

Course manual
Joint Master's Programme in
International Humanitarian Action

All
universities

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Master Thesis Guide
4th semester



Erasmus+

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1.Introduction

The Master Thesis is a compulsory element of the fourth component (Research and Internship, 30 ECTS) of the NOHA Joint Master's Degree in International Humanitarian Action to be completed during the last semester. It is a requirement for obtaining the Master's degree. In order to present the Master Thesis and receive a final grade, students should have successfully passed all first, second and third semester courses (90 ECTS).

The Master Thesis Project is a scholarly written report that substantiates a specific point of view as a result of original research carried out by a student on an agreed issue that falls within the humanitarian action study programme. The Master Thesis Project can be derived from the experience developed by the student during the Work Placement.

The thesis must be written under the guidance of a supervisor. There is some flexibility in the format of the Master Thesis. Nevertheless an agreed format for a NOHA Joints Master's Degree thesis should be adhered to as set out in this course guide.

In general, the objective of the NOHA Master Thesis is to show that students are able to put the knowledge, skills and competences acquired in the NOHA programme into practice. As the final element in the master's degree, the thesis gives the student an opportunity to demonstrate acquired expertise in the chosen research area.

2.Learning outcomes

In conformity with the learning outcomes set out by the NOHA network, the participants in the thesis module should achieve the following learning outcomes by the end of the module:

- Has justified and applied methodology and scientific methods correctly in an original piece of humanitarian research.
- Has studied a research topic in depth, and conducted and completed a medium-length research project largely self-directed.
- Takes responsibility for specifying clear ethical standards informed by the humanitarian principles, values and professional codes of conduct.
- Applies innovatively and strategically correct the humanitarian principles and standards to dilemmas in complex and insecure contexts.
- Has specialised skills to conceptualise, interpret and critically analyse complex humanitarian crises and interventions on the basis of a variety of sources, generating new interdisciplinary expertise to help solve complex humanitarian problems.
- Has demonstrated the ability to position one's own research findings in the broader context of humanitarian action.
- Has developed an open attitude towards acquiring new knowledge and

understanding about professional and academic developments in humanitarian action.

- Specialised problem-solving skills combining interdisciplinary knowledge and understanding of the range of needs and capabilities of crisis-affected people in a certain regional context toward relevant, evidence-based solutions for effective response.

3.Roles and responsibilities

Role	Responsibility
Student author	Write an independent scientific work with the assistance of the supervisor
Supervisor	Guide and assist the student author in good academic writing and research tradition. The supervisor can propose the master thesis grade.
First evaluator (home university)	Grade according to the learning outcomes and grading criteria in this thesis guide
Second evaluator (host university)	Grade according to the learning outcomes and grading criteria in this thesis guide

4.Teaching and learning methodology

- Supervision and follow-up individual tutorials
- Implementation of research methodologies
- Elaboration of an individual research project
- Completion of different tests for the verification of the acquisition of the NOHA programme knowledge, skills and competences.

4.1. Supervision

Students will have a supervisor. The supervisor must comply with the University requirements for the supervision of master thesis. In principle the supervisor belongs to the first semester home university. Students can propose a supervisor for the Master Thesis. However, the final decision will be taken by the NOHA Director of the respective home university.

Students are requested to stay in touch with their supervisor during the process of thesis writing.

5. Programme and training activities

The following programme and training activities and time-frame are applicable for the 120 ECTS NOHA Master's Programme as a minimum. The home university may set additional guidelines, such as for the oral defence.

5.1. Choosing a preliminary topic (by the 31st October, 3rd Semester)

In this phase students start to orientate themselves on their thesis topic and research problem. This phase should result in a short paper (500 words) in which the students write down a preliminary thesis topic. Students should formulate this as a problem and/or question and sub-questions (problem statement and/or research question). It should also include a brief explanation of the methodology they foresee for the project and include a list of relevant literature of a minimum of 5 academic publications.

The deadline for submission of the preliminary research topic is the 31st October to NOHA Blackboard. If applicable, ethical approval should be sought at an early stage according to home University regulations.

5.2. Assignment of supervisor

The supervisor should be assigned by the home university before the start of the Fourth Semester.

5.3 Writing a thesis research proposal (15th January, 3rd Semester)

From October to the middle of January, students start working on a thesis research proposal, which will be the input for the introduction of their thesis. A **template form for the thesis research proposal** and what it should contain is available via NOHA Blackboard and in Annex I.

The deadline for submission of the thesis research proposal is the 15th January to NOHA Blackboard.

5.4. Thesis Research and Writing (30th May, 4th Semester)

From February until the end of May students are actually conducting research and writing the thesis. Background literature is read and the theoretical framework is formulated. In addition, research is conducted through desk research, primary data collection, and the subsequent analysis of primary or secondary data.

After this, the results of the analysis are written down in the Master thesis: the Master thesis is a scientific report on the results of the research.

The students regularly submit draft texts (chapters) to their supervisor can comment on the student's work and progress. Students are strongly advised

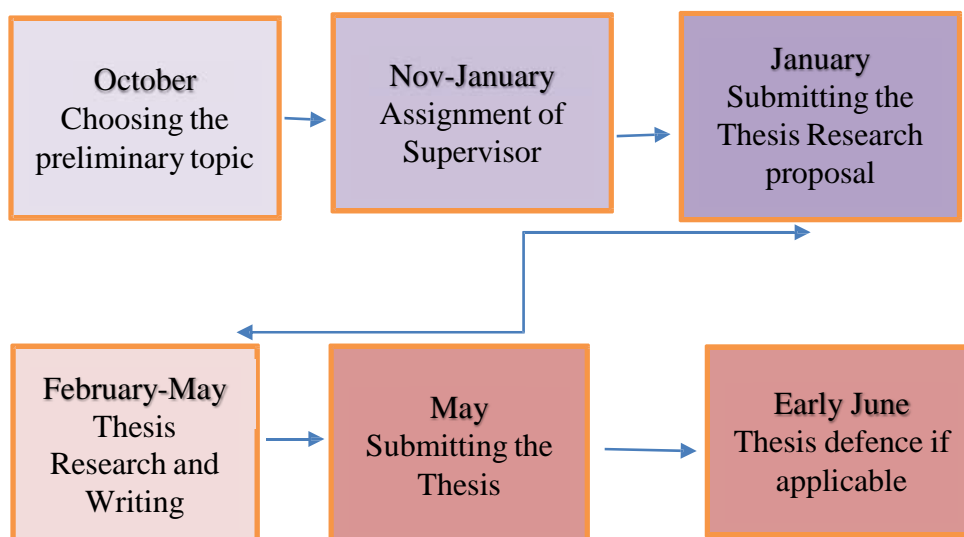
to keep the thesis writing process as much as possible separated from their internship activities in order to prevent having a double full-time workload. For those students who go on third semester exchange to NOHA Mundus partners outside Europe, the thesis proposal will complement the research plan at the NOHA Mundus partner. Consequently, this may require additional coordination activities for the student vis-à-vis the supervisor.

As a general rule, the 30th May midnight is the **deadline for submission of the final Master Thesis draft to NOHA Blackboard**. Before this deadline, the student has discussed already more than one draft version of the thesis with their supervisor.

5.5 Corrections and oral defence (June, 4th Semester)

During this period final feedback from their supervisor should be incorporated into the thesis. If applicable, feedback from the oral defence should also be incorporated into the thesis.

6. Schedule



7. Workload

The NOHA Master Thesis is worth 30 ECTS. Depending on the University 5 ECTS can be recognised for the (initial) research and preparation – to be handed in as a “Master Thesis Proposal”– and 25 ECTS for the writing process and final product. The Master Thesis should consist of 20.000-25.000 words for the introduction, chapters and conclusion excluding footnotes, bibliography and annexes (if applicable).

8. Thesis format requirements

Subject

The subject should be clearly related to humanitarian action. It can be a literature study or a field study. The investigation can use one or several perspectives from different academic disciplines, for example: law, anthropology, philosophy, public health, conflict studies.

Language

The Master Thesis should be written and presented in English.

Contents

A Master Thesis should at least contain the following elements:

- A title page with:
 - the main title and possible subtitle;
 - the name of the author;
 - the month and year of conclusion;
 - the name of the supervisor and its university or institution of affiliation;
 - the NOHA and University logo;
 - the following text:

This thesis is submitted for obtaining the Master's Degree in International Humanitarian Action. By submitting the thesis, the author certifies that the text is from his/her hand, does not include the work of someone else unless clearly indicated, and that the thesis has been produced in accordance with proper academic practices.
- An abstract: the abstract states the problem, describes the methods and procedures used, and gives the main results or conclusions of the research. It should not exceed 500 words in length.
- A table of contents: it should contain page numbers for every item included; titles in the table of contents should correspond exactly to those of the headings of the text.
- A preface (optional): the preface usually contains your motivation why you wrote your thesis and words of appreciation or thanks to people who have inspired or supported you during the writing process.
- An introduction chapter, which should describe:
 - the problem of your research;
 - the aims and research objective;
 - the research question;
 - the set of sub-questions or hypotheses underpinning your research;
 - a short section on previous academic research on the topic;
 - the justification for your research by highlighting the importance and relevance of your research angle for academia and the humanitarian field;
 - the research set-up which explains in detail your approach, your selected methods of research (data collection, field work, literature research), your source(s), including comments on the relevance and validity of these source(s) and the research structure (make sure that you justify your choices);
 - the limitations of your research set-up;
 - ethical considerations (if relevant).

- Main text, which can be subdivided into: 3-5 chapters (which include their own introductions and conclusions), sections, and subsections. Normally the main text consists of:
 - One or two theoretical/conceptual chapters, which includes a literature review of the theoretical angle you choose for your thesis as well as the construction of a conceptual framework and/or hypotheses.
 - One or two empirical chapters, where either describe the data collected or where you describe your case studies or other material relevant for your research questions
 - One discussion chapter, where you relate your theoretical/conceptual part to the empirical data from the field or a case study.
 - Conclusions: summarize the main research results and present the conclusions you have reached by:
 - explaining the answers to the questions posed in the introduction;
 - giving a final general conclusion (both empirically and theoretically);
 - pointing out the constraints and limits of your study with regard to methodology and conceptual framework;
 - if applicable, providing lessons and recommendations for the humanitarian and academic community.
- Note: never include new information which has not been discussed / analysed in previous sections of the thesis or make new, additional, references in the conclusions.
- Bibliography: list of consulted sources (ordered alphabetically by last name of the author), cases and decisions.
 - Appendices (if applicable).
 - A list of abbreviations /acronyms (often also placed after the table of contents). Names of institutions, journals, states, etc. should always be written in full the first time with the abbreviation or acronym in brackets, and afterwards as only the abbreviation or acronym.

Size and format

- Paper size: A4.
- Length: 50-70 pages (20 000 to 25 000 words) including bibliography but not appendices. *The grade of a thesis is not related to the length! Only a thesis that follows the formal length requirements and has a very high overall quality can receive the grade ECTS A.*
- Text must be in 12 point font for the body text, 10 point for footnotes.
- Line-spacing: 1.5 spaced, except for footnotes (single-space footnotes, with double spacing to separate one note from the next).
- Margins: 2.5 cm at top and bottom; 3 cm for left and right margin.
- Page numbering: lower right-hand side of each page.
- Chapters should each start on a new page. Chapters and sub sections should be numbered.
- Titles of papers, parts, chapters, sections, subsections, etc. do not end with a full stop or period (or any other punctuation mark except perhaps a question mark) and should be substantial and should preferably fit on one line.
- Graphs, schemes and pictures can be proper information sources. Number them, give them a proper title and refer to the source.
- Italics: only for foreign words, book/journal titles, headings. No quotations in italics.

- **Boldface:** Only for the thesis title and for headings.

References

There are many different systems of citing references but they can be grouped into two main types: inserted in the text or in footnotes/endnotes. The different styles or systems of organising references and citations are often referred to by a name such as "Harvard", "Oxford", "Chicago Manual of style" or "name-year system".

In-text Harvard author-date system is the most widely used in humanitarian studies and provides a precise system of reference. Other systems used in humanitarian studies are the Oxford (footnotes) and the Chicago systems. More information on the different systems can be found as follows:

- Harvard System of Referencing is for instance used in the journal *Disasters*, the *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development*, the journal *Development* and the *World Conference on Humanitarian Studies*. See for detailed explanations on the in-text Harvard author-date system: <http://libweb.anglia.ac.uk/referencing/harvard.htm>
- Oxford footnote system from the Refugee Survey Quarterly (Oxford): http://www.oxfordjournals.org/our_journals/refqtl/for_authors/index.html
- Chicago Manual of Style with endnotes from the *Journal of Humanitarian Assistance*: <http://sites.tufts.edu/jha/submission-guidelines>

All three styles are acceptable if used consistently and approved by the supervisor.

9. Plagiarism and research ethics

Beware of plagiarism!

Please be warned that plagiarism (using ideas or copying text from someone without providing a proper reference) is not allowed and is considered a 'mortal sin' in the academic community with grave consequences during your studies or in some cases even during your career afterwards. Sometimes it can even mean infringement of intellectual property rights and copyright laws with the risk of becoming legally prosecuted. You can prevent this easily by providing a complete bibliography of sources used, in combination with an adequately implemented referencing system throughout your text. Please also note that auto-plagiarism (copying earlier texts from your own hand without a proper reference) is not accepted either. Upon submission of texts to NOHA Blackboard, an automatic check against plagiarism and auto-plagiarism is executed.

Research ethics

Always obtain explicit written and informed consent from persons you interview. If you have sensitive data, code specific information, like personal names and geographical places. Never expose an informant to any kind of danger or unpleasant situation! Ask supervisor for advice.

Assessment criteria

The Master thesis must be assessed by at least two examiners appointed by the joint degree award issuing university on behalf of the degree awarding universities involved. In principle, the examiners should be a member of the first semester university and the second semester university concerned.

The student must demonstrate that he or she has achieved the above mentioned learning outcomes provided by the development of a Master Thesis which is to be submitted in writing and in electronic format according to the workload associated with the process of writing a Master Thesis at the NOHA home university of the student. In some NOHA Universities it is also required according to national legislation to present the master thesis and provide an oral defence before an evaluation court.

The final grade for the module will be determined on the basis of the criteria mentioned in the “NOHA Master Thesis Assessment Form”. Both the first and the second evaluators will assess the Master Thesis on the basis of these criteria and after having reached mutual agreement, the evaluators will provide a joint written justification through the means of the “NOHA Master Thesis Assessment Form”.

When there is an oral defence of the Master Thesis, the mark provided by the supervisor will be a proposal. The final grade will be given by the evaluation court.

Grades can be deducted for excessive supervision and not meeting with agreed deadlines.

