

Politics, Administration and Organization – Public Affairs curriculum

Characteristics of the Final Thesis

The final thesis for the master's degree consists of the writing and public discussion of an essay by the student on a topic consistent with the objectives of the degree program, under the supervision of an advisor.

The dissertation must demonstrate mastery of the subject, critical thinking skills, ability to work independently, and effective communication. The topic and structure of the final paper must be defined and agreed upon between the candidate and the advisor.

The general objectives of the master's thesis are:

- **Clarity:** The candidate's arguments must be clearly, rigorously, and linearly expressed. Grammar and syntax must be impeccable. A concise style is recommended (short sentences and avoidance of redundancy), following academic and scientific writing conventions.
- **Completeness:** All information necessary to understand the candidate's reasoning must be presented accurately.
- **Theoretical soundness:** The topic must be developed through thorough bibliographic research.
- **Methodological rigor:** In empirical studies, it is important to specify the methodological framework and describe the tools and techniques used.

Results must be discussed in relation to the reference literature, and ideally, they should introduce theoretical and/or practical innovations.

Structure of the Final Thesis

Depending on the topic, research questions, and methods used, the advisor may suggest structuring the thesis either as a monograph or as a scientific article. A scientific article is more concise than a monograph and may better suit certain disciplines or themes.

There is no fixed length requirement for the monograph format; the advisor's guidelines must be followed.

For the scientific article format, the maximum length is 12,000 words (plus any appendices or supplementary materials).

The final thesis can indicatively follow the suggested structure:

- Title page
- Abstract and keywords

- Table of contents (with chapter and section titles and page numbers)
- Introduction: It presents the objective of the thesis including the main topic, initial hypotheses, methodology and theoretical framework, conclusions, and the structure of the thesis.
- Main body: Organized into chapters (monograph) or sections (article), covering the chosen topic with bibliographic materials, empirical findings, and reflections in a coherent and organized manner.
- Conclusions: Summarizes the work done, especially in relation to initial goals and potential future research developments.
- Bibliography: Lists all the sources (books, book chapters, journal articles, etc.) cited in the thesis.

Two options for the PAO Master's Thesis:

- 24 ECTS credits 'standard' thesis
- 12 ECTS thesis (only for those who completed a 12 ECTS curricular internship). The curricular internship aimed at supporting the thesis development needs to be pre-approved by the thesis advisor and the internship coordinator.

The 12 ECTS thesis differs from the standard one as it requires less research work. Such a thesis can take a more practical approach, focusing on a critical analysis of the internship experience. With the advisor's approval, it may take alternative formats, such as a policy report or a case study, it might include policy recommendations, or propose improvements based on an organizational assessment.

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Thesis Grading Criteria

The thesis score ranges from **0 to 6 points**, based on the written work and oral discussion only (not on academic history).

Standard thesis (24 ECTS):

- **0 points:** Acceptable but minimum-quality thesis
- **1–2 points:** Stylistically and formally correct, mostly a literature review
- **3–4 points:** Involves fieldwork or extensive secondary data research, but lacks originality or strong theoretical insight

- **5–6 points:** Solid research, appropriate methods, and original contributions both theoretically and interpretively

12 ECTS thesis (with internship):

- **0 points:** Acceptable but minimum-quality thesis
- **1–2 points:** Descriptive of the host organization and tasks, but lacks analysis
- **3–4 points:** Good data collection and original case/policy interpretation, but weak analysis or theoretical framing
- **5–6 points:** In-depth and rigorous analysis, originality, and—if a policy report—specific, well-justified recommendations

Within each range, the exact score (e.g., 1 vs. 2) depends on the quality of the oral presentation and discussion.

The final grade = average exam score + thesis score.
The “110 cum laude” is reserved for students with both an excellent thesis and outstanding academic performance.