

# International Business Law LLM Program Master's Thesis Guide 2021 – 2022

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## I. INTRODUCTION

It is recommended you read this guide carefully. The information in this document is meant to assist you during the process of research and writing and to clarify the conditions that you are expected to meet, as well as to set your expectations about your thesis supervisor. Specific requirements, guidelines, assessment criteria and tips are provided here. The process of research and writing is overseen by a supervisor who is a lecturer at the faculty of law (usually a lecturer of one of the IBL courses, but a lecturer outside the program may also supervise, if necessary) and the thesis must be completed during the specified timeframe to graduate this academic year.

The Master's thesis represents the final stage of the Master's program. It is a report of research conducted independently by you. Many students consider writing the thesis to be the most interesting, but also the most challenging part of the program.

The thesis is an extended piece of writing that is the culmination of in-depth research. It takes the reader through the relevant issues, providing research evidence to back up competing viewpoints and providing a final answer to the research question.<sup>1</sup> The aim of writing a Master's thesis is to complete an independent research project on a substantial topic in the field of international business law and related to the curriculum of your IBL track. The Master's thesis is intended to draw upon the student's unique curriculum and intellectual experiences encountered while at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam.

Excellent writing skills are essential to any lawyer. Ultimately, written language will be your working tool. Future employers sometimes wish to consult an applicant's thesis to gain an impression of his or her writing skills. The thesis presents you with an opportunity to showcase yourself.

The master's thesis is a compulsory component. The thesis counts for 12 EC. From the moment you submit the thesis proposal (February 21) and until the final deadline (June 6), there are 15 weeks for you to research and write your thesis. You may always submit earlier than these deadlines, but not later.

The Master's thesis research and writing process could roughly be divided in three main phases:

1. **Write a thesis proposal** (standardized form on Canvas, word format). Upload the proposal on Canvas as indicated below by the deadline.
2. **Research and writing** of thesis.
3. **Assessment and grade** submitted online by supervisor and second assessor.

The IBL thesis coordinator is Ioana C. Ciobanasu. Contact by email [i.c.ciobanasu@vu.nl](mailto:i.c.ciobanasu@vu.nl) or via Canvas messages.

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<sup>1</sup> Lisa Webley, *Legal Writing* (4<sup>th</sup> Edition, Routledge 2016)

## II. Timeline

### Important notes – read carefully

- 1) THE TIMELINE IS INDICATIVE, but for a successful completion and graduation this academic year, we strongly recommend that you follow it.
- 2) MANDATORY DEADLINES The deadline to submit the official thesis proposal (February 21), the deadline to submit the final version of the thesis (June 6) and the date for the oral presentation are mandatory deadlines.
- 3) NEGOTIABLE DEADLINES The deadlines for submitting draft texts of chapters (March 21, April 25, May 23) can be negotiated with your supervisor.
- 4) FEEDBACK DRAFT CHAPTERS It is between you and the supervisor to decide what drafts receive feedback. Not every draft text might require feedback due to its high quality. The rules<sup>2</sup> allow supervisors up to 15 (fifteen) working days to provide feedback on draft chapters (when agreed to receive feedback).
- 5) ORAL PRESENTATIONS It is mandatory to present on the day you are scheduled for and to attend the entire session (around 2 – 2.5 hours) that day, *i.e.*, you may not leave after presenting.
- 6) CEREMONY JULY The timeline is designed so you attend the ceremony in July as a graduate. If you will not be a graduate on that day, you will still be invited as a guest.
- 7) NO GUARANTEED GRADUATION OVER SUMMER If you do not submit the final thesis in due time for the graduation ceremony in July, there is **no** guarantee that you will graduate this academic year. The supervisor is the final decision-maker regarding the assessment and grading of your final thesis in the months of July and August. No supervisor can be obliged to review theses during their summer vacation. By rule, assessors have up to 20 working days to grade final theses, so have this in mind when submitting final drafts, unless agreed otherwise with your supervisor.
- 8) DEADLINE AUGUST 31 However, if your supervisor decides to grade your thesis during the summer, the final grade must be registered at the latest on August 31. It can take up to a week for the grade to be processed in the system, and only then the grade and the assessment form become visible to you on your VUweb page. When the processing starts in September, you do NOT have to re-enroll in the next academic year.
- 9) If an upload is made after the June deadline, INFORM THE THESIS COORDINATOR (Ioana) of the upload because Canvas does not send notifications.
- 10) FINALIZE THESIS NEXT ACADEMIC YEAR If you wish to finalize your thesis during another academic year, then the rules of the respective year apply. No deadline below is relevant for you, not even the ones of February 21 and June 6. You will have to reenroll and pay tuition fee. Do NOT approach a supervisor until the second semester if you do not intend to finalize your thesis during the current academic year, or else a fellow student who actually needs a supervisor might not get one.

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<sup>2</sup> Teaching and Examination Regulations (TER) IBL Master's programme, Ch. 3, Article 3.4, para. 1 (p. 6)

<p><b>MANDATORY DEADLINE</b> <b>Official thesis proposal approved by supervisor</b></p> <p><i>The DEADLINE for submitting the thesis proposal MUST be observed. Your supervisor is NOT authorized to provide you with an extension. If exceptional circumstances apply, please contact the thesis coordinator.</i></p>	<p><b>Monday February 21</b> SUBMIT ON CANVAS Official proposal AND proof of supervisor’s approval Upload both on Canvas under assignment “Upload Proposal Here” (multiple attempts allowed)</p>
<p>First deadline Draft texts of chapters Table of contents and bibliography</p>	<p>Latest Monday March 21 SEND TO SUPERVISOR BY EMAIL</p>
<p>Second deadline Draft texts of chapters</p>	<p>Latest Monday April 25 SEND TO SUPERVISOR BY EMAIL</p>
<p>Third DEADLINE Draft texts of chapters</p>	<p>Latest Monday May 23 SEND TO SUPERVISOR BY EMAIL</p>
<p><b>MANDATORY DEADLINE</b> <b>Thesis Final Version</b></p> <p><i>The DEADLINE for submitting your thesis MUST be observed. Your supervisor is NOT authorized to provide you with an extension. If exceptional circumstances apply, please contact the thesis coordinator.</i></p>	<p><b>Monday June 6 latest 23:59</b> SUBMIT ON CANVAS SEND TO SUPERVISOR BY EMAIL</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Upload to Canvas assignment “Upload Final Thesis Here!”. You must upload your thesis as a PDF or Word file that cannot be over 5 MB in size (multiple attempts allowed).</li> <li>2) The thesis coordinator will send the plagiarism score (and the plagiarism report, if necessary) to the respective supervisor. Plagiarism report is not visible to students because of software license.</li> <li>3) The supervisor is not allowed to assess the final version of the thesis and submit the grade if there is no plagiarism score.</li> </ol>

<p>ORAL PRESENTATIONS</p>	<p><b>Week June 13 – 17</b></p> <p>A schedule will be published in due time. Schedules and panels are in principle organized for each track, but they can also be organized for each supervisor and their students, regardless of the track.</p> <p>It is mandatory to present on the day you are scheduled for and to attend the entire session (around 2 – 2.5 hours) that day, <i>i.e.</i>, you may not leave after presenting.</p>
<p><b>Final grade submitted online by supervisor and second assessor</b></p> <p>The grade becomes visible on your VUweb page once the education office processes the grade. That takes a few days after your supervisor submits the grade and form and you upload the thesis on the VU thesis database.</p> <p>Once you know for sure that no other modifications need to be made to the final version, you must upload the thesis on the VU Thesis Database. You must upload your thesis as a PDF file that cannot be over 5 MB in size. Your application for graduation will NOT be processed by the education office unless your thesis is visible in the VU Thesis Database. Multiple attempts at submission on the database are NOT allowed.</p>	<p><b>Latest Friday June 24</b></p> <p>Please note that, exceptionally, this is an expedite grading period for the purpose of attending the degree ceremony in July.</p>
<p><b>Degree Ceremony</b></p>	<p>(Second half of) July (exact date TBD)</p>

## III. Learning Outcomes

The thesis is the final demonstration of your capability to evaluate and analyze the knowledge, understanding and skills acquired during the academic year, as described by the learning objectives laid down in the IBL Teaching and Examination Regulations<sup>3</sup>. This means that you are capable of independently formulating a problem definition and a research question, identifying relevant source materials, critically analyzing, and interpreting those materials, developing compelling (legal) arguments, drawing conclusions, evaluating and, where applicable, making recommendations and suggestions for further research. The final product is proof that you would have acquired in-depth and specialist knowledge and understanding of a subsidiary area of international business law by means of conducting an academic legal study in accordance with the research methods that apply to that discipline.

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<sup>3</sup> Art. 9.4 "Exit qualifications" TER, available on Canvas

## IV. Supervisor and Second Assessor

Their role is to assess the overall quality of the thesis and assign a grade, according to the assessment criteria described below in section IX.

### Supervisor

Please consult the list of supervisors provided by the thesis coordinator. You should first contact a supervisor who is a lecturer in your track. If you are unsuccessful in finding an available supervisor, please contact the thesis coordinator. The earlier you start, the better chance you have in being supervised by the one you prefer.

Do NOT approach a supervisor until the second semester if you do not intend to finalize your thesis during the current academic year, or else a fellow student who actually needs a supervisor might not get one.

The role of the supervisor is to guide you through all processes, *e.g.*, from determining a research question to the final editing of the thesis. However, researching and writing the thesis is mostly your work, including identifying a thesis topic and a (draft) research question. Some supervisors provide some broad topics (list distributed by the thesis coordinator), while others do not. It is recommended that you think of a possible topic (even if broad) in advance of the first meeting with a potential supervisor. Most of them prefer meeting with you and having a starting point of discussion, thus being able to substantially help you in formulating the research question.

It is your duty, and not that of the supervisor, to actively search for contact and feedback. Please keep in mind that all lecturers act as supervisors for more students from other programs at the faculty, next to teaching and researching.

According to the rules, supervisors are allowed a maximum period of 15 (fifteen) working days to provide feedback on draft thesis chapters, and a maximum of 20 working days to provide feedback on the final thesis (check the Guide for Rules and Guidelines of the Examination Board)<sup>4</sup>. Mind the 20 working days rule is you submit your thesis after the deadline in June, unless agreed otherwise with your supervisor.

Specific responsibilities of the supervisor include:

- Providing suggestions and critique on the research proposal.
- Providing guidance and suggestions in carrying out the research activities and analyses, such that you are prepared to conduct the study.

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<sup>4</sup> Idem fn. 2

- Providing feedback on draft work. All versions must be submitted to the supervisor by email. If the supervisor is not available during (part of) the thesis period, he or she will give you timely notice of this and suggest an alternative solution.
- It is your duty to approach your supervisor and not the other way around. You should be proactive in seeking contact with the supervisor. If the supervisor does not provide feedback, after reasonable request, within 15 working days after submitting draft texts, please contact the thesis coordinator.
- The supervisor may terminate the supervision if you do not meet the deadlines. In that case, you may complete the thesis without any supervision, but only the final version of the thesis will be graded by the original supervisor and a second assessor.
- It is the supervisor's duty to select the second assessor (after final submission at the latest)
- Assessing and grading the Master's thesis.

If you encounter difficulties with your supervisor, you should firstly contact the thesis coordinator. If at any point the relationship with your supervisor is detrimental to your work, you have the right to request a new supervisor; however, there is no guarantee that a new supervisor could be found, especially in the late stages of your research, which means you might have to delay graduation.

If you consider that no reasonable solution has been offered by the thesis coordinator and/or the program board, you may contact the Examination Board via VUweb.

## | Second Assessor

The supervisor will select the second assessor.

He/she is usually a specialist on the topic of your thesis. However, the second assessor need not be a specialist on the thesis topic, but care should be taken to identify a second assessor who is able and willing to evaluate the scholarly contents of the thesis (the so-called "marginal approach").

The second assessor evaluates the thesis according to the grading and assessment criteria described in section IX below. The second assessor has the right to attend the oral presentation.

The thesis supervisor and second assessor will submit their assessments and grades online. This final grade is the outcome of consultation between the supervisor and assessor and it visible only to you on your VUweb page.

In case of an irreconcilable difference of opinion between the two assessors, the Examination Board will have the final decision, after consulting with the IBL program board. The Examination Board may allocate a third assessor for the purpose of impartiality.



## | External Supervisor or Second assessor

It is possible that you opt for an external second supervisor who is not an employee of the Faculty of Law. The Examination Board must provide permission for this. In principle, permission will be granted if the external supervisor holds a position in an affiliated university, but exceptions do apply. The external supervisor is only permitted to act under the responsibility of a faculty supervisor. You can discuss this with the thesis coordinator.

The supervisor may select an external expert as the second supervisor (*e.g.*, a legal professional). The examination board must provide permission based on the professional and academic credentials of that individual.

## V. Thesis Proposal

You may approach a supervisor(s) anytime (the earlier, the better) to discuss possible topics. Have a topic in mind, not matter how broad, ready for discussion. It is your duty to come up with the topic, although some supervisors suggest subjects for research. By the time you submit the official research proposal in February, it should be approved by your supervisor, meaning you would have discussed the prospective topic, research question(s) and any other ideas with that supervisor. The thesis proposal represents the commitment to a particular research undertaking.

It is mandatory to submit the thesis proposal by the deadline. Failure to do so may affect the grade of the final thesis.

The official thesis proposal form is annexed at the end of this guide and uploaded on Canvas. Do NOT use another format.

SUBMISSION – Upload the proposal and the approval of the proposal by supervisor on Canvas under assignment “Upload Proposal Here!”.

The IBL program board may require revision of the proposal if it considers that the topic falls outside the curriculum of the IBL program. You will be contacted only if the proposal fails to meet the criteria (NO CONTACT means your proposal has been APPROVED by the thesis coordinator).

Exceptional: Any subsequent substantive change of the topic must be submitted in writing to the supervisor and the program board at the latest three weeks after the original proposal has been submitted. You must provide a pertinent argument that explains the reasons for the change and how this would improve the research. For a different topic to be approved, the supervisor and the IBL program board must agree.

## VI. Written Thesis Requirements<sup>5</sup>

The use of language and layout must be worthy of a pass for the thesis to be assessed. The target readership of the thesis is an interested university-educated audience, possibly with a legal background. The thesis must be written in language that is grammatically correct and free of spelling errors. A good thesis is clear and does not contain unnecessary digressions. The argumentation and use of language must be appropriate. Among other things, this means that the use of language must not be unnecessarily pompous, complex, or colloquial. In addition, the style must be appropriate for the academic debate being discussed.

The grade for the written thesis counts for 80% of the final grade (see section IX below).

All Master's theses must comply with the standard guidelines described below for the following:

- title page and pre-pages
- font size and type
- pagination of pre-pages, text, and appendices
- numbering of chapters, sub-chapters, sections, sub-sections, figures, and tables<sup>6</sup>

### Structure

1. **OFFICIAL TITLE PAGE** is mandatory at the VU Amsterdam. The title page is to be found on Canvas. A good title is usually brief and to the point. Anyone must be able to grasp from the title and/or subtitle what the thesis is about.
2. **Pre-pages: Table of Contents**
3. **Optional pre-pages: Prefatory Material** (Preface, Acknowledgements, Dedication etc.)
4. **Abstract:** it is a succinct narrative (maximum of 500 words) of the overall research study.
5. **Introduction**
6. **Main body text structured in chapters and/or sub-chapters and sections and/or sub-sections**
7. **Conclusion**
8. **Bibliography or list of references**
9. **List of appendices / tables / figures** (if applicable)

Here follows an explanation of the meaning of introduction, main body text and conclusion.

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<sup>5</sup> Any student may obtain a copyright and include a copyright notice on the second page of the thesis. The notice consists of three parts: the copyright symbol '©' and/or the word copyright, the name of the copyright owner, and the year of publication. However, this is not necessary as the copyright is automatic.

<sup>6</sup> The relevancy of figures and tables must raise the overall understanding of the argument.

## Introduction

It is an explanation or a summary of your thesis. Introduce the topic and refer to

- the background
- the context
- the assumptions you make
- the importance of the topic
- the legal questions you pose and the rationale of those questions
- the purpose of your research
- the research method – doctrinal, comparative, empirical, socio-legal etc. Explain the reason why this particular method is appropriate for the research question.

Do not describe in great detail the basic knowledge and well-known definitions as you may assume that your supervisor and target audience<sup>7</sup> are knowledgeable. The main purpose is to provide your own arguments and findings. Some suggest writing the introduction at the later stages, after writing the main body text.

There must be one clear, focused, concise, complex, and arguable main legal question (Note: The question in itself has limited value if not linked to the further analysis that proves the value of the question). There could also be legal sub-questions. You should ask yourself: why are these particular questions relevant to achieve the research objectives?

Academic research should be original by building upon existing research or developing new analyses, ideas, or theories. Explain how your research contributes to the field you research because, *e.g.*, it covers a gap in existing research, or brings in new solutions, ideas, or theories, or offers a unique approach, or can be used for further research/policy proposals *et cetera*.

## Main body text

### **Divided into chapters / sub-chapters and sections / sub-sections**

This is the main text of the thesis. It should be based on academic research and/or legal practice. Always make reference to the relevant laws, statutes, treaties, codes, case-law, soft law documents etc. The relevant discussions, debates, analyses, and arguments must be written and developed in this part.

You will develop arguments by employing the various methods of our choice. You express your points of view and qualified opinions as derived from these arguments. Ask yourself: “What is my point?” and then support it with scholarly and/or practical legal arguments. One way to strengthen your argument and show that you have a deep understanding of the issue you will be discussing is to anticipate and address counterarguments or objections (you should always address the opposed critical view). Read critically

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<sup>7</sup> The target readership of the thesis is an interested university-educated audience, possibly with a legal background.

what others have written on the subject and develop your argument according to your own qualified point of view.

A chapter providing a literature review (*i.e.*, already existing research) may be written separately, but it may also become evident throughout the argument. A synthesis and a critique of the pertinent existing literature has the role to provide you with the basis upon which your own research develops.

### Conclusion

It is an overview of the important findings as supported by your analysis. The study should conclude by noting future research directions or questions that were elucidated through the research efforts. The conclusion should not bring in new information. However, the conclusion is not a mere summary of findings. A conclusion should be written as to synthesize, not summarize, it should restate the importance of the question and the assumptions made, it should make readers think further and it should provide a meaning (for example by showing how all your ideas work together).

### Formatting Requirements

The following standard formatting requirements apply:

1. **Margins:** 2.54 cm on top, bottom, and right and left margin (in case one or two printed copy are requested by your supervisor and second assessor, the margin on the left should be 3.75 cm to allow for binding).
2. **Font and type:** 11 or 12 pt font size and the same font type throughout the thesis. You may use different font size for titles, headings, quotations, and footnotes.
3. **Line spacing:** 1.15 line spacing throughout thesis, except for longer quotations, tables, or footnotes.
4. **Pagination and numbering:** use small Roman numerals (ii, iii, etc.) for all pre-pages after the Title Page (which is not numbered) and for bibliography. Use Arabic numerals for all pages (from abstract to conclusion). Appendices are numbered according to A, B, C, etc. (ex: A1, A2, A3; B1, B2; C, etc.). Within the main text, chapters should be consecutively numbered (Arabic or Roman). Sections, subsections, figures, and tables should be consecutively numbered.
5. **Main text:** carefully consider the use of paragraphs in the main text. Paragraphs in legal texts are often separated by an empty line. Abbreviations are not printed in italics.
6. **Word Count:** The number of words for the main body text, *i.e.*, excluding title page and pre-pages, abstract, footnotes, bibliography, and appendices, is a minimum of 12,000 and a maximum of 20,000 with a +/-10% margin of error (*i.e.*, around 30 – 50 pages). Write the word count on the title page where indicated.

## Citation and Reference Style

Follow the commonly accepted practice in legal writing. Use Oxford referencing style, *i.e.*, Footnote/Bibliography style (*Oxford University Standard for Citation of Legal Authorities* available at <http://www.law.ox.ac.uk/publications/oscola.php>). You may use another style provided that your supervisor agrees, and you are consistent throughout the thesis.

Footnotes are indicated by superscript numbers, inserted in the text, at the appropriate point. They appear at the bottom of each page. Bibliography (or list of references) appears at the end of your thesis as separate.

For assessment and grading purposes, good referencing does not only mean the proper use of the style, but also the high quality of the references, *e.g.*, if the latest legal research and legal practice have been identified.

## Some helpful tips

### TIME MANAGEMENT

- Think well in advance about a topic
- Do not postpone your research
- Respect the deadlines

### PREPARATORY WORK

- Discuss your ideas with anyone interested but do not be influenced
- Practice active reading, *i.e.*, have an internal dialogue with the author
- Write down all your notes, questions and comments while reading
- Write, write, write! on anything while reading and thinking and brainstorming with others
- Find resources in the library and on the internet, but be critical
- Prepare a tentative list of literature, table of contents and draft introduction

### WRITING THE THESIS

- Constantly ask yourself: "What is my point now?"
- Organize your arguments around a set of questions
- Begin writing the parts you know best
- Make your writing clear and unambiguous, in plain language
- Write conclusions and implications, but do not just restate your findings
- Make meaningful suggestions for further research if applicable
- The draft introduction should be re-written in conjunction with the conclusion as the conclusion provides the answer to the research questions

## VII. Fraud and Plagiarism<sup>8</sup>

Please note that you should always duly acknowledge the work of other authors. If you in any way use or elaborate on somebody else's work, you must make that clear through a reference.

LITERAL QUOTATIONS must be put in 'quotes'; use "double quotes" within single quotes.

If quotes are longer than two lines they should be indented and single-spaced.

Use quotations sparingly, and only where they seem essential, either to clarify or substantiate a point already made or to provide a starting point for an idea which you wish to discuss.

Quotations should never be used to prove that you have read certain literature, or to simply reiterate what you have read, but rather to strengthen your line of argument or for purposes of illustration.

PARAPHRASING is a rather grey area, and it is sometimes difficult to know when you are on the verge of plagiarism. A good guideline is to always indicate in some way the source of an idea or argument, no matter to what extent you feel you have put it in your own words.

PLAGIARISM CHECK ON CANVAS Every thesis will be checked for plagiarism upon submission on Canvas. Plagiarism is detected also when you commit self-plagiarism (*e.g.*, a thesis or essay written during your previous studies). The plagiarism scores will be checked by the thesis coordinator who will further inform the respective supervisor. No thesis can be graded without a plagiarism score.

SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES Fraud and plagiarism have serious consequences and therefore you should always be extremely careful in respecting the standard referencing and quoting. You may be expelled from the program if you commit fraud and plagiarism.

OBLIGATION TO REPORT If a supervisor or the thesis coordinator suspects fraud or plagiarism, also self-plagiarism, they are obliged to report it to the examination board, which is the only body at the faculty of law that has competence in deciding over this matter.

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<sup>8</sup> Official definitions and the sanctions are to be found in the Guide for Rules and Guidelines of the Examination Board

## VIII. Oral Presentations

The objective of the oral presentation is to identify that you are indeed the author of the master's thesis and to practice the respective skills. This objective will be reached if you are able to present the content and substance of your thesis and have a meaningful academic discussion with the panel members. Both your knowledge and your research and presentation skills will be assessed and graded. You may find the assessment criteria for the oral presentation in section IX below.

You are allowed to present only if the written thesis is considered sufficient for a pass mark. Being scheduled for a presentation session does not override this condition. The thesis coordinator will make available a detailed schedule of the oral presentations in due time. The oral presentation sessions are scheduled only once a year in the month of June. Schedules and panels are in principle organized for each track, but they can also be organized for each supervisor and their students, regardless of the track.

If you submit your thesis later than the June 6 deadline, it is up to your supervisor when to arrange a (private) session for you. At least two staff members must be present at that session.

To successfully graduate the IBL LL.M. program, it is mandatory to present your thesis on the day you are scheduled and to attend the entire session (around 2 – 2.5 hours) for which you are scheduled, *i.e.*, you may not leave after presenting. You may be asked to attend a session where other fellow students are supervised by your supervisor. You are welcome to attend any session of any day to support your fellow students and listen to feedback and discussions.

Your presentation is allocated a maximum of 15 minutes. It will be followed by a maximum of 15 minutes academic discussion with the panel members in the form of Q&As. The questions may relate to any aspect of your thesis, from structure to content to argumentation and methodology and research skills etc. Only the panel members ask questions, not the audience.

The panel members are:

- Chairperson: one of the members of the IBL program board or another lecturer
- Members: the supervisor and/or the second assessor and/or an external examiner (*e.g.*, practicing lawyer specialist in the field) and/or another lecturer at the faculty of law

The presentation will be graded, counting for 20% of the final grade. You may request feedback further than the one received during the presentation by sending an email to your thesis supervisor.



1. When a previously enrolled student finalizes their thesis between October and the end of May, the rules of the last year apply, which means that the oral presentation will not be a grading criterion, *i.e.*, the written thesis counts for 100% of the final grade. However, you will be allowed to present in June if you so wish and are willing to wait until then. You will receive a grade for the presentation (20% of the final grade). You will not be allowed to present if you wish to not be graded.
2. When a student finalizes by the deadline of June 6, the oral presentation will be a grading criterion (20% of final grade). The student will be scheduled to present in a panel, together with the "new" students (enrolled first time this year).

### Some helpful tips

- Do not simply read a text out loud from a paper when presenting – this will fail you
- Do not read the slides, but present the slides as a visual support for your message
- Practice the entire presentation beforehand (you might want to video record yourself and/or present in front of friends or some of your fellow students)
- Prepare a PowerPoint (or Prezi) presentation that is visually attractive
- Limit the number of slides (approx. 1 per minute) and observe the “Six by Six” rule (max. six lines and six words/line)
- Prepare for the academic discussion by making a list of questions you could expect (discuss the thesis with a friend or fellow student so you can check for blind spots)
- During the discussion with the panel, do not become defensive and remain respectful
- Always keep eye-contact with the audience

## IX. Assessment and Grading

### Final Grade

Read these criteria carefully as they can help you write an excellent thesis. Every criterion is a measuring tool that you can use to self-assess the quality of your writings and your performance before and after your presentation.

The final grade is a weighted average grade between the written thesis (80%) and the oral presentation (20%). You are allowed to present only if the written thesis is considered sufficient for a pass mark. Being scheduled for a presentation session does not override this condition.

The assessment form (grade and written assessment) will be submitted online by the supervisor and the second reader, and it will be visible only to you on your VUweb page. This final grade is the outcome of consultation between the supervisor and assessor.

A thesis that has been awarded and registered a pass mark cannot be reworked or resited.

The assessment will be recorded, even if it is a failed mark. If the thesis is not awarded a pass mark, you must write a new thesis, with a new supervisor and in a different discipline.

### Written Thesis Assessment Criteria

The following are the criteria on the online assessment form. A Master's thesis is assessed based on six (6) criteria by the thesis supervisor. Read these criteria carefully as they are the best guide for you to write an excellent thesis. You should be able to self-assess your final thesis based on these criteria. Each criterion will receive one of the ratings: excellent, good, satisfactory, unsatisfactory, next to a more detailed assessment presented in writing on the digital form. Here below there is an explanation of each criterion.

#### **1. Research question**

The problem statement is clearly formulated and has distinct parameters. The conclusions of the thesis constitute an answer to the research question.

#### **2. Justification of method**

The thesis clearly indicates the legal method applied and why this method was chosen. This method may be legal or involve comparative law, but could also cover such areas as the philosophy, history, or

sociology of law etc. A combination of different methods is also possible. In all cases, the choice must be justified.

### **3. Structure**

The main text of the thesis consists of three parts: the introduction, the main body of the text (subdivided into chapters) and the conclusion. The *introduction* presents the topic and formulates the problem statement. The author also provides a justification of the methods applied and a summary of what will be covered in the rest of the text. The *main body of the text* provides an analysis of the problem presented in the introduction. It must be subdivided logically into chapters. The *conclusion* brings everything together and formulates a response to the problem statement. The conclusion summarizes the argumentation in the main body text and does not introduce new information.

### **4. Argumentation**

This is the most important and most original aspect of your thesis, and it also counts the most in deciding the final grade. The thesis must be logically and consistently argued. The conclusion follows logically from the preceding text, without any sudden leaps in the argument or contradictions. Naturally, the thesis must not include any substantive inaccuracies.

### **5. Use of sources**

In the thesis, the student demonstrates his or her ability to identify, evaluate and organize the relevant literature, legislation, and case law on a subject. The organization is particularly important. The student must demonstrate a critical eye in approaching the literature. Adopting sentences from other publications verbatim without acknowledging the source is regarded as plagiarism, even if this concerns publications in the public domain such as Parliamentary Papers or government policy documents. It may be advisable to include case law in a separate list. Any internet pages quoted from must be accompanied by the date of access, as the content of these may change over the course of time. The supervisor may request prints of those quoted pages. The thesis must include a list of consulted scholarly and non-scholarly literature and judicial decisions.

### **6. Level of independence**

In the research conducted for the thesis, the student demonstrates his or her ability to work independently. The ability to work independently, however, is a relative criterion. It refers to the level of independence that may reasonably be expected from a student. If the student has conducted the thesis research very independently, this may result in a higher mark.

### **Summary final assessment**

This does not constitute a rated criterion, but the supervisor must supply it on the form. The final assessment concerns the academic level. The academic level is demonstrated by such factors as rigor in handling legal sources, the level of reflection and the degree to which the research is in line with (current)

discussions in law. In addition, the student's own contribution must be clearly recognizable. This can come to light by means of a particular position adopted by the student, or in the choice of literature or legal precedents and how these are organized. It can also be demonstrated by a critical appraisal of the literature and case law, an independent positioning choice, the forging of connections or the identification of contradictions.

### **Second assessor**

The second assessor will submit its four (4) ratings on just three (3) criteria: research question, structure, content, without providing comments on each criterion. He/she may write more general remarks on the form.

## Oral Presentation Assessment Criteria

The oral presentation is assessed based on four (4) criteria by the present members of the panel.

### **1. Content**

Presentation reflects key findings of thesis. Student explains the significance, background (context) and limitations of research, the methodology and contribution to the field.

### **2. Presentation skills**

Pace, fluency, tone and energy, eye contact, body language and gesture, timing, use of visual aids.

### **3. Academic discussion**

Ability to answer questions and debate if appropriate and convey a qualified scholarly opinion.

### **4. English language proficiency**

Academic and legal English, legal vocabulary (legalese) specific to the discipline and topic.

## IBL LL.M. PROGRAMME

### Thesis Proposal 2021 – 2022

**STUDENT NAME:**  
**STUDENT NUMBER:**  
**SUPERVISOR NAME:**  
**TRACK:**

#### **PRELIMINARY THESIS TITLE**

A good title is usually brief and to the point. Anyone must be able to grasp from the title and/or subtitle what the thesis is about.

#### **TOPIC AND LEGAL RESEARCH PROBLEM (400-600 WORDS)**

Describe the topic and its context and background. Argue the reason you chose this topic.

Describe the legal research problem deriving from this topic, already hinting to the possible research question(s) that this legal problem poses. A legal problem may be, for example, a gap in the law or scholarship, a dissensus or an undesirable status quo, somehow backward-looking.

Explain the importance of researching this topic and investigating this legal problem.

#### **RESEARCH QUESTION (AND POSSIBLE SUB-QUESTIONS, IF APPLICABLE)**

This is the most important element of the proposal. A good research question is focused and clear and it directs the entire analysis.

The research question emanates from the problem and is forward-looking, describing how the legal research problem should be addressed. Explain the importance of addressing this question in the context of the topic above.

There could also be legal sub-questions, deriving, yet supporting the main research question. Justify the relevance of these sub-questions.

#### **RESEARCH METHOD(S)**

Doctrinal, comparative, empirical, socio-legal etc.

Explain why the chosen method(s) is most appropriate and what the method entails.

#### **PRELIMINARY CHAPTER STRUCTURE**

The structure should give you a clear view on the amount of research and writing you will conduct. Correlate it with the timeline below.

#### **PRELIMINARY BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Indicate at least 10 (ten) relevant and authoritative sources (list to be expanded later).

Discern between primary and secondary sources.

#### **TIMELINE AND SCHEDULE OF ACTIVITIES**

Suppose you have 12 weeks to conduct your research. Plan by weeks: week 1, week 2, etc. Explain what you will do each week and consult your supervisor for confirmation.

**THESIS ORAL PRESENTATION ASSESSMENT FORM**  
**International Business Law LL.M. Programme**  
**2021 - 2022**

<b>Student</b>		
Supervisor		
Second assessor		
CRITERIA	SCORE E = excellent G = good S=Satisfactory/pass F=unsatisfactory/fail	COMMENT
Presentation skills		
Academic discussion		
English language proficiency and legal jargon		
Content		
<b>GRADE</b> (20% of final grade)		
<b>DATE</b>		

SUPERVISOR SIGNATURE	PANEL MEMBER SIGNATURE	STUDENT SIGNATURE
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