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MARS STATE EXAM – COMPONENT 1: The MA thesis

Students first need to find a thesis supervisor who will discuss with them their thesis research proposal. The supervisor will have to sign the final version of this thesis research proposal. The thesis research proposal has to use the MARS form (link) and has to be submitted before a specific deadline. The submission of the thesis research proposal also decides on the soonest moment when the full thesis can be submitted.

Submission deadlines

These are the deadlines for the academic year 2021/22:

Thesis research proposal submission deadline	First possible full thesis submission deadline
15 November 2021	3 May 2022
15 March 2022	2 August 2022
30 June 2022	4 January 2023

It is not necessary to submit the full thesis at the first deadline. They can be submitted before a later deadline as well.

The thesis needs to be uploaded electronically to the SIS before the deadline. Also one printed hard copy needs to be delivered to the Department of Media Studies and Journalism secretary, before the submission deadline.

The thesis defense

Theses submitted in May will be defended in June, theses submitted in August will be defended in September and theses submitted in January will be defended in February.

The guarantor of the MARS program will assign a reader (“opponent”) to each thesis. The opponent and supervisor both write a thesis review. Five working days before the thesis defense, at the latest, students receive these thesis reviews (one from their supervisor and one from the opponent).

Students should prepare to address the arguments in both reviews, during their defense.

The thesis is defended in front of a committee, consisting of ICSJ and IIR staff, appointed by the MARS guarantor. The committee has one chairperson and at least two other members. Normally, the guarantor will chair the committee and the opponent will be a member of the committee. The supervisor is welcome to attend the meeting of the committee as well. Exceptions (to who chairs and whether the supervisor/opponent are a member of the committee) can be made, though, for practical reasons.

During the defense, the student first briefly introduces the thesis and its key conclusions. Then the chairperson of the committee introduces the reviews. Then the student has to address the reviews and answer questions from the committee. When all points are addressed, the chairperson asks the student to wait outside the room for the result of the defense. The committee then discusses the reviews, the thesis itself and its defense, and reaches a consensus about the grade; if consensus

cannot be reached, the chairperson decides. After the decision about the final grade is reached, the student is brought in again, and the committee announces the result.

MARS STATE EXAM – COMPONENT 2: The essay

The written exam is the second part of the MARS State Exam. This exam consists out of a written essay.

Timing and application

The deadlines for the full thesis submission are also deadlines for applying for the state exam, which has to be done by the student in SIS. The deadlines for fulfilling all study duties (e.g., passing all courses and thus getting enough credits) are in the Academic Calendar.

The written exam takes place right before the thesis defense. The date of the written exam is decided by the thesis submission date (and its deadline).

Full thesis submitted before:	Study duties fulfilled before:	Written exam in:
3 May 2022	6 June 2022	June 2022
2 August 2022	4 September 2022	September 2022
4 January 2023	TBA (early January)	February 2023

The written exam procedure

It takes place at the Faculty of Social Sciences' premises. Students have 3 hours to write a short essay (800-1200 words) about one of the topics selected from the list of topics communicated beforehand. The topics are generally based on the content of the compulsory courses.

It is an open book exam, which means that students can use all available electronic and printed resources to complete their essay. However, they must not under any circumstances collaborate with anyone else on their essay.

The essay will be evaluated by members of MARS state exam committee. These members will be appointed by the MARS guarantor. The following criteria will be used for the evaluation: the quality of a) argumentation, logical coherence and structure, b) theoretical support, c) the use of empirical evidence for illustrative purposes, d) style and language. The committee will decide upon a grade, using the A-F scale. The grade will be announced it within one week after the written exam takes place.

The essay must include references to at least five different academic works, and a reference list should be provided. The reference list is not included in the word count. The referencing system can be freely chosen but should be used consistently.

MARS STATE EXAM: The order of things

1. Submit thesis research proposal (signed by supervisor)
2. Submit thesis AND apply for state exam
3. Take written exam
4. Defend thesis