

Econ MSc thesis seminar: information for advisors

Under Aalto/BIZ rules the MSc thesis seminar is worth 6 credits and is graded separately from the MSc thesis. At the Department of Economics the seminar is given twice a year and lasts for two periods. There are three stages where advisor input is needed for the seminar.

1. Topic approval

Required by the end of previous semester

Students need a faculty member's approval for their thesis topic before they can enroll in the following semester's seminar. The thesis process should start at this time. Go over what materials the student will work on over the next couple of months before the seminar starts. The minimum goal is that the student must be prepared to present a research plan in the 2nd week of the seminar.

If a faculty member ends up with too many advisees we will propose some students to switch advisors before the seminar starts.

2. Research plan (3-6 pages) and topic presentation (15 min)

Early part of first seminar period (1 or 3)

The learning goal is that the student is able to communicate to an audience of peers their research topic, what the main research question is/are, how they plan to answer the question(s), and why an answer would be interesting. The presentation also serves as an introduction to the broader topic for the audience. Parts of the research plan could be used in the introduction or in the background section of the thesis. However, there is no requirement for the research paper to adhere to the research plan.

3. Research paper (15-30 pages) and main presentation (25 min)

Late part of second seminar period (2 or 4)

The learning goal is that the student is able to communicate to an audience of peers the results of economic research, to explain how they were arrived at, what is their significance, and what are their limitations. The research can be original or a literature review, the key is that the student is able to teach the audience something interesting about their thesis topic. The research paper is not the entire thesis. If the MSc thesis is ready at the time of the presentation (as it is for a minority of

students) then the research paper should be based on a key section of the thesis, with introduction and other parts modified accordingly.

Students are under strict instructions to focus on results. A student who is working to obtain original results that are not ready at the time of the main presentation must then present a literature review. There were cases in the past where the main paper was just a rehashed research plan with added explanations for the lack of progress. This would now earn a failing grade for the seminar, as passing requires meeting the minimum learning goal.

Main points for advisors

The schedule of student presentations is posted after the first meeting. Please make a note of your advisees' dates, because all written inputs (both papers and slides) need to be pre-approved by the advisor by previous Thursday. The seminar meets on Tuesdays, but students are required to upload their work by the end of previous Thursday. This is a hard deadline: missing it causes the student to fail the seminar (barring exceptional circumstances).

The crucial input from the advisor is to go over the papers and presentations with the student. You should have sufficient time for back-and-forth with feedback and improvements before the deadline. The advisor approval is pass/fail; currently we only track this approval by student's written statement about who approved the submission and when.

Do not rubber stamp work that does not meet minimum standards, because this leads to a waste of time for the audience and an impossible task for the designated discussant. The work does not need to be very good, but it needs to demonstrate meeting the minimum learning goal.

Other information

While not required, advisors are welcome to attend student presentations. If you inform us in advance of your plan to attend we can adjust the schedule so that you do not need to stay for the entire meeting.

Students are required to read and comment on every paper in their subgroup, and to be the designated discussant for one. (We aim for subgroups of 7-10 students each.) These tasks require no input from thesis advisors.

Special requirements apply to retake students, to make sure that no one will take the seminar more than twice. Retakers must submit a passing draft of the research paper at the start of the seminar, but can of course improve it during the semester.

Marko Terviö, September 8th 2017