

Doing your Bachelor's or Master's thesis at the Conservation and Development Lab

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This document will guide you to understand and follow the process to carry out a Bachelor or Master thesis at the Conservation and Development Lab. Many of the steps are part of the regulations made by the Examination Board, but some steps are unique to this Lab and require that you read carefully these guidelines. If you still have any questions, please contact the Lab team members.

1. Important info before doing a thesis (Bachelor or Master) at the Conservation and Development Lab

a. Research areas

The world is facing a biodiversity crisis, sometimes described as a sixth mass extinction. Species and ecosystems are declining and degrading at unprecedented rates, largely driven by development models that depend on unsustainable use of natural resources. *Meeting human development needs while conserving the natural world requires new ways of thinking about how people and nature interact.*

The Conservation and Development Research Group studies social-ecological systems to understand how environmental governance can support both biodiversity conservation and human well-being. We focus on the underlying values and worldviews people have for nature, how their values become embedded in governance structures, and how different governance structures shape outcomes for both people and biodiversity. Our work is interdisciplinary, drawing on sociology, ecology, philosophy, geography, and institutional economics, and uses a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods.

Our core research questions are:

1. What values do people hold for nature?
2. What forms of environmental governance are effective?
3. What are the outcomes for biodiversity and human well-being?

b. Expectations

Within these broad questions, a great variety of individual Bachelor's and Master's thesis projects can be developed depending on your interest, skills, and time. Students are expected to have a proactive attitude when doing their thesis and become critical within their topic of interest. You are responsible of moving forward and meeting your timelines. Keep in mind that we try to foster a safe workspace, practicing values such as inclusivity, empathy, respect, and equity, within a friendly environment.

2. Steps to develop your thesis at the Conservation and Development Lab

Now that you have decided that the aims and scope of the lab suits your interests, and you have the skills required to carry on the thesis, there are a series of steps that are important to follow in order to develop your research.

a. Finding or refining a topic:

You could either have a topic in mind before hand or want to explore within the topics covered by the Lab. When deciding and refining your topic consider, i) your inner motivations (for example, a class that captivated your attention or a topic you have read about), ii) your experience gained during your Bachelor or Masters, and iii) the practical limitations (for example, traveling or language). Reflect on what skills you want to acquire by doing your thesis, for example, a deeper knowledge about a conceptual framework (e.g. ecosystems services) or learn how to apply a particular method or tool (e.g. qualitative thematic analysis), and who can help you with gaining those skills.

Having this in mind, it is convenient to set up a meeting with the Lab team to discuss your interest and negotiate with available options that you could develop. Depending on the topic, your thesis can be part of a larger project where you will be working closely with other students, postdocs, and/or professors.

b. Writing an exposé or proposal

Once the topic is agreed between you and your supervisors, you have to write an exposé or thesis proposal. Main sections for the exposé will include:

- *An introduction with a background section*: here you will present the main problem related to your research (i.e. biodiversity crisis, environmental injustice, climate change, etc.); then the conceptual lens to look at the problem (e.g. values of nature, power dynamics, governance); and what it is known and what is worth investigating (state of the art and knowledge gaps).
- *Research questions and objectives*: clearly state what will you answer with your research and if you have hypotheses to test (this not always applies). This has to match the objectives and further the research approach.
- *Research approach*: this section is the 'how' of your research question. It includes the proposed methods for data collection and analysis. Having a series of steps that you early visualize is useful to define the scope of your project.

This document should be concise and can contain early ideas to develop in the form of bullet points. The extension is usually around 2000-2500 words, but this can vary depending on the topic. This proposal can and will change in an iterative process of feedback and revisions until you have a consistent version.

c. Register your thesis

Once you have a final proposal, the thesis must be officially registered with the study Examination Board or [Prüfungsbüro](#). We encourage you to revise the [regulations](#) to avoid misunderstandings and to speed up the process. For registering you have to decide on formal supervisors: 1) one must be a professor in the Geography Department of HU Berlin, 2) the second supervisor does not need to be a professor at HU, however for Bachelor students they should have at least a Master's degree, and for Master's students they should hold a PhD. In case one of your supervisors is not yet on the list of examinators, you will have to follow the outlined [regulations](#) around appointing examinators from the Board.

d. Colloquium presentations

The shared colloquium between the Biogeography Lab and Conservation and Development Lab provides a friendly space for students writing their Bachelor's or Master's thesis to present their work and receive feedback while practicing and improving presentation, discussion, and

communication skills. Bachelor's and Master's theses students have to present their work minimum two times. For Bachelor students you will present a short talk of 5 minutes at the beginning of your project (framing phase), and a full talk of 15 minutes at a stage when the first results are available. For Master students you will present a full talk of 15 minutes showing the framing and first results and then a 30 minutes presentation to defend your thesis after submission. Full talks of theses at the colloquium are only possible if you are registered at the Examination Board. The presentations and discussions in the colloquium will be held in English.

There is a [Moodle forum](#) which is hosted by the Conservation BioGeography Lab, with more information and a calendar with upcoming presentations and the available slots, you can enroll at any time. Make sure to reserve a slot early on in coordination with your supervisor and Lab team. All presentations take place during the teaching term, please try to fill a space as soon as you can. If you would like to present, please write an email to Camille Dammann (camille.dammann@geo.hu-berlin.de) to reserve a slot, including the following information: 1) title of your presentation, 2) mention if it is a flash talk / full talk/thesis defense, 3) a short abstract (70-150 words), and 4) preferred date. Please don't omit any information or we won't be able to reserve a slot for you. The latest possible time to reserve a slot is two weeks before the presentation. Confirm with your supervisors your presentation date so they can attend. You can find the guidelines for presentations on Moodle (size, number of slides, HU template).

e. Writing and feedback of the thesis

Writing your thesis it's usually a back-and-forth process that takes time and patience. For this, we highly recommend to report on your progress, particularly if you run into major problems or if you would like to discuss the results and their interpretation. In general, do not hesitate to get in touch when you need feedback. For a thesis carried out within a research project, feedback will primarily come from the respective supervisors and the colloquium, but it is not restricted to that. You can approach postdocs, PhD students, and other professors. A very important aspect of your thesis is how you ground and discuss your results in light of other research. Getting to know the main discussions around one topic takes time, please do not underestimate this critical step. A well-written discussion section is far more valuable than more results and analyses. Another important point is the ethical use of AI tools, such as ChatGPT or Gemini; for this, please read the Lab guidelines and follow them when writing your thesis.

f. Submitting and grading your thesis

Once your thesis is ready or you are approaching the deadline, you will have to submit it to [Examination Office \(Prüfungsbüro\)](#). The format of the thesis itself is regulated in your [Studien- und Prüfungsordnung](#). We encourage thesis that are written in English and, at the Masters level, are in the form of a research paper. [Additional guidelines](#) are specified by the Examination Board ([Prüfungsausschuss](#)). Next, your two supervisors will have to grade it according to the German grading system (1,0 - 1,3 = very good; 1,7 - 2,3 = good; 2,7 - 3,3 = satisfactory; 3,7 - 4,0 = sufficient; 5,0 = insufficient) and passed back onto the Examination Board. Additional to the grading there will be a detail assessment elaborated by the supervisors explaining the grade you got. The rubric is based on:

- Content-related rubric: 1) task and formulation of objectives; 2) literature and source assessment; 3) methodological and experimental thesis; 4) results preparation and presentation; 5) relevance of the discussion and conclusions; and 6) creativity and intellectual merit.
- Structure-related rubric: 1) logical flow and balance of the structure; 2) language and grammar used correctly; and 3) design and layout.

In addition to the thesis, think about a short way of communicating your work, combining text and graphical material (i.e. this can be the abstract or a graphical abstract and some photos or images relevant to your thesis). Send these materials to the Lab student assistant Margarete (margarete.grunske.1@geo.hu-berlin.de) to be included in our web page and social media.