

SUSTEEMS Doctoral Thesis

The doctoral thesis is the core of the PhD programme. The Doctoral Thesis should be a work of original research and will generally include three research papers. The student must write the thesis him/herself. It is acceptable that the student collaborates with others on joint papers, but if any such papers are included in the thesis, there must be clear and substantial evidence of individual work.

In her/his PhD thesis, the PhD candidate may address research questions within a disciplinary boundary or from an interdisciplinary perspective. He/she can conduct both theoretical and empirical investigations, using diverse methodological approaches.

In his/her research, the PhD student is supervised by a supervisor (who can be internal or external to the Doctoral Programme Committee) and by other two experts who will be part of the Thesis Advisory Group (TAG). The supervisor, assisted by the TAG, has the responsibility to guide the PhD student in his/her study and research activities, to supervise the writing of the thesis and to guarantee the quality of his work until the delivery of the thesis.

The thesis should be written in English (except in the case of a written request motivated by Supervisor), which will also be the language of the examination.

How to define the subject and find a supervisor

Students are not constrained by the proposal presented for the admission (except for students with a dedicated grant).

They should consider first their field of interest:

- If they have already in mind one or more professor that can supervise them, they are invited to talk with these professors, and, as a second step, to interact with the Academic Director.
- If they have no idea, they are invited talk with the Academic Director: she/he can suggest you someone.

In order to define your final research project, students should pay attention to the following points:

- If data are needed: where can students find data? How can students build a new dataset?
- If data have to be collected (through survey, experiments, or there is the need of buying datasets): check if there is money enough.
- The research should be feasible, and a research plan must have a budgetary plan (for research, travel etc.). Can the supervisor support the student with research funds?
- Are there open calls for research projects funding?

Structure of the thesis

The thesis usually consists of three substantial papers, plus an introductory chapter.

In general, the three papers tackle with different aspects of a debated issue.

The three substantial chapters have to present original research results in the form of a scientific working paper.

The Introductory chapter must give an overview of the common problem and discuss the contribution that each chapter gives to the debate. It has to demonstrate that the candidate has a broad view over the problems she/he tackles with. For co-authored papers, the contribution of the candidate should be clear and substantial.

When to start to work for the thesis

After the end of the second semester exams (June), students should have already identified the research questions and the supervisor. The schedule is tight.

Major deadlines (Academic year starts in November):

June (year 1) - Assignment of the supervisor

September-October (year 1) - Presentation of the Preliminary Thesis proposal to the Programme Committee

March (year 2) - Presentation and discussion of the draft of the first research paper

September (year 2) - Presentation and discussion of:

- a) the first research paper
- b) the draft of the second research paper

March (year 3) - Presentation and discussion of:

- a) the second research paper
- b) the draft of the third research paper

September (year 3) - Presentation and discussion of the third paper

October (year 3) - Finalization of the three research papers and thesis submission

The Preliminary Thesis proposal

The proposal text should be around 4000 (15 double-spaced pages, excluding references).

The PhD student must focus on one of three papers, which will be the first paper.

The thesis proposal includes the following:

- a) a title
- b) an abstract of not more than 200 words
- c) an introduction that specifies the importance and background of the topic
- d) a literature review that provides a critical assessment of the key theoretical and empirical sources
- e) a researchable problem stated in terms of questions, hypotheses, or models as appropriate or a research design that includes a rationale for the method(s) selected and a detailed discussion of the source(s) of data
- f) a section with additional information, including
 - f.1) illustrative ideas for the other two papers
 - f.2) provisional work program
 - f.3) feasibility and budgetary issues as negotiated with the student's supervisor and advisor(s) and ethics
- g) a list of references (i.e. a list of works cited in the text) or a bibliography (i.e. a broader selection of texts) that demonstrates familiarity with the relevant literature.

Thesis proposals should

- be concise, precise, and feasible
- exhibit a strong "chain of reasoning" linking theory, methods, and data
- be professional in appearance

Three working days before the presentation, you will have to submit your Thesis proposal document.

The proposal presentation should be no more than 20 minutes in length.

Following the student's presentation, there will be up to 20 minutes of discussion of the proposal.

Students may subsequently be asked to re-think aspects of their proposals and make revisions.

Thesis Evaluation and Review process

In general, the thesis has to be submitted by the end of October of the third year and goes through a review process.

The referee panel is composed by at least two professors/experts who will be in charge of evaluating the thesis. The referees have the task of expressing a written analytical judgment on the thesis and to propose the admission to the public defense or as alternative the postponement for a period not exceeding six months, if major revisions are needed. Referees are chosen among professors and researchers at Italian or foreign institutions, with high profile, not belonging to the University or to other institutions collaborating with the Doctoral Programme.

At the end of their evaluation, the referees will make a recommendation.

They must choose from the following:

- a) The candidate is recommended for admission to the public defense without further conditions.
- b) The candidate is recommended for admission to the public defense subject to s/he making minor corrections to the thesis.
- c) The candidate is recommended for admission to the public defense subject to s/he making substantial corrections to the thesis, within six months.
- d) It is recommended that the candidate should not be admitted to the public defense.

In cases in which the referees have requested minor or major changes prior to recommending award of the Ph.D., the candidate will complete these changes and return the revised thesis to the Doctoral School Secretary Office.

Each referee should confirm in writing that these changes have been made and that the candidate may now be admitted to the final examination for the award of the Doctoral Degree.

Final examination (art. 33 UNIVERSITY REGULATIONS FOR DOCTORAL PROGRAMMES)

The Examination Committee consists of three members chosen among professors and researchers of Italian and foreign institutions, specialized in the topics of the thesis. The final examination, that must be held within 12 months as from the official end of the programme, consists of the public defense of the thesis in front of the Examination Committee.

At the end of the defense session the Examination Committee writes its assessment for each candidate. This assessment is an integral part of the final examination minutes.

The qualification “Dottore di ricerca” can be shortened to “Dott.Ric.” or “Ph.D.” and is awarded if the final exam is passed.