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Prof. Dr. Christian Rauh
Politics of Multilevel Governance

Guidelines for term papers and BA/MA theses

1. Introduction

I am very happy to supervise your research projects in the form of term papers or BA/MA theses at the Chair of Politics of Multilevel Governance. Before reaching out, please inspect this document carefully: it sketches potential topic areas, defines the basic requirements for term papers and theses, and outlines my evaluation standards. If these parameters fit your project, I look forward to learning about your plans!

2. Potential topics and research questions

My research and teaching focusses on the interactions between *international* and particularly *European decision–making* on the one hand, and national politics on the other. I pay particular attention to the *public politicization of decisions beyond the individual nation state*. My goal is to address *socially and/or theoretically relevant questions* in this area through systematic *empirical analyses*. My methodological interest lies primarily (though not exclusively) on quantitative content and text analysis. If you require further information on my research and teaching interests, please refer to the publications and detailed seminar plans on **my website**.

Your research questions fit particularly well if they touch upon the following topic areas:

- Decision-making / legislation of the European Union (EU)
- Roles, composition, or behavior of and in the European Parliament, the European Council and especially the European Commission
- Decision-making of the institutions/organizations in the UN system
- Public communication of European and international organizations
- Roles of national parliaments in European and international politics
- Partisan conflicts over European or international politics
- Public opinion on European or international politics
- Political debates on European or international institutions and decisions, e.g. in public or social media
- Methods for automated analysis of political texts (legislative documents, press releases, party programs, parliamentary debates, …)

Even if your project does not fall directly under one of these points but touches on the broader research interests outlined above, please do not hesitate to contact me early on!

I also encourage students to do *empirical work*. Think about how your own expectations and more formal hypotheses can be observed and tested in 'real politics'. Be creative! And remember: a disproved expectation is also scientific progress (and will thus not affect your evaluation negatively)!

Research questions can (and probably should) be normatively justified or motivated, but your literature research and empirical investigation should be as objective as possible on the basis of transparent standards and well-founded empirical information and/or data (see also below).

3. Preconditions

3.1. Term papers (BA/MA)

Submitting term papers requires enrollment and regular participation in one of my seminars. For each seminar, I specify detailed expectations on the term paper in the syllabus, on Moodle, and during our initial and concluding in-class meetings. Before you start writing a paper, you should talk to me at least once, ideally on the basis of a very short exposé sketching your ideas (I provide a template for this in the appendix below). Generally, the formal rules of the module for which you have enrolled in the seminar apply (see PULS for detail). *Submission deadlines for term papers* are March 31 for the winter term and September 30 for the summer term (11:59 pm in each case ☺).

3.2. Final theses (BA/MA)

Step 1: Narrow down the topic

Your paper/thesis should be motivated by a substantively and/or theoretically meaningful question in the broad realm of research topics specified in section 2 above. If you would like to write your Bachelor's or Master's thesis with my supervision, you should have some interest and some prior exposure to the research areas of the professorship during your studies (as seen above including international relations, international institutions, but also comparative politics and political sociology). Interest in empirical research and a basic understanding of respective research methods and designs in the social sciences is a bonus. *Master's students*, in particular, should also have successfully

completed at least one specialization seminar and one research-oriented specialization seminar in the fields of international or comparative politics.

Step 2: Brief proposal

Please contact me with a *preliminary proposal* of your planned thesis. The proposal should briefly justify your research interest, state a (preliminary) research question and outline your initial research design ideas. The *template provided in the appendix* helps you in setting this up and we can then discuss options on this basis.

Step 3: Formal registration with the examination office

Once we agree on the supervision, you must formally *register your thesis with the Examination Office*. The relevant information can be found on the respective **faculty website**. Please be aware of the specific registration deadlines and procedures for your study program and contact the relevant offices in your examination secretariat if you have any further questions.

Please note: Since discussion and agreement on the thesis proposal may take some time, make sure to contact me *well in advance*!

Step 4: Supervision, consultations and colloquium participation

Given the limited scope of an S-Professorship, I cannot offer my own colloquium, unfortunately. However, if I am supervising your project, I will try to place you in a colloquium offered by a relevant professorship in the faculty (ideally the second supervisor). Please take advantage of such or other opportunities before or during the preparatory phase to exchange ideas with your peers and get feedback on your planned work. The more you talk about it with others, the better! You may also present and discuss your research design in one of my ongoing seminars if it fits content-wise.

The intensity of individual supervision depends on the student and the thesis. The initial meeting discussing your preliminary proposal is mandatory for both theses and term papers. But especially for Bachelor's or Master's theses, I am very happy to offer further consultation meetings in Potsdam or via Zoom if you need them. Please arrange these via e-mail.

4. Evaluation standards

4.1. Fundamental standards of good academic practice

Papers and theses should basically show that you can independently conduct scientific research – and it is great that you contribute to this joint endeavor! That also means that you should strive for meeting the fundamental principles of good academic practice, including:

- *Originality*: Showcase your own thinking and give proper credit to ideas that you are building on

- *Critical thinking*: Engage respectfully and thoughtfully with extant arguments and knowledge but be clear when and why you disagree.

- *Truthfulness and honesty*: The purpose of science is to bring us closer to truth (without claiming absolute truth). Uncertainty and knowledge gaps are normal, but good science should point them out rather than hiding them. Present facts, data and insights in the most correct and precise manner possible – fabrication of data, sources, or results is the ultimate sin.

- *Transparency*: Clearly outline the assumptions in your reasoning and explain all analytical and methodological choices making up your work. Sharing data and analysis scripts is virtually always beneficial. Good science is reproducible!

In that spirit, the [Guidelines on Ensuring Good Academic Practice for Students at the University of Potsdam](#) apply, of course. In particular, plagiarism is a serious violation of the principles sketched above and all submitted papers will be routinely checked with PlagAware and similar text detection tools.

4.2. Use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools

The use of AI tools can meaningfully support scientific work, but the line between productive usage on the one hand and severe violations of the above specified fundamental principles of good academic practice on the other can be very thin. Quite clearly, just using a generative text model (which is not literally intelligent but replicates or re-assembles extant written text from academic articles and books, a.o.) and submitting the output as your own work violates all of the above specified principles and

will be handled equivalently to plagiarism. I will use our initial talk about your proposal, its development over time, a focus on empirical work, and different detection tools for my assessments in this regard.

At the same time, I encourage you to use AI tools productively to develop and challenge your ideas, or to improve and speed up your writing (be that of text or analysis code) – I regularly do so myself. AI tools can be highly useful 'sparring partners' at several stages of a research project – but the ultimate responsibility lies with you! Never just copy-and-paste – rather verify and document information along independent (human) sources, cross-check arguments or code solutions, and write and think critically using your words.

When using AI, transparency is mandatory: Indicate clearly whether and for which tasks AI tools were used and indicate them directly as references, or through explanatory notes and appendices (good guidelines here, for example).

And, more generally, reflect on three things when using AI: First, current large language models are not very useful if it's really important to get things right (they just assemble text probabilistically based on what has been written before). In whatever carreer you are striving for, you will have to learn how to get things right. Second, current large language models are much more useful if you actually know what you're doing – much like a cheat code in a video game is much more useful to someone who is actually good at the game. So, if you want to be augmented instead of replaced by large language models, keep learning stuff. Lastly, by routinely and lavishly relying on AI shortcuts you relinquish, as English professor Thomas Pfau puts it, 'the experience of intellectual achievement and growth, which can only ever be the fruit of *sustained* personal effort'. Your time at university will become 'a relentless series of logistical challenges', rather than 'a process of learning and intellectual and personal growth'. So think very clearly about what you are giving up—and risking—when trying to save some time.[1]

If you are unsure about a specific application of AI tools in your work, please reach out and ask! Below I list some AI-based tools that can be particularly useful if used responsibly:

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[1] This paragraph is largely copied with permission from Timo Seidl (https://www.timoseidl.com/blog/seidl-ai-course-policy; accessed: April 4 2025).

- Brainstorming and coding
  - Claude: https://claude.ai
  - ChatGPT: https://chat.openai.com
  - GitHub Copilot: https://github.com/features/copilot
- Academic literature discovery
  - Elicit: https://elicit.org
  - Semantic Scholar: https://www.semanticscholar.org
  - Perplexity: https://www.perplexity.ai
  - SciSpace: https://typeset.io
- Structure and drafting
  - Grammarly: https://www.grammarly.com
  - Quillbot: https://quillbot.com/
  - Jenni: https://jenni.ai

4.3. What makes a good academic paper?

Excellent academic papers typically exhibit the following characteristics:

1. Formal requirements are met; linguistically correct; submitted on time.

2. Topic area narrowed down to a specific and manageable question

3. Convincing arguments on the importance/relevance of the topic/questions.

4. Consistent, coherent, and clear argumentation and text structure.

5. Critical, targeted and largely comprehensive engagement with relevant existing literature, theories, and previous findings.

6. Complex relationships are succinctly and clearly summarized or visualized.

7. A clear method or analytical framework is presented and consistently applied.

8. Statements are substantiated with evidence (literature, quotes, data, etc.).

9. The implications and the potential impact of the research results are discussed.

10. The limitations of one's own and others' work are clearly stated and discussed.

For orientation, the following table outlines the abstract evaluation criteria for a seminar paper. The criteria are also applied to Bachelor's and Master's theses in adjusted form.

	Research Question	Structure/Argumentation	Style/Language	Formalities/Literature
Very good (1.0–1.7)	Precise and answerable research question. Very good consideration of the academic context/ state of the art in research.	All subsections necessary and relevant for answering the research question. Logically coherent and consistent line of argument. Clearly identifiable share of own arguments and conclusions.	Varied choice of words, conceptually precise expression, easy-to-read writing style. Free of grammatical and spelling errors.	Thorough consideration of existing work, sources and literature. Proper adherence to formalities (literature, citation, figure captions, etc.).
Good (2.0–2.7)	Narrowing down the topic to answerable research question. Reference to the scientific context.	Logically consistent structure. Problem-oriented. Comprehensible and consistent line of argument. Identifiable argumentative contribution.	Conceptually precise expression. Correct grammar and spelling.	Consideration of existing work, sources and literature. Proper adherence to formalities (literature, citation, figure captions, etc.).
Satisfactory (3.0.–3.7)	Choice of an answerable question. Superficial reference to the scientific context.	Comprehensible and consistent line of argument. Accurate reproduction of other people's arguments.	Correct use of terms. Largely free of grammatical and spelling errors.	Consideration of existing work, sources and secondary literature. Largely proper adherence to formalities (literature, citation).
Sufficient (4.0)	Only rough delimitation of the question / mere thematic focus. Superficial reference to the scientific context.	Comprehensible line of argument. Imprecise reproduction of other people's arguments.	Largely correct use of terms. Grammar and spelling partially incorrect.	Restricted to the absolutely necessary work and sources, mostly only secondary literature. Largely improper adherence to formalities (literature, citation).
Failed (5.0)	Imprecise and unanswerable question within the scope of the paper. Unclear reference to the scientific context.	Difficult to follow line of argument. Incorrect reproduction of other people's arguments.	Unclear expression. Incorrect grammar and spelling.	Inadequate consideration of existing work and sources. Use of scientifically irrelevant secondary literature. Deficient list of references and citations.

4.4. Text structure

The structure of a research paper/thesis may vary depending on the specific research question and the state of extant research in the respective area. The following elements are typically entailed, but depending on your goals, their relative emphasis may vary:

1. (Systematic) literature review: Critical analysis of the existing literature that is relevant to your specific research question.
2. Theoretical/conceptual work: Critical discussion of theory or concept, or development of a new theory/hypothesis that is helpful for answering your research question (in the light of relevant extant research).
3. Empirical work: Analysis of originally collected or existing data (qualitative and/or qualitative) to answer your research question and/or to test arguments in that regard.

In predominantly literature-oriented papers (only BA-level), the main body and the core of students' work consists of the analysis and synthesis of the current state of knowledge in relevant for answering the own research question. In theory-oriented work, the synthesis of the current state of knowledge focusses on identifying gaps relevant for the own research question to then primarily invest in developing new arguments or testable hypotheses (potentially illustrated with initial evidence or case studies). In papers that are primarily empirical, the methods section takes up relatively more space and the analysis section presents the quantitative or qualitative data in a way that directly speaks to extant or new arguments and theories.

For orientation, I recommend the following structure based on the classic layout of an empirical paper:

1) Cover sheet (see Appendix)
2) Table of contents (formatted, numbered)
3) List of figures
4) List of tables
5) List of abbreviations
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6) Introduction (10 %)
    a.   *Question*
    b.   *Relevance*
    c.   *Overview*

7) State of the art/literature (15%)
    a.   *Relevant theoretical arguments & debates*
    b.   *Relevant empirical findings*

8) Method (10 %)
    a.   *Study units/case selection*
    b.   *Empirical sources*
    c.   *Analysis/interpretation framework, statistical methods if applicable*

9) Analysis/Results (40%)

10) Discussion/Conclusion/Summary (20%)
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11) References / Bibliography
12) Affidavit
13) Appendix (supplementary tables, figures, questionnaires, scripts, coding approaches etc.)

4.5. Thesis expectations – Bachelor

A bachelor's thesis should come with a clearly outlined and well justified research question. It is expected to provide a thorough overview of the current state of knowledge relevant to that question. Students are free to choose the relative emphasis of literature review, theoretical work, and/or empirical study that is appropriate for their research question but an own, independent contribution has to be visible.

4.5. Thesis expectations – Master

Beyond the minimum requirements of a Bachelor's thesis, a Master's thesis is expected to *make its own empirical contribution.* This can come in the form of quantitative or qualitative evidence and includes both secondary analyses of extant datasets and

information sources or own data/information collections. The focus is on demonstrating one's own ability to independently conduct scientific work and contextualizing one's results within the existing body of literature.

4. Formatting

	Term Paper (BA/MA)	Final Thesis (BA/MA)
Scope / Pages / Word count	See module description, Moodle and syllabus	See examination regulations
Language	German | English	
Font	Standard (e.g. Times New Roman, Arial, Garamond)	
Font size	12 pt.	
Text alignment	Justified (block)	
Line spacing	1.5	
Page margins	Normal (2.5 on all sides)	
Orientation	Portrait (Exception: larger tables or graphics)	
Cover sheet	Obligatory (template in appendix)	
Table of contents	Obligatory for BA/MA theses	
Bibliography	Obligatory	
Citation style	Harvard Style	
Literature management software	Recommended: (e.g. Zotero, Mendeley, Citavi)	
Notes	Footnotes instead of endnotes	
Page numbers	Obligatory	
Affidavit	Obligatory, signed (template in the appendix)	
Submission deadline term papers	31.03. (Winter term) 30.09. (Summer term)	
Submission deadline final theses	See relevant examination regulations / registration	

8. Literature on academic writing/planning

There are numerous resources and guidelines on academic writing and/or research designing available online. Here I just list some literature that aims to assist you in finding a topic, formulating questions, designing your research and writing your thesis.

English:

1) Toshkov, D. (2016). *Research design in political science*. Macmillan International Higher Education.

2) Bryman, A. (2016). *Social research methods*. Oxford University Press.

3) Grønmo, S. (2019). *Social research methods: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches*. Sage.

4) Schmitter, P. (2008). The design of social and political research. In: Approaches and methodologies in social sciences. *A Pluralistic Perspective*. (ed. Donatella, D. P., & Keating, M.). Cambridge University Press

German:

1) Plümper, T. (2014). *Effizient schreiben: Leitfaden zum Verfassen von Qualifizierungsarbeiten und wissenschaftlichen Texten*. Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co KG.

2) Eco, U. (2020). *Wie man eine wissenschaftliche Abschlußarbeit schreibt: Doktor–, Diplom–und Magisterarbeit in den Geistes– und Sozialwissenschaften*. utb GmbH.

3) Hunziker, A. W. (2020). *Spass am wissenschaftlichen Arbeiten: so schreiben Sie eine gute Semester–, Bachelor–oder Masterarbeit*. Verlag SKV.

4) Heesen, B., Franck, N., & Weber, J. (2014). *Wissenschaftliches Arbeiten*. Springer Berlin Heidelberg.

9. Appendix

Template: Initial proposal structure for graded papers or theses

Last name, first name:
E-mail address:
Study Program:
Matriculation number:
First supervisor:
Second supervisor:
Date of submission:
Preliminary title of the paper:
Problem definition and relevance in keywords/paragraph:
Research question(s):
Central argument and working hypotheses:
Ideas on theoretical approach:
Research design (incl. case selection and basis of empirical data):
Analysis method:
Known and relevant literature:

Template: Cover sheet for term papers and theses

Universität Potsdam

Winter Semester/Summer Semester <u>YYYY</u>

Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences

Chair of Politics of Multilevel Governance

Module: XXX

Course: XXX

Title of the Paper

Lecturer:

Date of Submission:

Author:

Study program:

Semester:

Matriculation number:

Template Affidavit: Mandatory declaration on original, own work

Last name: Study program:

First name: Matriculation number:

Place of birth: Date of birth:

I hereby declare that I have independently completed my term paper / Bachelor's thesis / Master's thesis titled

"Title of the Paper"

without any external assistance. All passages taken verbatim or paraphrased from other authors are appropriately cited.

I am aware that in the event of a breach of the above declaration, not only will the relevant examination be assessed with the grade - 5.0 - but I may also face expulsion from the university.

Place, Date: Signature: