

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 held 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 Spring for the Fall seminar, by mid-November for the Spring

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 at the very latest. At the very least, 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 ready to give a topic presentation and submit a research plan in the 2nd week of the seminar.

If some faculty members end up with too many advisees we will propose some students to switch advisors.

2. Research plan (3-6 pages) and topic presentation (12 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. The research paper is not required to adhere to the research plan.

3. Research paper (15-30 p) 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 economic research on their thesis topic. The research paper cannot be the entire thesis. If the MSc thesis is completed 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 exact dates of student presentations are finalized in the beginning of a period. Students are advised to inform you of their submission deadlines as soon as they become available. Please make a note of your advisees' dates, because all written inputs (both papers and slides) need to be pre-approved by the advisor before the deadline. Most seminar meetings take place in subgroups that meet on Mondays or Tuesdays; 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 truly 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 to pass, but it has to demonstrate meeting the minimum learning goal.

Other information

The most common reason for failing the seminar is not meeting the deadline for the main paper. Special requirements apply to retake students, to make sure that no one will take the seminar more than twice. At the start of the semester retakers must submit a draft of the main research paper, which has been approved by the advisor as at least "pass" (they can still improve the draft during the semester).

Students are required to comment on every paper and presentation in their subgroup, and to be the designated discussant for one. (We aim for subgroups of max 12 students each.) These tasks do not require input from thesis advisors.

Kristiina Huttunen and Marko Terviö, January 3rd, 2022