



MALMÖ UNIVERSITY

Guideline
Communication for
Development
www.mah.se/comdev

ComDev Degree Project Handbook August 2014

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The ComDev Degree Project (15 ECTS credits)

The Degree Project comprises the final term of the MA in Communication for Development. The Degree Project is the equivalent of an MA thesis within a 1 year MA framework. It is granted 15 ECTS (as any other term on the programme) for half time study over a full academic term, September-January.

You should have completed all outstanding course work and have your project plan (PP) accepted before you can be appointed a supervisor. You cannot be examined on the Degree Project without having passed all previous assignments.

The Communication for Development Degree Project can be carried out individually or in pairs. If you choose to work together with another student, you could, for instance, conduct two case studies on one and the same phenomenon. However, each student must submit a thesis that is unique. The final degree project should be between **13,500 and 17,000 WORDS - not including foot/endnotes, bibliography, and appendices**. This allows for flexibility in length and the limitations minimum or maximum should not be transgressed.

Aim

The aim of the Degree Project module is to give you an opportunity to apply and develop the knowledge you have gained from previous modules of the Communication for Development programme. The degree project/thesis should demonstrate a **reflective approach to communication processes and interventions in contexts of development and social change**. It should investigate one or more central themes of the Communication for Development field. The Degree Project will **utilise and reflect upon a combination of relevant research methods** for the proposed problem and conduct an independent **analysis applying the theoretical concepts** and design laid out in the project.

It could, for example, involve research on communication and media methodologies and practices in development aid, health, heritage or urban renewal projects. The fieldwork or area/country focus can be anywhere where a communication and development issue can be explored. It does not necessarily have to be carried out in a so-called developing country. With a local/regional focus and in-depth reading of your field material or texts you will contextualise, e.g. by analysing the global in the local context. You can also make a so-called 'desktop study', analysing policy documents that deal with development cooperation. We strongly recommend that you survey relevant Degree Projects at the ComDev

portal, Malmö University Electronic Publishing MUEP and relevant article-versions of degree projects in our Glocal Times journal¹.

Degree Project Overview

The overview below shows the different stages or progression of the Degree Project term. The time schedule/dates for your specific term will be in the Google calendar

Term start

The term starts with an online introduction to Project Plan writing and the overall Degree Project process in the first week. You will submit your Project Plan (PP) soon thereafter. This is a compulsory part of the Degree Project exam but not graded. The PP has to be approved by one of the ComDev teachers and your supervisor is appointed soon afterwards.

September and October

Initiating your degree project with individual supervision and library research

Mid term

You will submit a process paper with excerpts from your thesis to demonstrate your progress in the writing process. This submission is about 15 pages long. The process papers will be discussed in an oral seminar, where each student does a brief oral feedback on a fellow student's process paper and you also receive feedback from staff lecturers. The submission of process paper and participation in an oral seminar are compulsory parts of your Degree Project, but they are not graded.

December

Close to the Christmas holidays and before the final submission date in January we will have a final lecture with recommendations on writing up, sharing questions and concerns regarding the final submission and preparing the final thesis. At this point at the latest you should have a draft of your thesis ready; supervisors are not expected to comment on final drafts, but on drafts that roughly present a 90% version of your thesis.

January

You will submit a full version of your thesis at the beginning of January for the oral examination in mid-January. You need to submit your final version to the URKUND anti-plagiarism software (detailed instructions can be found on itsLearning).

1. wpmu.mah.se/comdev; www.mah.se/muep; www.glocaltimes.se

After the examination seminar you will have one week for minor language and formatting corrections or other minor correction that the examiner deems possible to adjust within a week.

All students who submit a thesis will also peer review a fellow student's thesis. This is a compulsory part of the examination.

Once a final grade has been reported to the LADOK system and no other credits/assignments are outstanding you can apply for your official certificate. At this point you should also submit your thesis to the MUEP repository (detailed instructions can be found on itsLearning).

Compulsory requirements of participation during the Degree Project term:

1. Submission of a PP
2. Submission of a process paper
3. Comment on a fellow student's process paper either by oral feedback in discussion seminar or in writing
4. Submission of a thesis
5. Participation in person (compulsory for Nordic-based students) or alternatively on-line in the examination seminar
6. Peer review of a fellow student's thesis
7. Submission of a final version for MUEP.

Online seminars/lectures as well as other exhibition/presentation activity are not compulsory but highly recommended. You are also strongly recommended to submit a rough draft/90 percent version of your thesis to your supervisor for feedback.

Preparation: The Project Plan/PP

Your PP/Project Plan is a semi-detailed outline that presents your research idea. The PP should cover the following questions and themes – though not necessarily in the exact structure as below:

(1) Brief presentation of the theme, i.e. exploring **'what'**. On the same page you pose some of the possible questions, meaning you refine and scrutinise your particular perspective(s). Be careful to present or explore the theoretical frame or concepts guiding your

work, meaning the presentation of 'what' should be a theoretically informed argument for how and in which directions your PW orientates itself.

(2) Elaboration on means of investigating the approach the question/problem, i.e. exploring '**why**' and '**how**'. This part should also show its relevance for ComDev and why/how the questions/problems can be approached. Furthermore, you will discuss which theoretical and method choices may be appropriate. This part of the PP may relate to your previous assignment on the Research Methodology course, meaning that you may benefit from what you have already done when writing your PP.

(3) Elaboration on the **key literature, notably your theoretical framework** and how you envision it to be utilised and contribute to your degree project topic and questions. You will not have space to do a longer Literature Review or a summary of many articles or books; it will highlight and discuss a few threads of relevance.

(4) Timetable and collaborators (**'when'** and **'with whom'**). Here you explain and visualise the degree project process; when are you going to do what, and which stakeholders or collaborators may be involved and when. In full, this part is about when you plan to finish the different stages of the work, which organisations/key people you work with, possible local supervisors/facilitators (not mandatory), when to do interviews or/and field work, do particular travels etc.

Your PP should be approximately **four pages long** (do not exceed five pages). You may think of each of the four parts outlined above as approximately one page long each.

We use the PP to estimate if a feasible preliminary plan for the Degree Project is in place. It may be rejected, meaning more work needed before a supervisor can be granted, or more likely: accepted as a starting point. Then we use the accepted PP to guide us in the selection of supervisor. Possible supervisors may also read your PP. Your first task will be to discuss the PP again with your supervisors. We aim to finalise appointment of supervisors 1-2 weeks after the PP is submitted. You do not have to follow the exact plan of the PP in your degree project. Things may change as you start working, but it is very important to discuss new directions/changes carefully with your supervisor and you may also at any time contact the Degree Project staff coordinator.

An online introduction and PP feedback discussion with fellow students will facilitate the entry to the Degree Project phase.

In principle, your thesis can evolve into different directions after submitting the PP. You will discuss changes with your appointed supervisor, as you go along. In rare cases, we may change supervision if topic and questions change course and other facilitation is needed.

Progress: The Process Paper

The Process Paper is a significant extract from your future Degree Project. You will submit one document of max 15 pages. It should include the following:

1. An abstract or short text presenting the Degree Project in its entirety and which includes your key research questions
2. A description of the submitted process paper; what kind of chapter/content is it: literature review, method discussion, analysis or other,
3. Some questions/problems you want to raise in the process paper session. Items 1-3 should be contained within one page.
4. The specific extracts, excerpts or chapter/s

The process papers will be then discussed in an oral seminar. Each process paper oral feedback session will proceed like this:

1) The student/presenter will briefly introduce his/her work, her process and the paper (5-10 minutes). 2) The student commenter will then comment on the work submitted, and then 3) the teacher will give his/her feedback. The last part may turn into a discussion. There are no specific 'rules' for this commenting/feedback. You will adapt to what kind of paper/section is submitted. Look carefully at what is submitted; concentrate on clarity, communication, and key ideas. Pose ideas how to work further, ask questions about connections to other parts of the thesis, e.g. coherency, structure, and also about time planning, to which extent it is researchable and realistic to finish, and what further work remains, and what kind of results it may produce?

Submission: Degree Project thesis

The format of your thesis should roughly follow the guidelines below.

- Standard typing, i.e. size 12 font Times Roman (or similar)
- Margins of min. 2.5 cm for top and bottom and min. 3 cm. for left and right margin
- 1.5 line spacing; long quotations can be single spaced

- The layout must be clear and concise
- Referencing: Many standards are available. For academic assignments in particular Degree Project the use of a consistent and recognised system is compulsory. We recommend APA, based on the Harvard style. There is a link to a reference system in the Student Handbook

The thesis should more or less follow the order of content as indicated below, though allowing for your own individual names of chapters. This suggestion of content items below is based on a traditional academic thesis structure. Notice that your format or narrative could also be thematic interweaving elements of theory, method and data in topic/theme oriented chapters. The traditional and recommended academic structure of a thesis involves the following items. The 'Analysis' is likely to be a major chapter. Also some title/elements are compulsory in the form as presented below: that is the abstract, a table of contents, the use of page numbering, and a recognised referencing system.

Front Page with name, title of thesis, programme/course, date of submission. Consider also image/illustration (in particular for MUEP version) (please see the example in the appendix).

Abstract max 1 page

Your abstract should include a brief presentation of the study, its key research questions, theories, methods and findings. You will usually write the abstract at the very end of the study.

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Introduction

Including aim, objectives, research questions, introduction to core theories and research design, and outlining your empirical data.

Literature review and existing research

The literature review demonstrates your background knowledge in the field by summarising and discussing research of relevance for your study. This may be theoretical or/and empirical studies, as well as studies that are media or/and area specific. You will position your work in relation to a selection of relevant empirical researches – and possibly other

empirical data may complement your own research.

Theory and methodology

You should include a presentation of theories and methods and a reflection on their application, including self-reflexivity and ethical issues. Be careful to map out, make transparent, how you have worked, possibly using visuals, maps, tables. Your work will not only present the data generation tools, like e.g. 'interviews' but also connect the discussion of tools with theories which will qualify the particular approaches or perspectives in your empirical research (i.e. the concept 'methodology' implies a tool/method awareness as well as a theoretical awareness).

Analysis

You should explore your research questions by applying your theoretical framework to the empirical data. Analysis is of major importance in the field, and ideally analysis will be performed throughout the thesis, although specific chapters may be primarily analytical / engaging systematically with the analysis of your empirical data.

Conclusion

A final summary of your main findings and results, putting analysis and discussion into perspective, developing new questions, perspectives, recommendations for future research. The section/s will contain the final comments/answers to your research questions, and reflect back on the workability of your design.

References

Use a consistent referencing system. Check links for reference techniques in Student Handbook.

Appendices and Foot-/Endnotes

Consider carefully how you use a note system - either at the bottom of each page or as endnotes after each chapter or full thesis. Also, the Appendices (a series of texts/documents) are important as a way of documenting empirical fieldwork processes, texts/documents, i.e. interview transcription extracts, policy/brochure/campaign material. As any other text in your degree project it should be economical and selected and have a clear purpose.

Academic form of the Degree Project

The Degree Project can, alternatively, be presented in the form of a combined academic and creative work, which is assessed on artistic grounds as well. The creative work can be in the form of an extended essay, a competent documentary (in the form of a book or broadcast for radio), a documentary film, or a CD-ROM. Any creative submission needs to be accompanied by a substantial academic text that covers the key features outlined above. Contact the Degree Project coordinator and/or your supervisor as early as possible to discuss alternative degree project avenues.

Guidance and Supervision

All projects are carried out with the help of a supervisor. For every Degree Project, 15 hours of supervision time are set aside for supervision assistance. This includes feedback/correspondence with an individual supervisor throughout the Degree Project phase (10 hours) such as 3-4 meetings, written correspondence, and preparation/reading time of draft chapters. We always invite supervisors to the examination and many participate as they are examining other degree projects. The 15 hours include about 5 hours feedback in total on Project Plan and feedback during Process Papers sessions, in addition to about 10 hours of personal supervision. Be aware that you will need the supervisor in the preparatory stage (desk work), during work in the field and during the write-up phase. Let your supervisor read, and have time to comment on a well-developed draft before you submit.

You can also always use the virtual classroom, the Guidance forum for reflection, questions, and comments – not only from the supervisor, but also from the Course coordinator and fellow students. You are recommended to keep contact with fellow students during the degree project phase and exchange comments and drafts. However, regular communication with your supervisor is important. Especially when you are about to finalise your Degree Project.

Examination

The student usually hands in the thesis when the supervisor has read a draft of all major chapters of the thesis, or preferably a rough draft of the full thesis. Do not expect your supervisor to read over the same chapters more than once and take feedback into consideration when revising your chapters.

The exam consists of an oral examination seminar based on the thesis submitted 2 weeks prior to the seminar. At the examination seminar, the student will begin by presenting

her/his degree project. The student will provide an overview of the project, its analysis and results, its strengths and weaknesses, etc. This presentation should last about 10 minutes. The student is encouraged to use visuals to highlight his/her work. The presentation is academic, however, bear in mind that a broader ComDev audience (fellow students etc.) who is not familiar with the student's Degree Project will be present as well.

It is compulsory for all Scandinavian based students to attend the examination in person. We highly recommend attending the seminar in person and the exact dates will be announced right at the beginning of the term. After the seminar presenter/ examinee's presentation, a fellow ComDev student acts as the peer reviewer of the degree project for 10 minutes. The commenter must critically ask questions about the degree project, its methods, analysis, results, etc. The examined student can answer these questions briefly. The commenter must show that she/he is able to critically evaluate a ComDev degree project.

The examiner asks critical questions in relation to the written thesis, the field works carried out, the methods applied, the analysis, the results, etc. The student is given the chance to elaborate upon her/his work as she/he answers the questions. This is the student's oral defence of the degree project, but it should be carried out as a dialogue between the examiner and the student. The examiner may also recommend that the student needs more time than the 1 week for minor formatting and language issues before submitting the final work. If the does not pass on the essential criteria outlined before the student will be given a more substantial revision task and a new deadline for a revised written version. One week after submission of final version you will receive a written assessment and a grade by the examiner.

Assessment of the Degree Project

In the assessment of the degree project, special attention is paid to the criteria outlined in the Course Syllabus Learning Outcomes listed under 'Knowledge and Understanding', 'Skills and Capacities' and 'Critical Skills and Approach'.

Formulation of the problem must be clear: What are you going to do – what is the problem under investigation? Present the thesis statement and keep the thesis statement as a guideline throughout the report. Put the problem into context - but limit the scope of historical and background information in the thesis, which should be kept in an

academic and analytical format, not a descriptive format. Stay within your topic and time/space, and let your research questions and focus decide what kind of background and context information is needed in the thesis. You may add additional background material as well as documentation of fieldwork methodology (such as question guides, an extract of an interview transcripts, time schedules, consent forms etc.) in the appendices.

Relevant existing research on the subject must be presented and critically commented upon. The final thesis/degree project will reflect upon the possible variety of existing research and positions in the field, and discuss the merits and limitations of the chosen theories and methods relative to the formulation of the problem, the material, and the analysis. The degree project should make clear the focus, rather than fill the thesis with data that are not discussed or analysed (the literature review and research process is likely to produce more information/data than what is included or discussed in the Degree Project. The written Degree Project is therefore engaging with a significant selection of theories and empirical material, not all data encountered during the work phase).

The student must reflect upon her/his own position and role in the project (e.g. of particular importance if the student explores an organisation she/he has also worked for or collaborated with), including the biases that the student might carry with her/him.

The choice of methods and theories must be justified and its implications and importance for the analysis clearly explained. Students must demonstrate that they are able to reflect upon the consequences of more than one perspective – and to address the consequences of their limitations or particular perspective. As a part of this reflection they must demonstrate that they can distance themselves from their own preconceptions and approach to the problem investigated, or, alternatively, point out the existence of other perspectives. The student should look for more than one answer to the proposed question.

The final thesis must be characterised by conceptual and logical stringency, and a recognised and consistent system of referencing. This broader area can be elaborated as follows: **The concepts used must be defined and used according to definition throughout.** Analysis and interpretation must be logically consistent and not self-contradictory. The difference between reviews/summaries, author's claims and interpretation

must be clearly indicated. Reviews/summaries and descriptive parts should be kept to a minimum and give way to analytical writing, i.e. analytical engagement with context, application of theories and scrutiny of data (applying and reflecting upon your methodological framework) early in the thesis. Key factual information must always be substantiated (for example, by giving a reference), while claims and interpretations must always be justified by relevant arguments. Sources must always be checked and source references, notes and other references must be consistent, with consistent chapters and headings. The research and the Degree Project must be carried out independently and characterised by individual authorship and thinking. Plagiarism will result in an 'U' and possibly dismissal from the program. For grading scale, see below. Language must be academic and formal, using a clear, concise, direct, lively and sophisticated language. The degree project should be proof read, preferable by a second reader (not the author) before submission. If you are not a native English speaker consider strongly having a native English speaker proofread your thesis.

Modern academic writing requires precision and care when writing about race, gender, and class, for example. Try to avoid generalisations and words that convey old-fashioned racial or sexual stereotypes.

For setting the final grade for the degree project, the written thesis/degree project is of major importance, but all stages of the examination will be taken into consideration, including the oral presentation and defence, and being an opponent for a fellow student. The ComDev staff overview all degree projects and approve and report the examiner's commentary and marking. Only in rare cases an examiner's marking is altered.

The general requirements described above (reflected in the Learning Outcomes points/items presented in Course Syllabus) can be specified into five specified criteria of importance.

1. Analytical skills and reflexivity – has to do with your ability to analyse and discuss your material gathered by applying relevant literature (course literature from previous modules as well as new readings), including concepts and relevant contextual readings/knowledge. Analytical skills are also demonstrated in your ability to reach subtle in-depth insights on your work as well as your ability to reflect upon your role/s, choices and limitations.

2. Independence – considers how well you manage to create a discussion of your own, in your own words, without just repeating what has been said in class or what is written in the literature. Are you synthesising discussions and concepts from different sources? Are you carrying out the analysis individually? Every thesis will be checked for plagiarism through the URKUND submission system.

3. Empirical material or content – referring to your ability to select, or produce/expose and discuss relevant empirical material or content which demonstrates your contribution to Communication for Development research. Possibly, you may bring new perspectives to the field. This part also refers to your ability to address researchable questions, problems, and material, as well as an ability to select relevant theories and methods (validity and reliability). Finally, you will also demonstrate an ability to relate and contextualise your research and material to relevant and varied examples of existing research in the field.

4. Application of concepts – how theoretical/methodological concepts are unpacked, explored and discussed/criticised. Do you show an understanding of the concepts? Are they applied on the empirical data? Did you define the concepts well? Did you select relevant concepts for the enquiry? Do you discuss different concepts in relation to each other (and in relation to the data)?

5. Clarity – this refers to your writing capability in terms of clear argumentation and definition of the concepts you are using. It also refers to transparency in terms of making clear how field material is produced and analysed. Finally, assure that the formal criteria for format and style (length, content page, font, bibliography/referencing) is fulfilled and that the full work is proofread.

The Grading Scale

Malmö University approach to the grading system A - U for Degree Project Assessment. Please note that the first sentence is general or generic for all modules (from student handbook), e.g. A 'Shows a high level of creativity and imagination'. Then a sentence on degree project in relation to five key areas above is added.

A = VG, Excellent. Shows a high level of creativity and imagination. Strong contribution to general requirement in all specified criteria 1-5.

B = VG, Very Good. Shows creativity and imagination. A very good contribution to general requirements, understood as a strong contribution to at least 4 out of 5 of the specified criteria 1-5.

C = G, Good. The work is carried out in a skilful and serious way with substantial engagement with the general requirement. This means a fulfilment of at least 3 of the 5 specified areas – and only a satisfactory or less convincing fulfilment of 1 or 2 of the specified areas.

D = G, Satisfactory. Meets the requirements in a reasonable way. A majority of the specified areas 1-5 only fulfilled satisfactory or just adequate manner. Only one or two of the areas 1-5 above fulfilled as generally good or substantial.

E = G, Sufficient. Meets the minimum requirements. Just satisfactory in all areas of general requirements and specified criteria 1-5.

U = Fail. More work needed – Major flaws or unsatisfactory fulfilment in one or several criteria areas.

Good marks are A-C, below average marks are D-F. Note that the ComDev 'C' at Malmö University may not be compared to a 'C' in all university environments.

If the thesis is graded 'U' after the assessment, you should discuss a new submission schedule with the Degree Project Coordinator who may consult the examiner and supervisor as well. The student will not have to take part in another oral seminar. You are strongly recommended to carefully adapt to the examiner's points, and as well involve your supervisor and the degree project coordinator during the process of revisions.

The final grade for the 1 Year MA Communication for Development is set as average of all module marks, though recognising progression and the major weight of the degree project.

Credits and final Degree Certificate

Once a final grade has been reported to the LADOK system and no other credits/assignments are outstanding you can apply for your official certificate.

Publishing – MUEP and Global Times