The Faculty Council of the Faculty of Biological and Environmental Sciences approved these instructions in its meeting on 10 May 2011.

GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS FOR BACHELOR’S THESES (6 CR) AT THE FACULTY OF BIOLOGICAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES

Objectives

The purpose of a Bachelor’s thesis is to train students to write an academic report and use source data critically as well as to familiarise them with a topic in their degree programme. The Bachelor’s thesis also trains students in successful academic communication and the fluent use of their native language (Finnish or Swedish).

Content and method of completion

The Bachelor’s thesis is a compulsory component of intermediate studies in the major subject. The Faculty of Biological and Environmental Sciences recommends that the Bachelor’s thesis be written in the third year of study. The thesis consists of about 20 pages (about 2,000 characters per page) and focuses on a specialist topic in the degree programme. Students can choose the topic of their Bachelor’s thesis, but their supervisor must approve it.

The thesis must be based on some 20 academic sources published mainly in refereed publication series. A Bachelor’s thesis can also be a literature review on the same topic as a subsequent Master’s thesis or a short report on empirical work if the student and the supervisor have separately agreed on the topic and supervision.

The most important knowledge and skills required to write a Bachelor’s thesis and use reference databases are acquired during a proseminar or similar course. The Faculty recommends that departments arrange separate meetings to provide instructions for writing a Bachelor’s thesis. Bachelor’s thesis supervisors must hold at least a doctorate and teach at the department, but they need not be experts in the student’s thesis topic. First and foremost, the supervisors guide students in defining and analysing the topic. Supervisors must read and comment on the written version of the thesis at least once before the student submits it for assessment. Supervision can be provided in the form of group meetings. The supervisors also examine and assess each thesis. The disqualification of thesis examiners is governed by Sections 27 and 28 of the Administrative Procedure Act (434/2003).

A Bachelor’s thesis can be written in Finnish or Swedish, depending on the language of the student’s basic and secondary education and maturity test. Students who have completed their basic and secondary education in a language other than Finnish or Swedish can write their Bachelor’s thesis in another language, usually in English. The Faculty Dean decides on Bachelor’s theses and related maturity tests completed in a language other than Finnish or Swedish. Students must submit an application on the matter to the Faculty Office.
Writing instructions for students

You should begin by collecting the necessary source literature and the core source material (e.g., five key articles related to the topic). When searching for literature, use the skills you acquired in previous courses (e.g., the computer driving license course, the proseminar or similar). You can also use the information retrieval services that libraries offer. Study the source material carefully. Then define the topic you wish to discuss: think about which issues you intend to examine in the thesis and in how much detail. You can supplement your source material later on, if necessary, so that you can meet the objective of using about 20 source references.

You should separate the topic into logical entities of appropriate length and devise a suitable structure for your thesis (a tentative table of contents). A thesis can also include pictures and tables that illustrate the text. The first section (after the abstract) is the introduction in which you explain briefly and clearly what you will discuss in the thesis and what your objectives are. The final section (before the list of references) ties the whole text together and summarises your most important conclusions. Write the thesis concisely. Excessive length can lead to a lower grade. You must also write a short abstract of no more than 300 words using the University’s abstract form (http://www.helsinki.fi/bio/lomakkeet/). The abstract must be written in the same language as the thesis itself. The abstract is part of the whole thesis and thus counts towards the grade, so you should ensure that it is clear and informative. The abstract need not be written in a language other than that of the thesis. When completing your work, please contact the staff of your major subject or degree programme regarding layout instructions for Bachelor’s theses.

Please keep in mind that the Bachelor’s thesis is only one part of your intermediate studies; it is not your life’s work or even your Master’s thesis. You should be able to complete your thesis in a reasonable time. Six credits equal about 20 days’ work: for example, four days of searching for information, eight days of reading articles and eight days of writing.

The objective of a Bachelor’s thesis is that the writer provides the reader with information that he or she has acquired in a format that demonstrates a fluent academic writing style (translating directly from Finnish or Swedish into English, for example, usually results in awkward language). Because an article may need to be read more than once to understand its content and because the writing of a Bachelor’s thesis requires a strong command of the source material, you should devise a timetable for your work and adhere to it.

Studies related to the Bachelor’s thesis

Before beginning to write a Bachelor’s thesis, you must first complete the proseminar or a similar compulsory course.

A Bachelor's thesis cannot be approved until the student has passed a written maturity test on the topic of his or her thesis. As a rule, students who have completed their basic and secondary education in Finnish or Swedish must take the maturity test in that language and must demonstrate a good command of it. A student who has completed his or her basic and secondary education in Finnish or Swedish and passed a maturity test in that language becomes qualified for certain posts in Finnish public administration.

Students who have not completed their basic and secondary education in Finnish or Swedish can take the maturity test in Finnish, Swedish or English. The Faculty Dean decides on maturity tests completed in a language other than Finnish or Swedish. Students must submit an application on the matter to the Faculty Office.
A pass/fail grading system is used for assessing the maturity test. Further provisions relating to the examiner(s) of the maturity test may be given in the departmental curriculum. The department must register the maturity test as a separate entry in the Oodi register.

**Assessment**

A Bachelor’s thesis is submitted to the supervisor for assessment. The supervisor is not required to write a statement on the thesis. When submitting the thesis, the student must possess the right to pursue a Bachelor’s degree in the degree programme of his or her major subject (in the degree programme in environmental sciences, the student must possess the right to pursue a degree in his or her major subject). In addition, students must be registered as attending students at the University for the term during which the thesis is to be approved and assessed. Each Bachelor’s thesis is assessed on a scale of 0–5.

**Grading criteria (0–5)**

5: The thesis shows an independent, critical and creative research approach. The information presented is relevant to the topic, clearly structured and innovatively integrated. The theories and research results related to the topic are well known and appropriately referenced, as are the core research methods, which the writer has mastered on a theoretical level. The writer is capable of distinguishing out-of-date information from current information. The topic of the thesis is clearly defined, and the language used is polished, accurate and clear: the thesis proceeds logically and forms a dynamic, successful whole.

4: The thesis is logically and clearly written and reflects an independent and critical approach. The thesis does not, however, meet some of the criteria for grade 5 as defined above.

3: The various sections of the thesis constitute a successful and integrated whole. The selected sources are relevant to the topic. The conclusions are mostly logical, yet the writer also presents his or her own reflections. The language used is mostly accurate and clear, and the text is well organised.

2: Theories and previous research are presented, but are often discussed only mechanically. The thesis contains only a modest amount of the writer’s own reflections and conclusions, or they are not always presented logically. The structure and language of the thesis are inadequate in some places.

1: The premise, purpose and concepts of the thesis are poorly presented. The most important literature sources related to the topic have been identified, but are examined in an unbalanced or inappropriate manner. The writer shows no independent or critical approach. The text is readable, but poorly organised and often inaccurate.

0 (failed): The text includes many of the following serious deficiencies: The premise, purpose and concepts of the thesis are absent. The conclusions are inaccurate or incorrect, and the writer presents none of his or her own reflections. The background information related to the topic is poorly described, and the most important theories are ignored or poorly presented. The citation of sources contains many errors. The thesis as a whole is illogically structured, and the language is poor.

The department enters the thesis grade in the Oodi register in the same way as for other completed studies.

**Appeals concerning the grading of a Bachelor’s thesis**

According to Section 63 of the Regulations on Degrees and the Protection of Students’ Rights at the University of Helsinki, students dissatisfied with a grade for completed studies may appeal in person or in writing to the teacher responsible for the grading. The appeal shall be filed within 14 days of the date the student had access to the grade and the application of grading principles.
An appeal shall receive a reasoned decision within a reasonable period of time. The teacher shall provide the decision in writing if the student wishes to pursue the appeal. The student may appeal to the Academic Appeals Board of the University of Helsinki within 14 days of receiving the decision.

Public access to a Bachelor’s thesis and its abstract

Bachelor’s theses, as well as other theses and dissertations, must be available for open assessment. The actual thesis to be assessed must include no information intended to remain confidential under the Act on the Openness of Government Activities (621/1999) (e.g., business or professional secrets). Such information must be included only in the background material of the thesis. The examiners of the thesis are bound by confidentiality if they choose to access this information. Assessment of the thesis, however, is based on its public content. Bachelor’s theses, as well as other theses and dissertations, are made available to the public immediately after they have been approved. In addition, the thesis abstract is always a public document.

Archiving

As specified in the University of Helsinki archiving plan, approved Bachelor’s theses are to be preserved permanently at the department in printed format. The supervisor must ensure that each thesis is archived.

Entry into force

These general instructions shall enter into force on 1 August 2011, on which date they shall supersede the Faculty Council’s previous general instructions concerning Bachelor’s theses.