Supervision Letter for MSc and Ph.D. Theses

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This letter aims to provide you with information regarding the supervision process during your thesis project. It will clarify the type and quantity of advice I will be able to give you during your thesis project, how I will supervise you during the writing process, and what I expect from you during this process. In the letter, I will describe both: what you can expect from me and what I require from you. Thereby, I seek to align expectations and to give you a clear picture in which aspects my supervision can contribute for a successful completion of your thesis, and in which not.

The letter is aimed at both: supervision of a master thesis and supervision of a Ph.D. thesis. Cases for which the supervision context/style differs will be *marked* in the text.

Regarding Topic/Fields

In general, I supervise master/Ph.D. theses whose topics relate to my own area of expertise. Therefore, the thesis must have an economic focus and can be in the fields of environmental economics, development economics, and political economy – these are my research fields. See my homepage and publications to get a more detailed overview of my research interests. In the case of a supervision of a *master thesis*, I may also act as a supervisor on other topics that are only peripherally associated with my research - but then you cannot expect me to be an expert in your specific topic.

Master thesis: Overall, you should find a research topic, which you are interested in, and where you want to get more expertise. If you are not sure about your topic, I can assist you in finding it. Besides that, I also have a couple of research topics, which I would like to explore more in-depth with a master student. In the end, your master thesis and the topic you have chosen will be a unique selling point in your CV to find a job afterwards – therefore, the topic should fit your interests.

Ph.D. thesis: In case you are writing a Ph.D. thesis, the topic needs to fulfill two objectives: for you as a student/researcher, it needs to be in your fields of interests as it will lay the stepping stone for your scientific career; and for me, as your supervisor, it needs to pursue my own research agenda/interest. Therefore, discussing and deciding upon an overall Ph.D. thesis topic (and partly on the topics of the papers you are writing in the course of your Ph.D. thesis) will be an interactive and joined process. If the Ph.D. thesis is funded by an externally funded project, the topic of your Ph.D. thesis will be aligned with the project's research tasks.

Regarding method

Master/Ph.D. theses I am supervising must be empirically based, i.e., an econometric study, spatial analysis using GIS, or a statistical analysis. It can also be a thesis applying a survey to get data, which can then be analyzed quantitatively (e.g., willingness to pay studies) – but no qualitative studies. These are the methodological fields where I have the most expertise and can provide proper supervision. To tackle the methodological requirements, you should have some experience working with datasets and using statistical or spatial programs like, e.g., STATA, R, Python, or ArcGIS. Preferably, you did statistics and/or econometrics classes before. If you are writing a *master thesis*, basic knowledge of these methods is sufficient. In case you are writing a *Ph.D. thesis*, you should have already worked and analyzed data in previous research projects, such as bachelor thesis, seminar reports, or master thesis.

My view on supervision

I perceive the supervision process as a bilateral and interactive activity. It is important that you take full responsibility for this project. This means that you are expected to take an active role during and between each meeting we have together - this includes being prepared for meetings, searching for answers to your questions before you ask me, but then also asking me and discussing with me the topics you need help with! You should also think carefully and communicate how you think you will get the most out of your thesis, which kind of feedback you would like to get from me, what you need help with.

Always remember that the thesis and the corresponding final product are yours, not mine! My task is to support and supervise you in that process. I will give you content- and form-based suggestions as to how you may boost your project's quality, but you are the one responsible for the outcome, both in terms of the final version of the thesis and the process preceding this written text. In case we are working on a joined paper in your *Ph.D. thesis*, my role will cover both a supervision task as well as a co-author task.

Keep in mind that drafts of your thesis that you have sent to me are unrelated to the final mark you will receive. Thus, you do not need to worry that such drafts may negatively influence your final mark, regardless of their content, as only your final thesis version is assessed. However, a poorly written draft limits me considerably from giving helpful feedback. Please also consider that I take reading drafts seriously, which is strainful and time-consuming. ***Therefore, before sending a draft, make sure that it fulfills common scientific standards (form, citation style, ...) and is clearly written!*** If you send me written drafts from your thesis, please limit it to a maximum of 10 pages and let me specifically know what you would like me to focus on. It should also be clear that I will not read the entire thesis throughout the supervision process (this will be different when working on a joined paper in a *Ph.D. thesis*). So please be careful to think about what (and for what reason) to send me to read.

I strongly encourage you to independently consult the curriculum and the administrative authorities for technical queries regarding the formalities involved in the thesis project. I do not see this as a major part of my supervision task. A final note to consider, as soon as you have submitted your *master thesis*, my role switches from supervisor to evaluator.

Around and in the first meeting

Master thesis: Your task before our first meeting will be to write a short draft of your problem statement and submit it before we meet. If you have multiple topics, you can send up to 3 problem statements before our first meeting. The problem statement should include a short description of context, potential research question, possible datasets you will plan to use to answer your research question, some thoughts about the methodological approach to answer your research question, and some relevant scientific literature you have already found. ***Please consider: a problem statement should not be longer than 1 page and should be seen as a draft (it is fine if it is not perfectly worked out in all aspects)!*** In our first meeting, we will work on this problem statement by talking about and discussing the research question (or the problem) you would like to investigate, how this can be embedded within the literature and theory, and with which method(s) you can best address your research question. Usually, we will end our first meeting with a plan and a common understanding of what should be included in this draft of your problem statement. Sometimes, we will end with a discussion of different alternatives to the points mentioned above, from which you will make a final decision at home. After 1-2 minor revision rounds of the problem statement, you will get my approval for the topic. Besides discussing the topic, in the first meeting, we will also go through the specific requirements a master thesis must fulfill to be marked successfully.

Ph.D. thesis: The Ph.D. process is a multi-year process. Therefore, the initial phase will take longer, will be individually adapted, and aims to mutually identify a direction of a

potential research topic. This initial process will be iterative and can take some time. If the Ph.D. thesis is externally funded, research questions will be aligned with the content of the research project, which means that the initial phase will be relatively short.

During our first meeting, we will make a joint agreement on whether, for example, we will meet once a month or at your request. These meetings usually last for about 60 minutes. We do not necessarily have to meet at my office, so sessions can also take place online. Despite our agreement, you are welcome to contact me between our set meeting dates if you encounter unexpected problems.

Subsequent meetings

To set up an appointment, please contact me by e-mail the week before you would like to have a meeting and let me know what days and times would fit you.

Before each meeting, you are expected to give me very clear instructions of what you need from me (outline the agenda you would like to discuss) and, if applicable, send me the text you want me to read (please consider the max. 10 pages rule). Please, let me specifically know what you would like me to focus on when I give you feedback. I will not be able to provide any kind of general feedback to the question of "how did you like it and what can I improve?". Please, send me your text along with instructions and potential questions to my e-mail no later than 24 hours before our meeting.

Contact

The easiest way to contact me is by e-mail (stefan.borsky@uni-graz.at). I usually write back within 1-2 days. If I do not write back, your e-mail accidentally slipped through, and I am asking you to send me a reminder.

One final note to keep in mind

As the process of supervision proceeds, our roles will gradually change. You will be reading more and more about your topic, which, in relation to your research question, will make you the expert in this field, not me. I will still be active in my role as a sparring partner and discussant and ask critical questions, but I will not know and be familiar with all of the literature and research papers you have read (and I will generally not have time to read them).

Finally, you will need a lot of commitment and willingness to work hard. The master thesis is the final piece in your studies, showing what you have learned in the last 3+ years. The Ph.D. thesis is your stepping stone for your scientific career.