



UiO : **Department of Political Science**  
University of Oslo

## Planning your thesis

Topic, research question, and application for supervisor



Elisabeth Bakke

Tuesday March 24<sup>th</sup>, 2020

## PECOS 4081 Design seminar

- purpose: help you get started
- mandatory attendance at the first seminar AND active participation in 2/3 of the remaining seminars
- you will present an outline of the master's thesis AND serve as discussant for at least one of the other students' outline
- the number of seminars depends on the number of students; we devote 45 minutes to each outline

## The outline: a plan for the thesis

- a precise research question
- research design: how do you plan to answer this question?
  - theoretical context
  - methods
- sources and data
- disposition – structure of the thesis: what goes in which chapter?

## Three phases of (academic) writing

### 1) preparation

- choose your topic
- read up on the scholarly literature (be sure to take notes)
- collect materials/check if existing data are available
- systematise
- narrow down the topic to a researchable question
- disposition: a detailed plan for the text

2) drafting }  
3) editing } after design seminar

## Topic

- You are completely free to choose any topic for your thesis
  - as long as it is relevant for peace and conflict studies
- How to choose a good topic
  - What am I interested in?
  - What do I already know, and what do I need to read up on?
  - Are there available sources in a language I can understand?
  - Can anyone supervise me on this topic?
- Knowledgebase: mandatory and optional courses

## Research question

- Think several steps ahead:
  - The relationship between research question, analytical perspective and data/literature
- Is your research question researchable? Within the time available?
  - A carefully formulated and sufficiently limited research question is a necessary condition for a good result AND for finishing on time
- Different types of research questions, e.g.,
  - Literature driven: Knowledge gaps you can contribute to fill
  - Problem oriented: How can it be that...?

## What is a research question?

- A question that can be answered within the given time and space constraints
  - Description: What happened and how did it happen?
  - Explanation: Why did it happen?
  - Evaluation: (How) does it conform to certain normative standards?
- The purpose of the text: limited, coherent, precise
- Always means narrowing the topic
- Helps deciding what is relevant and what is not

## What is a research question? (continued)

- limited – to a certain time period
- limited – to certain regions/countries/sub-state entities
- limited – in terms of aspects of the topic
  
- purpose: description and/or explanation? Or evaluation?



## Sources and literature

- books/journal articles/other written sources
- internet – electronic journals
- existing quantitative datasets
- do you want to collect your own data?
- be aware!
  - validity: how well suited are these sources to answer the question?
  - reliability: how trustworthy are they?

## Methods

- the choice of method depends on the research question
- triangulation may be useful
- if you base your thesis on secondary sources, historical method may be useful
- if you choose a comparative design, make sure you reflect over whether you have a most similar or a most different systems design

## Resources

- Getting started:

<https://www.sv.uio.no/english/studies/master/pecos/index.html>

- Databases

<https://www.sv.uio.no/isv/tjenester/kunnskap/datasett/>

## Application for supervisor

- Should include a short project description
  - The more precise the project description, the easier for us to find the appropriate supervisor for your project
- Suggestions for relevant supervisors are very welcome!
  - Contact relevant scholars (at UiO or elsewhere) and ask them if they want to be your supervisor
  - Even if you have not contacted relevant scholars in advance, suggestions are nevertheless very welcome!
- Do not hesitate to contact academic staff at the Department of Political Science to get advice!

## Application (continued)

- Deadline is 20 June – only once per year!
  - Even if you know you will not start working with your thesis until the spring semester, you must apply now
- Remember information meeting at semester start, where you will be informed about supervisors:

**(date to be decided)**