



UNIVERSITEIT VAN AMSTERDAM

## **Fieldwork and Thesis Project: Master International Development Studies**

This document provides an overview of the fieldwork and thesis trajectories as part of the Master in International Development Studies at the University of Amsterdam. This comprehensive course manual will cover what is required in carrying out fieldwork and writing the final thesis. It will also give guidance for what will be expected of students before, during and after the fieldwork time. We ask that all students read through this document in its entirety at an early stage in the program to be prepared for the upcoming expectations.

This document also indicates how the fieldwork preparation and thesis writing process are linked to other courses and components in the program. Courses and activities that play a direct role in the pre- and post-fieldwork time are the *Research Training and Fieldwork Preparation* course (to write the research proposal); the *Thesis Seminar* (to support the thesis writing process); and the *Policy and Practice Seminar* (to prepare the “communication product”). Each of these courses and the assignments associated with them have their own course descriptions. Please consult those for more details.

## Table of Contents

Fieldwork and Thesis Project: Master International Development Studies .....	1
Administrative Overview .....	3
Content .....	4
Learning Objectives.....	4
What is a relevant development context? .....	4
Ethics, safety and security .....	4
Finding your supervisor.....	5
Limits to research questions .....	5
Contact information and emergency situations .....	5
Before you go to the field.....	5
The preliminary research proposal and the final research proposal .....	6
While you are in the field .....	7
When you return from the field .....	7
Study load and basic requirements for the thesis .....	8
Assessment .....	8
Deadlines .....	9
Handing in the thesis and the Turnitin Plagiarism check: .....	9
Second Reader .....	9
The Thesis Defense .....	9
Re-sit of the thesis .....	10
Extensions .....	10
Cum laude.....	10
Guidelines for written work and note on plagiarism .....	10
Appendices .....	12
Appendix 1: Guidelines ethical review and fieldwork abroad .....	12
Appendix 2: Mutual Expectations between the supervisor and the student .....	13
Appendix 3: The thesis working document and tips .....	14
Appendix 4: Primary data verification principles.....	15
Appendix 5: Communication Product.....	15
Appendix 6: Back from the Field Report and PowerPoint Presentation .....	16
Appendix 7: Consider a “peer review buddy” during the writing process .....	16
Appendix 8: Graduation .....	17
Appendix 9: Evaluation Form Master Thesis International Development Studies .....	17

## Administrative Overview

Course catalogue number	74040004CY
Credits	24 EC
Language of instruction	English
Entry requirements	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Students must be enrolled in the Master Program International Development Studies</li><li>• To begin fieldwork, students must complete and pass all coursework from the first semester as stipulated in the exam regulations.</li></ul>
College/graduate	Graduate school of Social Sciences
Organised by	Department of Geography, Planning and International Development Studies
Lecturer(s)	Students will be assigned individual supervisors
Contact	MIDS Study Advisor Eva van der Sleen, E.A.M.vanderSleen@uva.nl
Is part of	Master International Development Studies

## Content

The fieldwork and thesis project is an important part of the program representing the culmination of the students' knowledge and growth in the master program. The fieldwork takes place in a relevant development context (see below), most often in the Global South, but also in the Global North, and is the period of time during which students carry out primary data collection for approximately 8-10 weeks. Students arrive in the field with a well-developed research proposal, a theoretical and conceptual framework, and with preliminary contacts to help them get started. Throughout the fieldwork and writing trajectory, students gain first-hand experience with what it means to view development phenomena through specific lenses and the relationship between theory and empirical research. They also gain experience in working with and learning from others, facing obstacles that come with the practice of development research, learn how to recognize and respect ethical boundaries, and communicate in unfamiliar contexts. While the final thesis is an academic piece in nature, it brings with it both personal and professional development.

## Learning Objectives

In completing the fieldwork and thesis writing, students should be capable of:

- applying their existing theoretical and conceptual knowledge to more deeply understand real-life situations in relevant development contexts (see below).
- implementing their chosen research methodology and methods, and reflect on the strengths and limitations of their chosen approaches.
- analyzing primary and secondary data according to their given theoretical and conceptual framework in order to recognize and organize their findings into key themes.
- assessing the value of their findings and themes in relation to the research question, the theories used and social relevance.
- developing sound conclusions and recommendations based on their independent analyses.
- Identifying the ethical challenges they have faced in the research process and reflect on them.
- Communicating and defending their research in the context of a thesis defense.

## What is a relevant development context?

International Development Studies have traditionally focused on development processes and transformations and shifting power balances in the global South. However, within the field of IDS there is increasing recognition for the ways in which development issues and outcomes are related to processes in the global North. Additionally, conditions traditionally associated with underdevelopment such as poverty, lack of access to resources and vulnerability are also found in the global North. By expanding the lens of development, more attention is drawn to its multi-scalar dimensions. For these reasons, we consider a "relevant development context" to be either a geographical location, which is not limited to the global South, or an institutional setting where either conditions for development are set or processes of development take place.

## Ethics, safety and security

Ethics of research and ethics concerning the protection of students and those they encounter in the field are discussed in various parts of the program. In addition to this, all students will have read and discussed the GSSS Ethical Guidelines for Student Research in the Undertaking Fieldwork course, which is available on the student information page for their program. It is important to note that supervisors have the authority to veto certain topics and types of research based on the principles expressed in the GSSS Ethical Guidelines. The relevant parts that play a role in these decisions can be found in Appendix 1. Choosing your topic

Some students will join the program with their research topic clear to them and others will need time after starting the program to figure out what they would like to do. We encourage students to look for topics that match with the expertise of our teaching and research staff as early as possible after the program starts. Even if supervisors may not have expertise on particular topics, they can provide the necessary academic support in the thesis writing process. Supervisors often have field contacts to help students get started in the field, but students should also keep in mind that they will need to make extra time into

preparing for their fieldwork, including the logistics of travel and visas, as well as finding local supervision.

### **Finding your supervisor**

The majority of students will be matched with an IDS staff member or researcher from the GID research program who will supervise the research project. During the course of the first half block (first eight weeks) of the program, students can explore the availability and topics of supervisors and can also informally meet with potential supervisors to discuss potential topics. Towards the end of the first block, students will complete a form stating their supervision preferences. Once the forms are submitted, the study advisor and program director will finalize the best matches between students and supervisors. This may mean that some students will not end up with their first choice, but we make every effort to make the best matches possible. In exceptional cases, this may mean matching a student with a supervisor who is external to the program, but has expertise in the topic in which the student is interested. After matches are confirmed, students should plan to meet with their supervisor as soon as possible to make a plan. Students should initiate this first meeting. Please see Appendix 2 for planning your supervision trajectory with your supervisor.

### **Limits to research questions**

Your research questions will have been discussed with your thesis supervisor and in your Undertaking Fieldwork course. However, a point needs to be reiterated here. While the topics that students research cover a wide spectrum, we do have some limitations on the kinds of questions students can ask. Questions directly related to personal trauma, experiences of severe exploitation or violence, and questions that potentially cross the line in terms of violating individual privacy of respondents are not allowed. While students may be very sensitive and mature on a personal level, questions in these areas require a certain kind of expertise and training we cannot provide in the program as asking questions about trauma can activate secondary trauma, or trauma for our students and this is something we wish to avoid entirely. Additionally, research questions that would put students in direct danger are also forbidden.

### **Contact information and emergency situations**

Students should keep the following points in mind to prepare for emergencies before they depart:

- Students should be sure that the study advisor for IDS has contact details of ~~of~~ someone we can contact in case of emergencies.
- If a large scale emergency abroad occurs the UvA will contact students within 24 hours to check whether you are safe and to give you further instructions following the advice of national and international governments. The general advice is to check in as quickly as possible with your contact person back home, the nearest Embassy and your study advisor.
- If an individual emergency occurs please follow the same steps, in addition to seeking immediate help. Make sure you know the national emergency number where you are and have important documents at hand, or stored on a device on which you have easy access.

### **Before you go to the field**

There are a number of logistics students need to think about before leaving for the field.

- Signing necessary forms: Your supervisor and fieldwork coordinator sign your fieldwork –and thesis agreement, and Personal declaration of responsibility forms, prior when leaving for the field.
- Apply for the fieldwork subsidy: For more information on this matter, please see this link: <http://student.uva.nl/mids/shared/studentensites/fmg/gsss-gedeelde-content/en/az/fieldwork/fieldwork-subsidy-gsss/fieldwork-subsidy-gsss.html?origin=lrfa01E9TuqsN18%2FHtw9Dg>
- Arrange housing/accommodation, airplane/train ticket, travel insurance.
- Prepare your budget and make sure you secure the funds you need for travel. Please recall that you were informed upon acceptance to the program that fieldwork expenses will be in the range of 3000 euros.

- Prepare a data management system ahead of time: know how you will store and save your data and have back-up systems in place. Consider safety of your data and ensure that it is password protected (ethical consideration).
- Plan a meeting with your supervisor to discuss a schedule for keeping in touch while you are in the field and a thesis timeline. You should also discuss mutual expectations during the entire supervision trajectory. See Appendix 2 for guidelines on this.
- Prepare all necessary paperwork. Some countries require a research visa, and acquiring them might take up to 3-4 months!
- Arrange vaccinations and advice regarding which medicines to take.
- Local supervisor: During your fieldwork it is very helpful to have a local supervisor, alongside your UvA supervisor. Your local supervisor is specifically there to help you during your fieldwork. In order to explain the role of the local supervisor while you are in the field to your local supervisor you can download the 'letter local supervisor' at <http://student.uva.nl/mids/az/a-z/a-z/content-2/folder-2/fieldwork/local-supervisor-fee/local-supervisors-fee.html>

There are also forms of preparation necessary:

- Preliminary proposal: be sure to follow guidelines closely for how to write your preliminary proposal (in the *Research Training and Fieldwork Preparation* course) to ensure that your supervisor understands your intent and can give approval (see more explanation below).
- Final proposal: This will also be part of the *Research Training and Fieldwork Preparation* course. This will serve as your blueprint once you arrive.
- Prepare a working thesis document with preliminary chapter titles so that you can fill these in while you are in the field. (See Appendix 3 for how to create a working document and tips).
- Read everything you can about the topic and country of your choice.
- Read the final theses of students from previous years so that you can already get an idea of where you are headed and what you should expect from yourself.

### **The preliminary research proposal and the final research proposal**

Students must prepare a preliminary research proposal in the context of the *Research Training and Fieldwork Preparation* course in order to obtain initial approval from their supervisor to go to the field. The criteria and deadline for the preliminary proposal can be found on the *Research Training and Fieldwork Preparation* Canvas page. The preliminary proposal is a draft document, but should be taken very seriously in order for the supervisor to judge if the student is academically prepared to go to the field. Once approval is given for the preliminary proposal, students may begin their preparations for going to the field. Students should NOT purchase plane tickets before this first approval is given.

Once approval is obtained, students continue working on their final research proposal (in the *Research Training and Fieldwork Preparation* course, where it is also graded). If it becomes apparent that there is a risk that students are not meeting the preparation requirements for fieldwork, they are informed of this as soon as it becomes evident. Students should also take responsibility in informing either the *Research Training and Fieldwork Preparation* lecturers or their respective supervisors if they are in doubt about their own progress.

Students must submit their final proposal before leaving for the field. Grading cannot be completed in the short time allowed, therefore students will only get their grades once in the field. On the rare occasion when a student does not get a passing grade on the proposal, the *Research Training and Fieldwork Preparation* lecturer and the supervisor will first discuss what will be required of the student to accomplish this. This is then discussed with the student, with a clear set of requirements for what still needs to be improved, and a timeline for when it can be completed. This then leads to three possible outcomes:

- The first is that if the student has not already left for the field, the student may be asked to revise the proposal before departing. This will lead to a shorter time doing fieldwork, for which the student must request permission from the Examinations Board.

- Another possibility, which is not desirable, but sometimes necessary, is to let the student go to the field without a sufficient research proposal, but with all the necessary feedback and an agreement on when the proposal will be done. This approach is sometimes necessary when students have purchased expensive plane tickets to travel to their fieldwork location and cannot refund or change the dates of the tickets. This option requires that students stay in very close contact with their supervisors by email/skype to ensure that the proposal can be completed satisfactorily.
- Third, if it is abundantly clear that a student will not be able to produce a satisfactory research proposal using either option, then they must meet with the study advisor and request permission from the Exam Board to extend their studies.

### While you are in the field

Here are some tips on what to think about and how to organize your time in the field:

- If you are doing interviews and focus groups, please transcribe these immediately. They are freshest in your mind the day you do them, and with each day, important details will be forgotten. It is also very time consuming if you wait until you return. This will seriously cut into your writing time and can cause delays in finishing.
- If you are doing surveys, circulate them as quickly as possible, and enter the data into your database right away so that you can be aware if you need to make any changes in your survey for an additional round or add interviews to supplement the information you have. Do not wait until you return to enter your data.
- Maintain organization with your data management system. This is not easy to do with all the information you will be gathering. Put time into preparing and securing your data management system so that it will be accessible for you when you are ready to start your analysis. Please see Appendix 4 (Primary data verification principles) for further guidelines on how to do this, and how to ensure transparency in the process.
- Keep a daily field journal to keep track of ideas and developments.
- Keep regular contact with your supervisor. This could be emails every two weeks, or an occasional skype update. Set up a plan with your supervisor before you leave. You must take the lead in sticking to this plan and being in touch with your supervisor according to the schedule you arranged.
- Start writing: allow yourself several hours a day to start writing the thesis.
- Keep close contact with your fellow students: find ways to keep in touch with your fellow students. Set up online communities for exchanging experiences, for example.
- Communication Product: When you return from the field and are writing your thesis, you will also take the *Policy and Practice Seminar*. In this course, you will have to prepare your “communication product.” Please see Appendix 5 for an explanation on this. You will also present this at the graduation. Please see Appendix 8 for more information on the graduation ceremony.
- Write your “Back from the Field Report”: In preparation for the first session of the *Policy and Practice Seminar* that you will start upon returning from the field, you will have to write a “Back from the Field Report”. This will be due before the first session so it is important you start on time. This is a first attempt to summarize your experiences in the field and to think about the conclusions you might draw. Please see Appendix 6 for the assignment and *Policy and Practice Seminar* Canvas page for the exact deadlines.

### When you return from the field

When you return from the field, the intensive period of writing will begin. The momentum of the field experience usually gives students the motivation to start writing. Nonetheless, it can be a daunting experience. There are several things you can do to make this process easier.

- Meet with your supervisor as soon as you return. Even if you have nothing to show or share, make initial contact so that you can discuss a good plan together for when you will submit individual chapters, the speed at which you can expect feedback, and the due date for the penultimate draft (refer to Appendix 2, regarding mutual expectations).

- Consider finding a thesis peer review “buddy”. This is somebody with whom you can work closely along the way for feedback, accountability and mutual support (see Appendix 7 for tips).
- The *Thesis Seminar*: You will start this course as soon as you return from the field. It is meant to facilitate students during the writing process. The course is based on assignments that must be prepared ahead of time for feedback and which can be included in your thesis. Please see the Canvas page for the Thesis seminar for more details about the course.
- The *Policy and Practice Seminar*: This course will begin to introduce to the professional field of International Development. You will prepare the “communication product” in the context of this course.
- Find a good writing rhythm for yourself. Writing is hard work, even when you are not feeling inspired on a particular day. Make sure you find the writing rhythm that works best for you and stick to it.

### Study load and basic requirements for the thesis

- The thesis and fieldwork make up 24 ECTS in the program. This is a total of 672 hours. In very general terms, half the time should be spent on fieldwork, and half the time on writing the thesis. These hours fit within a full-time program and should be used completely so that you can finish the thesis on time.
- The thesis is between 20,000 and 25,000 words. You are required to stay within this range to meet the basic criteria. Please do not exceed this upper maximum number. All students must be given equal opportunity to communicate what they want to say within the word count, and supervisors cannot be expected to read more than what time allows. Likewise, do not fall below this number as you need to demonstrate that you can achieve a certain level of depth that cannot be achieved with smaller written works.
- The thesis must have the following components:
  - Cover page (title, name, student number, name of programme, name of department, name thesis supervisor, name second reader, place and date of submission, contact (e-mail))
  - Abstract
  - Preface / acknowledgements
  - Table of contents
  - List of tables, figures, boxes, acronyms
  - Introduction (problem statement and justification, objective, research questions, thesis setup)
  - Theoretical framework based on literature review and synthesized in conceptual scheme
  - Methodology (research design, operationalization, units of analysis and observation, data collection methods, sampling, data analysis, ethical considerations and positionality, reflection on the quality and limitations of research)
  - Contextual chapter (based on secondary material and key respondent interviews)
  - Primary data chapters (1-2 chapters, these can be arranged according to the sub research questions, per case, or per concept if the thesis is strongly theory focused)
  - Concluding chapter (synthesis of the findings by answering the research questions, theoretical reflection, implications of findings, suggestions for further research, recommendation for policy and/or practice)
  - References
  - Appendices (list of respondents, anonymized if necessary, operationalization table, questionnaire and interview guides, other supplementary material if needed)

### Assessment

Students must get a minimum grade of 5,5 on the final thesis to graduate from the program. The thesis grade will be based on 12 specified components which can be found in the Thesis Evaluation form (Appendix 9). The thesis grade is decided on by the first and second reader (see below) together after the final defense has taken place (see below).

## Deadlines

Please see the program Canvas pages for the most up-to-date deadlines for the thesis and other final assignments.

## Handing in the thesis and the Turnitin Plagiarism check:

Students submit their final thesis to the supervisor and the second reader. This may be done either digitally or in hard copy, depending on what you have agreed upon with your supervisor. Please ask them directly what they prefer. You are also required to submit your thesis on the Thesis Project Canvas page for a plagiarism check on the same day as the final version is submitted to your supervisor and second reader. Please check the Thesis Project Canvas page carefully for the instructions on this. After Turnitin (the plagiarism software) has performed the checks (this may take up to 1 or 2 days), your supervisor will check the Turnitin score. This score will be included on the thesis grade form.

## Second Reader

Every thesis is read by a second reader. The second reader plays an objective role in the assessment of the thesis and is not involved in the supervision. The second readers will be assigned to the students by the study advisor and program director. Students do not need to find their own second readers. If you are one of the exceptional cases in which your supervisor is external, it is mandatory that the second reader is part of the IDS teaching staff or part of the GID programme group. The study advisor and program director will ensure the proper matches are made. You will be informed of who will be your second reader approximately one month before the final due date of the thesis.

## The Thesis Defense

A thesis defense is mandatory at all times. If, for any unforeseen reason, the student, the supervisor or the second reader is abroad (or not available for some other reason), a defense via an online platform is an acceptable alternative. There are no restrictions on this. The thesis defense takes place after the final draft of the thesis has been submitted and read by both your supervisor and your second reader. It is best if you, your supervisor and your second reader select a date for the defense on your own, based on your own availability. There is no official scheduling. The only thing to keep in mind is that the defense should take place sometime in the two weeks after the thesis deadline so that grades can be submitted on time for you to graduate. If you foresee any problem with this (such as you can only find a date when all are available for the defense a few days after grades need to be submitted), please let the study advisor know. It is not likely to be a problem, but we do need to be aware and get the final grade as soon as possible.

The defense is attended only by you, the supervisor and the second reader. It is not open to others. Contrary to how it sounds, the thesis defense is not a harsh interrogation of the thesis, but most often an inspiring conversation about it. It gives the students a chance to clarify certain points, or say more than what they could include in the written text. The thesis defense takes one hour and is structured in the following way:

- Students get five minutes for opening statements regarding their thesis. This can be a summary, highlights, reflections, etc. – whatever you deem most important at that time. You should not do this as a powerpoint presentation, but simply at the table, with notes if needed.
- After the student makes the opening statements, the second reader takes the lead in the defense. The second reader will have read the thesis and prepared a number of questions to ask you related to relevance, theory, data collection, data analysis, findings, recommendations, etc. In other words, they can ask a wide range of questions. The question/answer time usually lasts between 35-40 minutes. The first supervisor may also have input or ask questions, but most of the defense should be left up to the second reader.
- After the students have finished the answering the questions, they will be asked to leave the room for 5-10 minutes while the first supervisor and the second reader fill out the Thesis Evaluation form and jointly decide on the final grade.

## Re-sit of the thesis

The first deadline for submission of the thesis is a hard deadline: either a passing grade is given or a fail/NAV will be registered. The second deadline for submission of the thesis is a rewrite: the student can receive any grade the supervisor deems valid on the revised thesis, but Cum Laude will not be awarded. If the re-sit deadline cannot be met, a motivated request for extension of the thesis deadline needs to be sent online to the Examinations Board, after having consulted the study adviser. After a first extension request (third deadline) a student cannot be given a grade above 7.0.

Please note: students are not entitled to supervision during the summer break. If you need to revise your thesis to get a passing grade, please arrange with your supervisor that you get all feedback before the summer starts. You will use that feedback to complete the thesis and re-submit it by the second deadline.

## Extensions

If students are not able to complete their thesis before the second deadline, or the student does not obtain a passing grade with the second deadline, a well-motivated request for extension of the deadline for thesis submission should be filed to the Examination Board via the online form on which can be found through the MIDS student website. Please be aware that passing the set deadlines could have repercussions in terms of supervision.

## Cum laude

program. The thesis grade is an important part of this.

You will graduate cum laude if:

- Your GPA (Grade Point Average) is a minimum of 8.0, prior to rounding
- No course grades are lower than 7.0
- Your thesis has a minimum grade of 8.0
- You finalised your master programme within the set period of two years and submitted your thesis on the first deadline

## Guidelines for written work and note on plagiarism

In writing the thesis, students should follow the guidelines for written work set out in 'Manual for writing an academic paper', which you can find on the A-Z menu on the RMIDS website. Written assignments are meant to test your knowledge and develop your skills. For this reason, as described in detail above, we do not tolerate plagiarism of any kind. All submitted papers will therefore be screened using the Turnitin programme. Students suspected of plagiarism as made evident from the screening will be denied immediate access to classes and exams, and are expected to report to the Examinations Board.

Plagiarism is considered a form of fraud and may lead to severe sanctions, including expulsion from the programme and the University of Amsterdam, not to mention having to live with the reputation of dishonesty. In accordance with the Regulations Governing Fraud And Plagiarism For Uva Students serious plagiarism is defined as:

- a. making use of or reproducing another person's texts, data or ideas to a significant degree without acknowledgement of sources;
- b. presenting the structure or central body of ideas taken from third-party sources as one's own work or ideas;
- c. reproducing the work of fellow students and passing it off as one's own;
- d. reproducing another person's audio, visual or test materials, software or program codes without reference to the sources, and in doing so passing these off as one's own work; e. submitting papers that have been written by someone else (whether or not in exchange for payment), including papers that were acquired from a commercial institution.

Moreover, plagiarism includes:

- a. making use of or reproducing another person's texts, data or ideas without complete and correct source references;
- b. presenting the structure or central body of ideas taken from third-party sources as one's own work or ideas, even if a reference to other authors is included;

- c. failing to clearly indicate in the text – for instance by means of quotation marks or a particular layout – that literal or near-literal quotations have been included in the work, even if a correct reference to the sources has been included;
- d. paraphrasing the contents of another person's texts without sufficient reference to the sources;
- e. submitting a text that has previously been submitted, or is similar to a text that has previously been submitted, in the context of assignments for other courses without correct acknowledgement of sources.

If a case of plagiarism or the misuse of sources is suspected or detected, the lecturer/supervisor will refer such a case to the Examinations Board. All cases of suspected plagiarism will be treated seriously. The measures to be taken will conform to the plagiarism policy of the UvA: such sanctions could range from having to rewrite a section, failing the thesis, or being expelled from the programme. The Examinations Board will decide on the relevant sanction per individual case.

## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Guidelines ethical review and fieldwork abroad<sup>1</sup>

#### *Procedure for Obtaining Ethical Clearance for a Student Research Project*

If a proposed research project (research proposal) fails to comply with the ethical standards presented in the GSSS Ethical Guidelines for Student Research and the referenced documents associated with it, the GSSS degree programme may reject it. Approval must always be granted by the supervising lecturer or thesis supervisor. Supervisors have the authority to veto certain topics and types of research based on the principles expressed here. (For example, your supervisor may not want you to interview traumatized children if you do not have the proper skills in order to prevent their being harmed by your research.) The lecturer/supervisor is the person who can give ethical clearance, based on having been declared competent to do so by the Examinations Board. It is then the responsibility of the student to behave in line with the terms of the clearance in all phases of the research. In the event of doubt about whether a proposed research project is ethically justified, the lecturer/supervisor may first consult a colleague, the director of the relevant AISSR research programme group, or the programme director. In the event of continuing doubt, or if the lecturer/supervisor and the student fail to reach a mutually agreed solution, the proposed research project will be submitted to the Examinations Board for review. If the Examinations Board is unable or unwilling to make a judgement, or if the student or lecturer lodge an objection against the proposed decision of the Examinations Board, the Examinations Board will submit the research proposal to the AISSR Ethics Committee for advice.

Based on the advice issued by the AISSR Ethics Committee, the Examinations Board will decide after consulting the GSSS director. An appeal may then be brought against the decision of the Examinations Board, following the customary appeals procedure.

Step-by-step procedure:

- The lecturer/supervisor reviews the ethical acceptability of the research proposal.
- If it is rejected, the student must revise the proposal.
- In the event of doubt, the lecturer/supervisor consults a relevant colleague.
- If doubt continues, or student and lecturer/supervisor cannot come to an agreement on the needed changes, the proposal is submitted to the Examinations Board.
- The Examinations Board reviews the research proposal and will either issue approval or a rejection.
- If the Examinations Board cannot come to a decision, or if the lecturer or the student object to the approval or rejection, the Examinations Board will submit the case to the AISSR Ethics Committee.
- Having heard (and following on from) the AISSR Ethics Committee, the Examinations Board will reach a final judgement.
- The usual appeals procedures relating to decisions of the Examinations Board apply to any further steps.

If you submit a master thesis to a programme requiring ethical clearance without having received such clearance, you have not met one of the important learning outcomes of your degree programme: awareness of your ethical responsibilities as a researcher. This means that you do not qualify for the degree, even if your thesis exhibits no other weaknesses. In practice, it means that your thesis will not be assessed. You receive no credit for it and have to start from scratch.

---

<sup>1</sup> This appendix is part of the GSSS Ethical Guidelines for Student Research which is available on the RMIDS programme information Canvas page.

## *Guidelines for Research Work Placements and Fieldwork Outside the Netherlands*

As a rule, the supervising lecturer grants approval for fieldwork or research work placements outside the Netherlands as part of the degree programme. S/he has been declared competent to assess the feasibility and safety of the proposed research project abroad by the Examinations Board. In the event of doubt, approval will not be granted. In that case a new research proposal must be drawn up (with a different location for gathering data) and approved by the lecturer/supervisor. If the student disagrees with the rejection, the student may approach the Examinations Board, and the Examinations Board may overrule the lecturer/supervisor.

In any case no approval will be granted for a formal study component abroad if the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs has issued a warning 'advising against non-essential travel' for that particular country or region (a so-called "code red").<sup>2</sup> If the Ministry issues such a warning in the period between approval of the research proposal and the student's actual departure, the approval will have to be revoked. Students are perceived to have an individual responsibility to adhere to the advice issued by the Dutch embassy (or by their country of origin, if they are non-Dutch nationals) for the relevant country or region. In cases where hardship results from such a revocation of approval (e.g. because flights have been paid for), the student may approach the GSSS International Office with a plea for extra financial support (which is, however, not guaranteed).

If a student travels abroad despite consent not having been granted, the proposed research plan will be deemed unapproved and the rights to supervision and assessment of the research project will lapse. The student is responsible for acquiring the proper type of visa for the stay abroad, as needed.

Extracurricular stays abroad fall outside the scope of the degree programme and, in principle, will not be approved by the degree programme. This is based on the principle that a student should be available full-time to complete their degree programme within the duration defined by the relevant programme.

Step-by-step procedure:

- The lecturer/supervisor and the student assess the safety-related aspects of the research destination.
- If the Ministry has issued a warning 'advising against non-essential travel', the proposal is rejected.
- In the event of doubt, the lecturer/supervisor rejects the proposal and discusses this with the student.
- If the student disagrees with the rejection (and continues to do so after discussion), the proposal may be submitted to the Examinations Board.
- The Examinations Board reviews the research proposal and will either issue approval or rejection.
- If, despite a negative decision, a student still goes ahead with the research in accordance with the rejected plan, the rights to supervision and assessment lapse.

### **Appendix 2: Mutual Expectations between the supervisor and the student**

Even though there are general guidelines for the fieldwork and thesis trajectory, the relationships and agreements between students and supervisors often vary based on what is mutually agreed upon. It is important to set out some clear expectations from the start to ensure a positive and productive working relationship. In total, the supervisor has 34 hours per student, and includes time discussing and reading the research proposal, feedback while in the field, reading and providing feedback on all submissions before the final version, reading the final draft of your thesis, the thesis defense and grading. Please keep in mind that supervisors want to help the students as much as possible. However,

---

<sup>2</sup> For up-to-date travel advice please consult <https://www.nederlandwereldwijd.nl/reizen/reisadviezen> (in Dutch).

in the end, the work is the students' own, and there will be limits to how much a supervisor can intervene to shape the final outcome.

Your chapters do not need to be perfect before you hand them in, supervisors are there to improve the quality of your work. Yet, their time is limited and precious, so make sure that you present something that is worth to discuss, preferably already indicating where you feel you need specific help. In general, it is useful to discuss how you want to work together in terms of time and expectations regarding submissions and feedback. Here is a potential check-list of what to plan:

- Plan how many meetings you will have before and after going to the field.
- Plan a writing time-line from the time you begin the writing phase (after research is completed) to the final due date: set dates for when you will submit individual sections or chapters. Make it realistic and prioritize sticking to this timeline. It will result in a smoother writing process and will give you the time you need if revisions are necessary. It will also ensure that your supervisor has time to give feedback when you expect it. A week-by-week overview may be the most helpful.
- Decide on how much time the supervisor will need to provide feedback for each section you submit.
- Be clear about what kind of feedback you are looking for at each stage of writing and plan (do you have specific questions, do you need help on structure, coherence, etc.)
- Plan ahead what you want to discuss in the meetings.

### Appendix 3: The thesis working document and tips

You may benefit from creating a working document with the structure of your thesis. Use so-called styles (in Word) for the headings, which makes it easier to navigate from one part to another as the document grows and which facilitates the generation of a table of contents; insert page numbers; keep your reference list up-to-date from the beginning and at all times. Put the introduction, theoretical framework and methodology chapter in this working document (all to be taken from your research proposal – the only occasion that you are allowed to self-plagiarise!). Decide on adaptations in your theoretical framework and indicate with inserted comments whether, where and how it should be expanded (to be discussed with your thesis supervisor). Adapt your methodological chapter by turning the future tense used in your research proposal into the past tense and adapting it to what you actually did and experienced in the field. Write the contextual chapter which is generally easy to write. In this way you can have four chapters ready in 2-3 weeks (depending on the quality of the theoretical framework, conceptual scheme and contextual information in your research proposal and the adaptations needed) which is quite stimulating. Save the file with a date each time you make changes (e.g. Thesis\_Your\_Name\_15042017).

To indicate preliminary content of chapters and sections, it helps to complement the following sentences:

- This chapter/section deals with/addresses.....
- In this chapter/section I want to make clear/argue that....
- To that end, I need the following building blocks/steps: (a) ....., (b)...., (c)...
- The material needed for this chapter/section is: (a) ....., (b)...., (c)...

Tips:

- Figure out, working backward from the deadline, how much time you want to spend on each chapter and what that means per day. Breaking up the big project into small weekly goals will help a lot in keeping a clear perspective.
- The importance of working neatly: from day one of your project, try to establish clear procedures on archiving your work. If you already had a draft chapter lay-out before you left to the field, this can help you in organizing your findings. Be neat in copying quotations, add the page numbers, and write down the full references of everything you need. The use of Endnote, or another library programme, can save you an enormous amount of work in editing

your library, and also the frustration of knowing that ‘there is this great quote but where, where did I leave it...’. Endnote, and other computer programmes, also allow you to ‘label’ information designated for a certain chapter. Working neatly also means trying to avoid spelling errors from the beginning.

- The importance of tidy references: We do not require that you use a specific type of referencing style, however you should be consistent and complete with the style that you choose. Referencing techniques are always being updated, so it is good to check online for the most current way to reference sources.
- When in doubt, over-reference: if you are not sure if a part of your thesis needs to be referenced or not, it is always good to err on the side of caution. There is no penalty for too many references, but plagiarism (even accidental) is taken very seriously.
- The importance of relaxation: writing up a thesis is hard, and often solitary work. It is important not to become completely enmeshed by it, but to also relax at times, to keep one day a week free from working on the thesis, and to pick up sporting or another form of relaxation.

#### **Appendix 4: Primary data verification principles**

It is good practice for a researcher to be as transparent as possible about data collection and sources from the field. In the IDS programme, we have agreed upon a number of principles to ensure this. For students this means the following:

- The student should make a numbered list of all respondents included in the research, indicate what method was used (interview, focus group, survey, etc.) and include their key characteristics (name, age, sex, location), as well as the date of interview/participation. This list should be handed to the thesis supervisor upon return from fieldwork.
- When citing perspectives of respondents, a reference should be made in the text (or in a footnote) at least indicating the interview number. In agreement with the supervisor other aspects might be included (interviewed by..., date, affiliation, or other specific characteristics important for the analysis). The number should correspond to the number of the list mentioned above.
- The complete dataset, either in the form of interview transcripts or summaries thereof, or in the form of an Excel/SPSS/STAT/GIS datasheet, should be submitted for verification to the thesis supervisor during the thesis writing process. In all cases, the privacy of the respondents will be protected. This will be the “transparency document” which you will submit in your *Thesis Seminar* once you return from doing research.

#### **Appendix 5: Communication Product**

It is important to know about this assignment before going to the field so that you can start your preparations there. The communication product allows students to draw on their research experience directly, and make it more relevant than for “just” the final thesis. It can also be seen as a way to “give something back” to the people or groups whom students worked with while in the field. The product can be used to communicate their results to help profile themselves as they enter the workforce, and/or to reach out to a wider audience in order to bring awareness to certain issues, to create knowledge bridges between different stakeholder groups, and highlight the relevance of their research to other academics. One of the most important aspects of this assignment is to decide who is the most important audience, who will benefit the most from what you have done? What is the best way to give back? For many the best kind of communication product will be a policy brief that can build directly off the recommendations of the thesis. However, there are many other possibilities including blogs, mini-documentaries, podcasts, photo projects, short stories, illustrated animations, infographics, etc. The final product can also be more creative than these suggestions and we welcome students’ own ideas. The range of ideas that students have come up with in the past few years has been very inspiring and students take this very seriously.

While there is no specific requirement for what the communication product will be, but there are a few basic guidelines:

- It must be manageable within the time allowed. Students will all be working on their thesis at the same time, and should not become too distracted by this assignment. Time in the week after the thesis has been submitted and before the thesis defense is a good time to work on the project.
- Students must get the approval of the *Policy and Practice Seminar* coordinators before moving ahead with their ideas. Other than that, students are welcome to be as traditional or as creative as they choose. Mediums of communication can be written, video or audio recording, visual (such as a poster), or other formats.
- Student should seriously consider how they want to move on after their graduation and choose a communication product that will serve them in their future endeavours.
- Regardless of what the final communication product is, all students must be able to present it on one Powerpoint slide which will be used in the graduation ceremony (see more about the graduation ceremony below).

### **Appendix 6: Back from the Field Report and PowerPoint Presentation**

This assignment will be due before the first session of the *Thesis Seminar*. Please check the *Thesis Seminar* Canvas page for exact deadlines and requirements. It is intended as a first attempt to reflect on your research experience as a whole. Students appreciate this assignment as it encourages them to think about how to get started with the actual analysis. Very importantly, the idea is to write this report without diving into your field data, and not drawing on any literature. In other words: try to write the report based on memory, “off the cuff”, in order to discover for yourself the general storyline and larger patterns. Often, we suggest students write these as they are on the airplane returning from the field to give them the opportunity to reflect and have something to work with when they are ready to start writing. The report should aim to be approximately 1500 words (+/- 10%).

To organize the report, here is a suggested format.

- a. Briefly describe where you were and what your topic is.
- b. Give an overview of the main preliminary findings of your field research.
- c. Present the most interesting and surprising aspects.
- d. Formulate a provisional answer to the research question: very provisional!!
- e. Will you need to adjust your main research question and sub-questions based on what you take from this reflection. What direction do you expect the question to take?

Short PowerPoint presentation: Building on the report, students are asked to make a short PowerPoint presentation which allows them to visualize their back-from-fieldwork report and share it with others in peer groups. For the PowerPoint, we ask you to add a few things to make the visualization and understanding of the topic for others stronger.

It can include:

- a. What is your problem statement?
- b. What are your research questions?
- c. How does your study area look like (use map and photo(s)?)
- d. What kind of data you have collected? (E.g. x surveys, y in-depth interviews, z focus group(s) on ..., etc., think also of observations, documents, visuals, newspaper clippings, etc.)
- e. What are your preliminary findings? (the most important ones; what do you expect to come out of your data; highlight the most interesting or surprising.)
- f. What is the provisional answer to your main research question?

### **Appendix 7: Consider a “peer review buddy” during the writing process**

If you would like to form buddy groups to help each other in the writing process, here are some tips for doing so. Just praising or editing is not enough; what you all need are constructive comments that help you and others to improve your outlines, chapters, etc. So you can praise a draft’s strengths, but the primary purpose of peer review is to improve each other’s work.

For a good review of draft chapters or sections, pay attention to

- Overall strengths and weaknesses.
- Structure: is the overall organisation of the draft clear and effective and is the internal logic convincing (is there some sort of introduction, body of text and closure to each section and chapter).
- Are the sections supportive to the respective headings? Are the contents of each section and each paragraph clear and insightful? Have you noted any errors?
- Argument: is the argument clear and does the argumentation follow a logical storyline? Is it clear how the section is embedded in the broader whole of the thesis?
- Suggestions regarding style, transitions and mechanics (spelling, punctuation, etc.).
- Specific suggestions to improve the draft.

In general, some do's:

- Treat your colleague with courtesy and respect.
- Comment the draft, not the person.
- Concentrate on the argument, not whether you agree or disagree with it.
- Do aim for balance and completeness in pointing out strengths and problem areas.
- Do comment on specific examples and problem areas.
- Concentrate on how the work of your colleague student can be improved.

Some don'ts:

- Don't use snippy marginal comments such as "So what?" or "What's your point?" but be as specific as possible.
- Don't get into debate over irresolvable questions of individual value and belief.
- Don't argue with the writer. Raise objections or ask for explanations only to clarify and suggest ways of improving the text.
- Don't confine your comments to mechanical details.
- Do not make vague, global comments.
- Don't rewrite for the writer.

### **Appendix 8: Graduation**

Elsewhere on the programme information Canvas page, you will find more details about graduation. To give some explanation here, the graduation ceremony usually takes place sometime in October, but this may change. It will be confirmed with you by the registrar's office once the date has been set. Please note: the MIDS programme does not set the date. The graduation ceremony is attended by friends and family. The graduation ceremonies run parallel and there are usually 8-10 students per group. The supervisors of the students attend the ceremony (or somebody takes their place if they are not able to). The programme director opens the ceremony. After this each student presents their communication product in a short presentation of 3-4 minutes maximum. After this, the supervisor will make a small speech of 2-3 minutes about the student. The student then signs their diploma. The ceremony is followed by a reception. It is, of course, desirable that all students attend the graduation. However, it happens that students cannot attend. If that is the case, there is no problem. Simply inform the registrar and your diploma can be picked up separately or it will be mailed to you.

### **Appendix 9: Evaluation Form Master Thesis International Development Studies**

It is a good idea to look over this thesis evaluation form as you begin the writing process so that you are aware of all the expectations. The thesis is evaluated on the basis of the twelve components presented in the table below. For each component, specific points of attention are provided. Each component receives a separate score on a scale from 1 to 10 (thus not each specific point), whereby 1 is very poor and 10 is excellent. The final grade of the thesis is based on the twelve separate scores. However, some components (e.g. theory and research design) weigh more than others (e.g. style and layout). The supervisor and second reader must agree on one single typewritten version of the thesis

evaluation form that is to be signed by both. A copy of the signed evaluation form should be submitted to the Registrar's Office of the GSSS.

<b>1. Purpose and relevance of the research</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Is the purpose of the research clear?</li> <li>▪ Are the scientific relevance of the research and the knowledge gap clearly formulated?</li> <li>▪ Has the societal relevance of the research been addressed?</li> </ul> Comment:										
<b>2. Problem statement</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Are the problem statement, research question, and sub-questions clearly formulated?</li> <li>▪ Is the problem statement original?</li> <li>▪ Can the questions be reasonably answered/explored within the period of time allocated for the research?</li> <li>▪ <i>Is the problem statement well embedded in the international scientific debate?</i></li> </ul> Comment:										
<b>3. Theory and conceptual model</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Are the theoretical framework and the conceptual model well elaborated and do they give direction to the analysis?</li> <li>▪ Is the theory well informed by a literature review? Or, in the case of grounded research, is the theory well informed by the empirical data and then linked to relevant literature?</li> <li>▪ Has the student reflected on the theoretical framework?</li> </ul> Comment:										
<b>4. Operationalization</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Are concepts correctly operationalized, either before the field study or (in the case of more grounded research) during the field study?</li> <li>▪ Is the use of variables and indicators relevant and justified?</li> <li>▪ Is the cultural/local context acknowledged in the operationalization process?</li> </ul> Comment:										
<b>5. Research design and justification</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Is the research design sufficiently explained?</li> <li>▪ Have the employed methods and techniques, including sampling and data-processing, been justified and are they suitable for the purpose of the research?</li> <li>▪ Has the student reflected on the quality (reliability/validity) of his/her research?</li> <li>▪ Has the student reflected on the ethical aspects of his/her research?</li> <li>▪ <i>Has the student reflected on his/her ontological and epistemological position?</i></li> </ul> Comment:										
<b>6. Data collection, processing and analysis</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Have relevant empirical data sources (e.g. policy documents, survey, statistical data, spatial data) been amply and purposively used?</li> <li>▪ Has the data been collected in a reliable and responsible manner?</li> <li>▪ Has the mixed-methods approach (if applicable) been applied in an adequate manner?</li> <li>▪ Has the data been adequately and correctly analysed and interpreted?</li> <li>▪ Is the student capable of carrying out research independently?</li> </ul> Comment:										
<b>7. Structure of thesis</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Is the thesis well-structured (adequate introduction and background, clear distinction between principal and secondary issues, coherent line of reasoning)?</li> </ul> Comment:										
<b>8. Argumentation</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Are statements supported by empirical evidence?</li> <li>▪ Have the research questions been answered?</li> <li>▪ Do the conclusions follow from the findings? Are generalisations justified?</li> <li>▪ Have the findings and conclusions been connected to the theory?</li> <li>▪ <i>Does the discussion/conclusion reflect on existing theories and knowledge?</i></li> </ul> <p>Comment:</p>										
<b>9. Policy and/or research recommendations</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What is the adequacy of the (policy) recommendations?</li> <li>▪ Are the (policy) recommendations well formulated, sufficiently justified, and based on a critical reflection of the subject matter?</li> </ul> <p>Comment:</p>										
<b>10. Style, referencing, language, tables and graphics</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Does the thesis use clear and concise writing and correct English grammar, sentence structure and spelling?</li> <li>▪ Is the empirical situation well illustrated with maps, tables, figures and citations?</li> <li>▪ Has referencing and citation of academic work been done in a scientifically responsible way?</li> </ul> <p>Comment:</p>										
<b>11. The final defence</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Is the student capable of critical reflection on his/her own thesis?</li> <li>▪ Has the student defended his/her thesis well?</li> </ul> <p>Comment:</p>										
<b>12. Additional qualities</b>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
<p><i>(NB: these are not part of the regular assessment, but acknowledge excellent features that are normally only required at Research Master level)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>Does the thesis contribute new insights to existing academic debates in International Development Studies?</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Does the thesis reflect the student's ability to carry his/her findings to a higher level of abstraction and to reflect beyond the analysed problem?</i></li> <li>▪ <i>Is there potential for the thesis to be converted into a publishable article?</i></li> </ul> <p>Comment:</p>										
Overall evaluation/additional observations:										