

Guidelines 2/2015: Thesis defense

Effective as of October 1, 2016. (With minor changes since May, 2017.)

From the academic year 2016/2017, the thesis defense becomes the only part of the state final exam. A well-organized defense is the key for maintaining reputation of our programs. The following guidelines describe the details of a thesis defense.

Thesis reports

Each thesis is evaluated by the thesis advisor and a referee. Referees are assigned by the Program Director in cooperation with the teacher responsible for Bachelor's (respectively, Master's) Thesis Seminar II.

When writing reports, advisors and referees are asked to be as impartial as possible. They are asked to comment on each of the four following categories: contribution, methodology, literature, and manuscript form. The form contains the point scale for grading as well as the explanation of evaluation criteria for all these categories and their weights in the final grade. The minimum length of the report is 300 words.

The reports need to be submitted into the system (SIS) before the specified deadline (typically eight days before the state final exam).

Committees

Each committee consists of three members. None of the committee members is a thesis advisor or its referee. Program Director is an extra member who attends parallel sessions, asks questions, and can be asked by the committee to give an additional opinion, but does not vote.

Before the exam

About two weeks before the exam, each committee member becomes a rapporteur for a few selected submitted theses.

- Ideally, the rapporteur's fields of expertise are close to the thesis topic.
- The theses are distributed among all committee members equally.
- Assignment of theses among committee members is made by agreement of the Director and Program Director.

Each rapporteur is asked to make the following steps in advance:

- Look into the thesis.
- Read all reports carefully.

- Prepare questions.
- When reports are inconsistent, inconclusive, or poor, discuss the case with other committee members in advance. If needed, discuss the case also with the Program Director who can arrange other reports, if the existing reports are insufficient.

The rapporteur also chairs the thesis defense, i.e. explains the process to the students, monitors time of the presentation, and ensures that the student is not interrupted during the presentation.

Committee membership

- Participation: All internal faculty members will be involved in the committees as rapporteurs. Wide participation in the committees adds diversity and also helps to align the expectations of faculty members by observing representative samples of students.
- For Bachelor's (undergraduate) committees, the Program Director typically appoints junior faculty members, faculty members with more exposure to the Bachelor's program, and those with an established track record of Bachelor's theses supervision.
- For Master's (graduate) committees, the Program Director typically appoints senior faculty members, faculty members with more exposure to the Master's program, and those with an established track record of Master's theses supervision.

Defense

- Each student is given a maximum 15 minutes for his or her presentation using standard presentation software (PDF or PowerPoint). The student will not be interrupted during his or her talk.
- The student will provide committee members with a handout that summarizes the thesis (one A4 page, 3 copies).
- The defense is in the language of the thesis (English, or Czech/Slovak).
- Questions take about 10-30 minutes.
- The committee members are allowed to ask specific questions from courses related to the thesis topic or methodology.
- Each committee is reserved a single room (typically Rooms 109, 206, 314).
- The defense is an event open to the public, but the public does not take part in the exam in any way. It is prohibited to operate an audiovisual recording function on any device.
- The committee makes the decision about the final grade based on the thesis, reports, student's presentation, and the discussion. Thus, the final grade may differ from the average grade suggested by the reports. The committee makes a decision by simple majority voting.
- Advisors/referees are informed in all cases when their suggested grades largely differ from the final grade.

Award for Distinction

- Each committee may identify the best theses that deserve extra accolades.
- The award of Distinction is given to the approximate top 10% of defended theses.

Announcements

- A brief public ceremony takes place in Room 109 in the afternoon.
- The Program Director will announce the theses receiving Distinction.
- Committee members are invited to take part, but participation is not compulsory.
- Additionally, the Program Director announces each student's grade in private.

Other consequences

- Note that the thesis topic and the grade are written on the student's diploma.
- Theses with Distinction are announced on our homepage.

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