the Master’s Thesis advisor, Master’s students also have a number of responsibilities that they are expected to adhere to. In short, students are expected to:

1. adhere to the general timetable and schedule agreed upon with the advisor (it is the responsibility of the student to inform the advisor of changes, or desired changes, to these schedules);
2. undertake an independent piece of academic research for which the student has full responsibility (in terms of writing, research, content and form), and to ensure that the final thesis is free from plagiarism and/or copyright infringements;
3. come prepared to each meeting with the thesis advisor with questions and original material to be discussed (it is the responsibility of the student to provide the material used for discussion);
4. to submit material to the advisor in a timely fashion, such that the advisor has sufficient time to read the material and formulate comments;
5. construct a viable research question/s and conduct a thorough review of literature (in terms of theory and methodology);
6. to undertake the research as agreed independently (unless otherwise agreed);
7. to present the final draft of the manuscript to the advisor in a timely fashion;
8. to submit the thesis to the examiner and opponent in a timely fashion, and to defend the thesis/respond to comments/critique during the final seminar.