

MEPP

Master of European Politics and Policies

Member of *European Master in Public*

Administration network

Parkstraat 45 Box 3609 3000 Leuven



KATHOLIEKE
UNIVERSITEIT
LEUVEN

GUIDELINES DISSERTATION MEPP

In addition to coursework requirements, students are expected to produce a dissertation that consists of work of potentially publishable quality which makes a contribution to theory and practice of public administration, public policy-making in the European context and of other European political issues.

It should be stressed that the latter requirement is not intended to be restrictive. Such a contribution could be made in many ways. Work on the EU or comparative work (particularly since a stay in another country gives students the opportunity to develop such work) is one obvious form, but other types of contributions are not excluded, for example dissertations of a mainly theoretical nature, work applying a non-European literature or sets of concepts to European material, or comparisons between non-European countries and one or more European countries.

I. RELEVANCE

The dissertations are submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of 'Master of European Politics and Policies'. The dissertation **counts for 15 credits**, the complementary research seminar counts for 5 credits. Students are requested to clearly demonstrate the link between the topic studied and a recognized corpus of literature in public administration, public policy-making or European politics (in the same way that a scientific journal article has to do).

II. THE ESSENTIAL INGREDIENTS

A well-planned programme of research for a dissertation goes through a standard series of stages, irrespective of what you are writing about and the sort of research methods you are using.

Put at its most simple, you start by asking a question; you select and collect data which are relevant to that question; you then analyse the data in order to answer the original question. And there must be a clear line from question to data to analysis and conclusion: a logical structure to the argument, from start to finish.

1. *The Research Question*

You need to have a clear research question. That means a question which is carefully formulated, so that you are capable of answering the question unambiguously. Make sure that you have chosen a question which, as well as being clear, is one which can be answered with the kinds of data that you are going to be able to collect within the time and resources available to you.

You should, of course, choose a question which interests you. The dissertation will take a lot of your time and will require a lot of dedication. On the other hand, do not expect in your dissertation to provide an ultimate answer to the meaning of life: you may provide that at some later stage in your career, but for the moment you must choose a research question which is manageable and therefore not over-ambitious.

Questions do not arise in a vacuum. They represent a puzzle, a problem, or a paradox: something that is not clearly understood. Remember: research is supposed to make a contribution to knowledge; if everyone knows what the answer is, then there is no puzzle, and whatever you are doing is not research. In saying what question you have chosen, you will need to show that other investigators - and, often, the policy-makers who deal with this particular problem at a practical level - have in some degree been puzzled. This is one of the reasons why, early in your dissertation, you will review the existing literature on the subject you have chosen, showing its insights but also its limitations. You will need to take stock of the theoretical literature which could provide insights into your chosen paradox. You may also want to expose the assumptions lying behind conventional policies in the field concerned and the perplexities with which policy-makers are wrestling. By the end of your dissertation you will, we hope, have helped to resolve the sense of puzzlement. It is in this sense that the Master's Programme asks that you demonstrate that you are capable of original thought not necessarily in the sense of being able to produce findings which shake the foundations of human knowledge, but in the sense of being able to identify disagreements within the literature, and contribute through your research to their resolution.

Your research question should not be purely descriptive: for example, 'What is the policy of government or public agency X on problem Y, and how does it differ from that of government Z?'. Nor should your question take the form 'What happened in the run up to policy decision X?'. That is a chronological question, and chronology is not sufficiently interesting for a dissertation. You are supposed to be showing your abilities not in description or chronology, but in the social science of political and policy analysis. In other words, your question should start with 'why' or 'how' not 'what'. A 'why' question will require you to model, to explain, to appraise, to evaluate, to predict, to build scenarios, or to test theory: one that merely requires you to describe and compare descriptions is not appropriate for this degree.

Finally, if you are going to study particular countries, you should justify your choice by reference to the research question you have chosen. Of course, part of the reason why you focus on countries X and Y may simply be that you spent time in each and you did not have the time or money to go to the really interesting country Z. Nevertheless, you should frame your research question in a way that exploits to the full the interesting contrasts that can be found between countries X and Y. If there are no interesting contrasts (or, perhaps, interesting similarities) - interesting given the general topic you have chosen - then you should choose a quite different research question.

2. Selecting and Collecting the Data

Some social scientists make their reputations analysing and criticising the theoretical propositions of their predecessors and developing their own theoretical edifices. For your dissertation, in contrast, although you will make use of theory, you will need to collect and analyse empirical data. Your empirical data could, of course, include evidence about the assumptions, the prejudices, the 'theories' with which policy-makers and policy-takers operate in their practical concerns; but the theories developed by social scientists cannot serve as the 'data' which you are studying. Only in few cases, and on condition of motivation, will you be allowed to write a purely theoretical or methodological dissertation.

If you have formulated your research question with sufficient precision, it should be possible to see what data are both necessary and sufficient to answer the question. If you find yourself wondering whether some of the data which you are collecting are relevant, it may be because you need to sharpen up the research question with which you started. Indeed, what often happens is that as the researcher considers the data that are available, the question is itself progressively refined. The textbooks give the impression that the research question is crystal clear before the data collection starts; in practice, however, it is often only by confronting your provisional research question with the initial data that you achieve the required precision.

3. *The Analysis*

Think carefully about how you will present the data in your dissertation. Wherever possible, include in the text the most important tables of key variables that you have drawn up as part of your analysis.

Where you are using data from different countries (perhaps interviews carried out in more than one country) you should comment on the quality and comparability of the data which you offer and the implications for the robustness of the conclusions which you then draw. As the Master's Programme emphasises, you must show that you have learned how to interpret with due caution cross-national data and studies based thereon, taking into account the difficulties which are posed when such data are not fully comparable.

As you refine your research question, and as you select, collect and analyze your data, you may well find yourself having to re-think your methodology: the principles on which it is based and the practical means by which it can be carried out. Writing a dissertation is, usually, a process of learning (not least, learning from mistakes). You may wish to include, perhaps in your final chapter or in annex, some reflections on your methodological journey.

A dissertation needs to have not only a clear definition of the problem but also and most importantly a central integrating argument. The argument should be logically developed, building up a case point by point, and displaying a critical and analytical approach to the subject.

Descriptive material which does not contribute to such an argument should normally be omitted.

It is not enough simply to write about the collection of books and articles which you have read about the topic. You are required to examine the evidence critically.

Your argument must have depth and balance. Important counter arguments must be met. If not refuted, it is important to take them into consideration in your final assessment and give eventually your reasons for having doubts about their validity. Similarly, do not ignore evidence that does not support your case. Examine the evidence thoroughly. If you can find no fault and if you have no counter-evidence, then maybe something is wrong with your case.

The dissertation must have an analytical base. Always link your empirical and descriptive material (fieldwork or material based on secondary sources) to some conceptual or theoretical literature: e.g. if you are describing an organisation structure, refer to organisational theory; if you are writing about garbage collection organisation, you must relate to the broader literature on public service provision; if you are analysing a government's social housing policy, you will have to refer to broader literature on social policy; if you describe a particular policy-making process you must make sure that you relate to the established concepts and literature on public policy-making.

4. *Academic Integrity*

Students are required to respect rules on intellectual property. Borrowed ideas and concepts are referenced with mention of author and location (book, article, internet; including page references). Literal quotations are put between quotation marks, followed by references to author and location. Breaking these rules of academic integrity is considered as theft of property. **Sanctions range from fail marks to expulsion from the programme¹.**

¹ The rules and sanctions of academic integrity also apply to written course work.

III. SOME DO'S AND DON'TS

A dissertation needs to have not only a clear definition of the problem but also and most importantly a central integrating argument. The argument should be logically developed, building up a case point by point, and displaying a critical and analytical approach to the subject. Descriptive material which does not contribute to such an argument should (normally) be omitted.

It is not enough simply to write about the collection of books and articles which you have read about the topic. You are required to examine the evidence critically.

Your argument must have depth and balance. Important counter arguments must be met. If not refuted, it is important to take them into consideration in your final assessment and give eventually your reasons for having doubts about their validity. Similarly, do not ignore evidence that does not support your case. Examine the evidence thoroughly. If you can find no fault and if you have no counter-evidence, then maybe something is wrong with your case.

Your dissertation should offer and justify some causal statements: in other words, statements which explain, make predictions, reduce complex phenomena to a few main lines of causation. A system of classification won't do this, nor will a series of definitions. Do not make causal or explanatory statements, unless for each one you make, you can show that you have provided suitable evidence.

Do not assert anything at all, unless you can either give authority for it (then do so!), or you are arguing for it!

Do not use slogans. If an examiner reads sloppy and ideological journalese in a dissertation, s/he will deduct marks.

Do not put in slabs of background description, or pages of general reflections. It shows an unfocused mind.

Do not go on and on about goals. Tell us about what, if anything, was implemented.

Do not use flow charts, unless it is clear what they are meant to show. A few variables in boxes with lines or arrows running between some of them may be just a misleading diagram! Put clear coding at the bottom of the flow chart to define the nature of the relationships which you have included in the diagram (and use dashed lines, dotted lines, and different thicknesses, etc., for different types of relationship).

IV. SOME PRACTICALITIES

1. *Supervision*

The dissertation is supervised by one of the lecturers within the MEPP-programme. It is the responsibility of the student to contact a supervisor and reach common agreement on a subject for the dissertation. During the academic year every student should meet regularly with the supervising professor and inform him/her on the progress of the dissertation. The supervisor will be a member of the jury in the public defence of the dissertation.

2. *Length*

The length of the dissertation should be no more than 15.000 words, exclusive of appendices and references.

3. *Content*

The structure of your argument is very important. A typical MEPP dissertation might have a structure something like this:

Of course, you do not have to follow exactly this chapter structure: it may not fit precisely the nature of your research. However, you should make sure that all the elements are in there somewhere, and that someone reading the table of contents can readily identify where to find each of them.

1. **Table of contents.**
2. **List of all tables, figures, illustrations.**
3. **Acknowledgements** (suppliers of data, respondents, technical support, etc.).
4. **Executive Summary of 500 words.**
5. **Introduction:** setting out the puzzle, and some of the reasons why it is an interesting and an important one to research, or why it matters. Maybe some of the theoretical background to the puzzle, if you are researching a puzzle that has emerged from the state of theory. The state of knowledge prior to your research (This should be tight, well-focused, and very thoroughly referenced. Loose and baggy reflections on the existing literature and ideas in it have no place in a dissertation).
6. **Methods chapter:** key variables, sampling strategy, data collection methods; statement of the limitations of your methods; any gaps actual data (e.g. non-response), and the reasons for them, and how you have attempted to control for them and deal with the problems those gaps present for your argument (e.g. bias, or indeterminacy on a key variable).
7. **Main findings chapter,** their consequences for the research question, and for the state of knowledge in the field generally. Include tabulations, and cross-national comparative analysis, as appropriate.
8. **The significance of your findings.** This might include, for example, scenarios for future development.
9. **Conclusions:** Key question for any concluding chapter to answer: what have we really learned, that we couldn't have known before, now that we have seen the findings and their significance? This is a good place to bring out any normative or prescriptive implications for public policy, public administration, and politics which arise from your findings. Again, argue them – do not just assert. Conclusions in research dissertations are not the place for journalistic comment! Nor should they provide a mere summary of successive chapters of the dissertation: it is the Executive Summary at the start that should do this.
10. **Annexes:** Instruments or samples of instruments. Glossary of definitions of key variables, if necessary. If interview data is used, you could include samples of data to show its quality: e.g. fully coded material from frames, or selections from transcripts.
11. **End notes.**
12. **A list of references.**

4. *Annexes/appendices*

Annexes are a means of including background material which is relevant to the argument of the dissertation but which does not itself constitute part of the argument.

Annexes do not count towards the word limit for the dissertation. You can therefore put material in annexes without fear of incurring penalties for length. However, this does not mean that you can put material there which is of dubious relevance: you should be selective, and if the material in your annex is ignored within the text of the dissertation, ask yourself whether the annex is really necessary. On the other hand, do not put material in the annex which is really part of the argument of the dissertation: you cannot assume that your examiner will read the annexes!

If you have undertaken fieldwork, an annex could give more technical details of the fieldwork than are included in the main text of the dissertation. The same goes for the detailed analysis of the data, leaving just the conclusions to be reported in the body of the dissertation. But it is worth repeating: your examiner may not read the annexes, so the argument of the dissertation itself must be sufficiently detailed and compelling to demonstrate that you have carried out your research project successfully.

5. Style and format

- **Cover:** An example of the cover page can be downloaded from TOLEDO or the Student Portal-website of the Faculty.

The cover page should mention: Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Faculty of Social Sciences, followed by the full title of your dissertation, your name, your promoter and supervisor's name, the programme's name ("Master of European Politics and Policies") and the academic year.

The cover page has to be printed on a light paperboard (120g), available from every Leuven copy shop.

- **Referencing:** The Anglo-Saxon system of referencing is now becoming universal and you are strongly recommended to use it (see *annex*).
- **Lay-out:**
 - For the main body of the text, font size should be 11 points (Times New Roman) and should not be in italic (italics may be used for quotation).
 - The text should be **single-spaced** on **A5** paper.
 - The **margins** should be 2 cm at each side.
 - Footnotes should be 10 points and single-spaced (it is essential that a consistent form is adopted for the notes).
 - Dissertations should be printed either single or double-sided and bound in a soft binding (spiral or ring binding techniques are however not allowed). The margins should be sufficiently large for the binding (2 cm above, beneath and left & right) not to obscure the text.
- **Number of Copies:** You are required to submit *three bound copies* by the deadline at the Faculty's Student Secretariat (SW 01.125). Four, if needed, five copies are requested if there is a co-supervisor or an assessor.

Additionally, students submit their thesis through *Toledo* and are requested to submit their dissertation also *electronically via e-mail* (to evelien.cautaert@soc.kuleuven.be); this in order to allow the MEPP staff to check your dissertation on plagiarism.

Previous MEPP dissertations (those awarded a distinction degree) can be consulted in the Faculty Library of Social Sciences (Library Code starting with: "DISS. MAS. MEPP") and through the LIBIS-catalogue.

6. Dissertation defense

The thesis defence starts with a presentation of 7 to 10 minutes (maximum). Given the limited time available and the fact that the timetable is rather tight, there will be NO technical means available for your presentation.

The introduction to the debate gives you the opportunity for commenting on the choice of the subject, the aims of the dissertation, your methodology and major findings. Please prepare this presentation carefully, having in mind that the jury already knows what is written down. So, you should be original in your comments and keep in mind the time available.

Subsequently, for some twenty minutes, the promoter and the second reader will comment on your work and ask some questions on the content or the methodology. As a round up the promoter gives his/her remarks and expresses his/her ideas about the quality of the work presented. Don't be surprised if these comments are rather critical. This does not mean that the overall assessment will be negative. So, don't lose your self-confidence.

The written document in combination with the oral defence will determine the final result of the dissertation. However, this result is NOT communicated yet to the candidate. So, you can immediately leave after the defence.

V. DISSERTATION MILESTONES

▪ 9 November 2010

Deadline submission dissertation form, signed by your promoter, to the Faculty's Student Secretariat (01.125).

The suggested topics will be evaluated and have to be approved by the Permanent Educational Committee of Political Sciences on November, 16th. If the suggested topic is not approved, students will be asked to present an alternative research proposal.

7 December 2010

"Second-chance" - deadline submission dissertation form, signed by your promoter, to the Faculty's Student Secretariat (01.125).

The suggested topics will be evaluated and have to be approved by the Permanent Educational Committee of Political Sciences on December, 14th. If the suggested topic is not approved, students will be asked to present an alternative research proposal.

▪ 23 December 2010

Submit Research Seminar paper with discussion of methodological issues of dissertation work.

▪ 2 May 2011

Students, who wish to defend the dissertation in June, should submit the mandatory acknowledgement (an electronic form as can be found on the Student Portal website of the Faculty).

▪ 16 May 2011, 4PM

Deadline to submit three hard copies (+ one Toledo and one e-mail version) of the dissertation to the Faculty's Student Administration, intended for the jury members of the dissertation defence.

▪ 6 - 11 June 2011 (*for those students who submitted their dissertation in May 2011*).

Defending the dissertation in front of the Supervisor and Second reader. The student presents his/her research and findings. The written document in combination with the oral defense determines the final result of the dissertation.

▪ 25 August 2011, 4PM

Deadline submission dissertations - third examination period.

▪ 8-13 September 2011

Dissertation defences for the students who submitted their master's thesis in the August session of exams.

ANNEX: SYSTEM OF REFERENCES

References in the text

Anglo-Saxon system is recommended (if using alternatives: be consistent!)

Most frequent situation:

In the text reference is made to the Family Name only, the publication date and the consulted pages are put in between brackets and separated with a comma.

Particularities:

- **Different authors, same Family Name.** Also refer to the initials of the First name.
- **Anonymous source.** Refer to the title of the source.
- **One source, two authors.** Refer to both.
- **One source, three or more sources.** The first time you refer to all the names, later on you may refer to the first name followed with "e.a."
- **Several sources, several authors though one reference.** Connect the reference elements with ",".

The use of end- and footnotes

Foot- and endnotes are allowed to make a particular specification or addition to the text which would distract the reader if it were included in the core text. Foot- and endnotes are not used for bibliographic references.

Graphs and tables

The reference of graphs and tables is similar to a text reference, except for the fact that the reference is put in between brackets. Abbreviations are never used for graphs and tables.

Examples

In general reference is made to the Family Name of the Author, the date of publication and the consulted pages, all in between brackets and separated by a comma (Fesler, 1968, p. 375). Some sources, however, are never printed, for instance interviews (Kitano, 07.07.1999), personal announcements (Tilmans, 16.08.1999) and articles on CD-rom (Roberts, 1997). When reference is made to a whole document, then no reference is made to pages. For example, a sentence like, recent studies on social security (Lens, 1998) deal with the issue from a sociological point of view'.

Depending on the construction of your sentence different ways of referencing are possible. 'Clark (21.06.1998) describes on a webpage the new political order' is just one example of how the mentioning of the author in the text makes an additional mentioning of the author in the reference abundant. On the other hand, one may say 'in a recent study on the new political order (Clark, 21.06.1998) one discovered that ...' in this case the reference has to be complete. However, if you refer to both the name and the date of the source in the text, then no further reference is needed. For instance, 'as a result of the broadcasting of the Panorama on 30th July 2003 on the Gulf War, the producer, James Cutler received many positive comments'. Suppose you refer twice to the same author in one paragraph, then it is acceptable to delete some information in the reference. For example, 'in the article of De Belder (24.10.1997, p. 3) the education system is subject of analysis. De Belder explains ... 'the second time there is no need for a reference since it remains within the same paragraph.

Sources of three or more authors, a full reference is made at the first time, (Kerkhofs, Devisch, Wets & Vanthienen, 1997) later on one may use a short reference: 'Kerkhofs et.al. concluded that...'

Sometimes there are two authors, in these cases one separates the names with an "&" (De Prins & Van de Vijver, 2000; Altheide & Snow, 1991, p. 38).

Another particular case is a reference to different sources but from the same author. (Fiske, 1992a, pp. 321-324; 1992b, p. 158). It is not necessary to repeat the name of the author.

In the event of an official document, for instance the Council of Europe (01.2003), then the author is the institution itself. (Council of Europe, 1999, p. 4).

References in Bibliography

- **Italic.** Some parts are put in italic; do not use bold, underline nor capitals.
- **Tabs.** The first line of each reference is normal, the next line(s) has (have) a tab.
- **No open lines.** In between the references there are no lines left open.
- **Alphabetical order.** The references are listed in an alphabetical order, based on the Family Name of the author or the first letter of the Title when it is an anonymous source.
- **Pages.** For articles one should refer to the beginning page and ending page (e.g. pp. 23-36), for books etc. one uses 'p.' e.g. p.236.
- **Exhaustivity.** All references from the text should be included in the list of references
- **Inclusiveness.** List only references used in text.

Some difficulties:

- **Same author, different publication dates.** A secondary ranking takes place based on the date (oldest work first)
- **Same author, same publication date different source.** An alphabetical ranking takes place based on the title of the source, the alphabetically first source gets 'a' (e.g. 1994a). Subsequently, the letter 'b' (e.g. 1994b).
- **Group of authors or publishers.** In these cases the names are written in full.
- **Anonymous source.** In these cases the title moves to the reference position of the author.
- **Missing information.** For instance no date, then one uses s.d. if there is no information available for other elements, then these parts remain empty.

Examples

Altheide, D. L., & Snow, R. P. (1991). *Media worlds in the postjournalism era*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

Animal Communication: The functions of communication (2002). In *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica Incorporation. [15.09.2003, Encyclopaedia Britannica online: <http://www.britannica.com/>].

Barnes, G. M., Welte, J. W., & Hoffman, J. H. (2002). Relationship of alcohol use to delinquency and illicit drug use in adolescents: gender, age, and racial/ethnic differences. *Journal of Drug Issues*, 32(1), pp. 153-178. [18.02.2003, *Social Sciences Full Text 1/00-11/02*: <http://librisource.libis.be/>].

Barron, D. (dba@redwood.com). (11.09.1998). *New browser* [Email aan mailinglijst computersoft@netquest.com].

Clark, K. (21.06.1998). *The new political order*. [18.09.1998, University of Idaho: gopher://gopher.uidaho.edu/11/IU_gopherlibrary.html].

Council of Europe (01.2003). Guidelines on Human Rights and the fight against terrorism adopted by the committee of ministers at its 804th meeting on 11 July 2002. *Human Rights Information Bulletin*, 57, pp. 40-43. [12.09.2003, Council of Europe: http://www.coe.int/T/E/Human_rights/IB57Elt.pdf].

Fesler, J. (1968). Decentralisation and centralisation. In *International encyclopedia of the social sciences* (Vol. 2, pp. 372-377). London: Macmillan and the Free Press.

Fiske, J. (1990). *Introduction to communication studies*. Londen: Routledge.

Fiske, J. (1992a). British cultural studies and television. In R. C. Allan (red.), *Channels of discourse* (pp. 284-326). Chappel Hill & London: University of North Carolina Press .

Fiske, J. (1992b). Cultural studies and the culture of everyday life. In L. Grossberg, C. Nelson, & P. Treichler (reds.), *Cultural Studies* (pp. 154-173). New York & London: Routledge .

Kitano, T. (Parijs, 07.07.1999). *New Film 'Kikujiro'* [Interview with Annie Jakobs].

Langer, J. (1981). Television's Personality System. *Media, Culture and Society*, 3(4), pp. 351-365.