Frequently Asked Questions
Master's Thesis 15 and 30 credits
Department of Informatics
Umeå University

1. Requirements

What are the requirements for this course?

The Masters' thesis courses have four requirements: 1) Thesis proposal, 2) Full thesis, 3) Presentation and Discussion, and 4) Publication in DiVA.

What is Requirement 1: Thesis proposal?

During the first week of the course, you must hand in a thesis proposal to the course coordinator. The proposal must contain a preliminary title, a suggested research question, a proposed field of research where you situate your research question, a proposed method and a brief discussion of potential results. It should be about 300-500 words long and contain at least two scientific references. It will be graded with a Pass/Fail.

At the very beginning of the course the course coordinator will go through, in more detail, everything that is required to write a thesis proposal, what our expectations are, and how the research should be framed.

After you've handed in your thesis proposal, the course coordinator will give you feedback on your proposal and thereafter assign you a supervisor, who will be your advisor for the remainder of the course.

What is Requirement 2: Full thesis?

There are seven assessment criteria for the Master's thesis that are used to assess the quality of the work when grading. There are also some other criteria that have to be followed:

- A 15 credit full thesis adheres to all formatting guidelines is 20-25 pages long with at least 15 scientific references in the related research section, and at least 5-7 interviews (or equivalent depending on the data material).
- A 30 credit full thesis adheres to all formatting guidelines, is 25-30 pages long with at least 20 scientific references in the related research section, and at least 7-10 interviews (or equivalent).

Furthermore they both contain a research question, an introduction-, related research-, methodology-, results-, discussion-, and conclusions section.

What is Requirement 3: Presentation and Discussion?

There are two parts to this requirement:

1) Examiners' seminar: The student must present his/her work during an examiners' seminar, following a specific template. During the seminar, the student will get feedback from the examiners, that is the people who will be reading and grading the thesis, and is also expected to comment on and give feedback to other students' work. This assignment will be graded with Pass/Fail.

2) During the final seminar the student must critically examine other students' thesis work, and defend his/her own thesis when critically examined. To complete this requirement, the student must act as opponent of one (1) other thesis, discussant of one (1) thesis, audience for two (2) thesis presentations, and defendant of their own thesis. This assignment will be graded with Pass/Fail

What is Requirement 4: Publication in DiVA?
When the thesis has gotten the grade Pass or Pass with Distinction, the student has to send the finished document as a PDF-file to the teacher, *and* publish the thesis in DiVA. This assignment will be graded with Pass/Fail

2. The Process
What does the thesis process look like?

1) You start out by meeting the course coordinator for lectures and workshops. During the first course week you will be required to hand in your thesis proposal and the coordinator will team you up with a supervisor.

2) After a few weeks, there will be an examiners' seminar, which is mandatory and requires your physical presence. After that you work on producing a full thesis.

3) About two weeks before the official end of the course, you are required to hand in an almost complete seminar version of the thesis. Around this time there is also a lecture on seminar preparation.

4) A week before the end of the course, there is the mandatory final seminar. After the seminar you have a week to make corrections and additions before you hand in the thesis for grading.

5) The examiners will meet in the two weeks after the course ends, and the grade will be presented thereafter. If you receive the grade Pass or Pass with distinction, you have a few days to make minor edits and publish the thesis in DiVA. Once the thesis is published, the course coordinator will report your grade. If you are writing a 30 credit thesis, it has to be published before Midsummer (June 23), in order for your grade to be registered before summer vacation.

6) If you receive the grade Fail, there is a second opportunity to hand in your revised thesis for assessment in June (15 credit thesis) or September (30 credit thesis).

Time frame
You have about ten/twenty weeks to finish your thesis. However, an almost-complete version of the thesis (the so called seminar version) has to be submitted after approximately eight/eighteen weeks. This means that you must plan accordingly and use your time wisely.

What is the final seminar?
During the final seminar, each thesis has an allotted time space of about 55 minutes. The author(s) presents his/her thesis for 15 minutes, then the opponents, discussants (fellow students who have read the thesis beforehand and prepared questions) and the audience ask questions about the thesis (findings, method, related research etc.) for about 40 minutes (20 min for opponents, 10 for discussants, 10 for audience). Each student will present their own thesis, act as discussant for two other theses, and as

audience member for two additional thesis presentations, which means that one is required to be there for at least five different seminars.

3. Format
What is the general format of the thesis?
A 15 credit master's thesis should be 20-25 pages long (excluding references and appendices), include at least 15 scientific references (in the related research section), and contain at least 5-7 interviews (or an equivalent amount of data).

A 30 credit master's thesis should be 25-30 pages long (excluding references and appendices), include at least 20 scientific references (in the related research section), and contain at least 7-10 interviews (or an equivalent amount of data).

Can I choose any formatting template for my thesis?
No, the thesis has to follow the departmental formatting guidelines. The template will be posted in Cambro once the course starts.

4. Choosing a Topic
How can I find a good topic?
You should start out by narrowing down your field- what do you find interesting? Look for literature in that area. See if you can identify a gap in research- that is, can you find an area that you would like to know more about and identify a problem or specific issue that no one else has studied/written about before? Start big and narrow it down.

Can I choose any topic I find interesting?
Yes and no. Your topic has to be grounded within the main topic of the program. This means that if you are an HCI-student, the topic must belong to HCI. If you are an IT Management student, the topic must be grounded within IT Management. However, within those two broad categories, you are free to choose. Please remember that your topic has to include IT somehow, whether it is your object of study, your solution to a perceived problem or something else.

Is there a list of available topics?
No. If something comes up (for example a firm contacts us with a specific problem), the course coordinator will present it to the whole class. It is, however, ultimately the student's responsibility to come up with a topic and formulate a research question.

What if I want to work with an external company?
You are welcome and encouraged to work with an external company. However it is up to you to find a suitable firm and a good research question. You need to make sure that your research indeed addresses a problem in research and not just solves a practical problem. This is why it is important to tie your research question to a specific field of research.

How can I find a business case?
Once you know what you want to study, start looking for a firm. It could be local or global, as long as you get access to good data. Start making some choices: is there a

specific type of firm that you want to investigate- small, medium, large? Does it matter if it has its own IT department or not? Is it within the public or private sector? Do you want to go deep into one type of firm or compare different types? How easy will it be to get hold of people?

Can you give me suggestions of available companies?
The Department of Informatics does not have a list of available firms, however Umeå University has a website where firms may post available topics. It is called LinkedStudent: <http://www.linkedstudent.umu.se/linkedstudent/?languageId=1>

I have a really good idea for a topic, but I want to discuss it with someone. Who can I talk to?
Before the course starts- come talk to the course coordinator.

5. Supervisors
How will I find a supervisor?
The course coordinator will assign you a supervisor after you have submitted and gotten a Pass on your thesis proposal.

Can I choose my own supervisor?
The course coordinator gets a pool of professors from the Director of Studies, and then tries to match up students and professors so that everyone is happy. If you have a specific professor in mind already, you are free to suggest this person, however there is no guarantee that this will be the person who ends up being your supervisor (since it all depends on what else they are doing that semester), but we try to be as accommodating as we can.

Can I have a supervisor from another department?
Maybe, come talk to the course coordinator.

What can I expect from my supervisor?
You can expect your supervisor to help you in your thesis process, by reading and commenting on your text, by discussing issues with you, and by being available for meetings. However, the time your supervisor gets to supervise your thesis is very limited, and their schedules are usually full with other engagements, so you cannot expect him or her to be at your beck and call, day and night.

How much time can I expect from my supervisor?
The supervisor gets 20 (for MA15) or 25 (for MA30) hours to supervise a thesis. This includes meetings, time spent reading and commenting on your thesis draft, and time spent chairing your session at the student seminar.

Will my supervisor tell me what to do?
A thesis process is very much a student-driven process. You have to manage your own process and time, including scheduling appointments with your supervisor, asking for help, and initiating discussions. Your supervisor will not push you and tell you what to do, unless you specifically ask to be pushed. It is encouraged to have an initial discussion

about expectations and hopes and wishes. Communication is always paramount to a good relationship.

Can I change supervisors?
Not without good reason.

What if I don't get along with my supervisor?
Always try to solve any problems directly with the specific person. Communication is key. If all else fails, come talk to the course coordinator.

6. General Questions
Can I write my thesis abroad?
Yes, you are allowed to write the thesis abroad. However, there are some sessions that are mandatory and that require your physical presence in Umeå (please see the schedule). But if you want to do, for example, your data collection abroad, that is ok.

Do I have to write my thesis alone?
No, in fact we encourage you to write in pairs. Pairs have a much higher chance of actually completing the thesis on time, so find a partner and team up!

Where can I find information about the course?
Once the course starts, all relevant information will be posted in Cambro. The schedule is available via the Department of Informatics' website: www.informatik.umu.se

What is Urkund?
Urkund is a plagiarism detection system that the department uses. Before submitting your final version of the thesis, you also have to submit it to Urkund, which compares your text to a large number of sources to make sure that text has not been copied without proper referencing. Urkund does not make a decision about plagiarism, this decision is always up to the examiners.

7. What if?
What happens if I miss the deadline for the thesis proposal?
You will not be assigned a supervisor until the course coordinator has read and graded your thesis proposal with a Pass.

What if I miss the Examiners' seminar?
You will be required to hand in a written exam.

What happens if I fail the final seminar?
It is not often that someone will fail the oral part- that is presentation and discussion, but if that would happen, there is a catching-up opportunity in September of the same year as your course, and then in January of the next year.

What happens if I have too few pages, only three interviews etc.?
Unless there is a very good reason for this (for example, the company you studied only has three employees, however you did an in-depth study of this particular site, met with each employee several times, have thorough documentation of your process, and a rich data set), your thesis will not meet the requirements and therefore be graded with a Fail.

What if my thesis is graded with Fail?
After the thesis has been presented and discussed, it will be graded. If it would be graded with fail, there is an opportunity to make corrections and hand it in for a second round of grading later in September.

Do I have to re-take the whole course if I fail at any of the requirements?
You do not have to retake the whole course. If you are planning to leave Umeå after the spring semester, but are not able to present your thesis in May- then you would have to arrange a trip to come back in September to present the thesis then. You must be physically present for the thesis presentation and may not present your thesis via Skype or any other video-conferencing equipment.

8. Grading

How does the grading process work?
Once you've submitted your thesis for grading, one of the examiners will read and assess your thesis. All examiners will meet in a grading committee meeting and discuss each thesis and the assessment thereof. The examiners will then decide upon a grade.

Who will tell me my thesis grade?
The course coordinator will let you know what grade the thesis got.

What happens after the thesis has been graded with a Pass or Pass with distinction?
The next step after having your thesis graded is to make any small corrections that you have been asked to make, and then send a copy of the thesis as a .pdf file to the course coordinator who will then send you a serial number. After that you may upload your thesis to DiVA, and once the course coordinator sees that the thesis is published, and that you have finished all of the requirements of the course, s/he will report your grade.

If my thesis is graded with Fail, can I have more supervision?
If the thesis gets the grade Fail, you should always have a follow up meeting with your supervisor to discuss the assessment and make a plan for your revision process. Before you submit your thesis for a second round of grading, you should ask your supervisor to have a look at it. However, you cannot expect your supervisor to spend time on regular meetings over an extended period of time after the course is finished. If you are in need of more supervision you must contact the Director of Studies.