

Master of Theology (180EC)

Master Religious Studies, Specialisation Theology (60EC)

# Master's thesis

*Course guide 2023-2024*

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**Radboud University**





## **CONTENTS**

|           |   |          |
|-----------|---|----------|
| <b>1</b>  | <b>Research design and Master's thesis workshop</b> | <b>2</b> |
| 1.1       | Contents, place and function                        | 2        |
| 1.2       | Aim   | 3        |
| 1.3       | Link between internship and thesis                  | 3        |
| 1.4       | Period, scheduling and study load                   | 3        |
| <b>2.</b> | <b>Master's thesis</b>                              | <b>4</b> |
| 2.1       | Theology thesis requirements                        | 4        |
| 2.2       | Assessment criteria                                 | 4        |
| 2.3       | Supervision   | 5        |
| 2.4       | Assessment procedure                                | 6        |

## **APPENDIXES**

|   |   |    |
|---|---|----|
| A | Master's thesis assessment form                                       | 7  |
| B | Fraud policy  | 8  |
| C | Master of Theology learning outcomes                                  | 9  |
| D | Master of Religious Studies specialisation Theology learning outcomes | 10 |
| E | Planning  | 12 |

## **1 RESEARCH DESIGN AND MASTER'S THESIS**

### **1.1 Contents, place and function**

The master's program is concluded with a master's thesis. The preparation and guidance take place within the framework of the course 'Research Design', which is a joint course for all master's students in theology (both those of the Master's Theology 180EC as well as those of the Master's Religious Studies specialisation Theology 60 EC). During this course, students develop a work plan for their thesis. This work plan includes the thesis topic, a well-thought-out problem/objective, a description of the research methodology to be used, an outline of the thesis structure (including an estimate of the size of each section), and an overview of the key literature to be used. The work plan also specifies who the thesis supervisor will be and includes a realistic schedule for writing the thesis with an eye on the deadline.

In the semester following the successful completion of the 'Research Design' course, students work under the individual guidance of their thesis supervisor to develop their work plan into a complete thesis. They also participate in several meetings of the 'Research Design' course of that semester to discuss their progress and present any problems to fellow students.

**Students are only allowed to submit their thesis with the approval of their thesis supervisor.** Make clear agreements about this. In case the supervisor determines that the thesis is not ready for evaluation by the time of a deadline or if the student submits the thesis too late, the supervisor records 'Niet voldaan' (NVD) in OSIRIS for the relevant examination opportunity. Theses may be submitted at any point throughout the semester until the deadline(s), as long as the assessment procedure detailed in section 2.4 is followed. The deadline for submitting the master's thesis (via Brightspace) depends on the semester in which students write their thesis:

- First semester: deadline **January 7<sup>th</sup>**, re-sit **February 4<sup>th</sup>**
- Second semester: deadline **June 2<sup>nd</sup>**, re-sit **June 30<sup>th</sup>**

A student who does not achieve a passing grade will receive written feedback from the supervising teacher no later than two weeks after submission. They then have two weeks to improve their thesis before the deadline of the re-sit. A student who also fails the re-sit must re-enroll for the master's thesis in the following semester. See Appendix E: Planning for an overview of the schedule and process.

Approximately one month before the deadline, the Faculty Thesis Poster Day takes place. On that day, all master's students present a poster in A3 format containing the key points of their research. The goal is for them to explain the content and purpose of their thesis in a maximum of 5 minutes using the poster as a visual aid. Ideally, they also submit the first complete version of their thesis to their supervisor for feedback around the same time. The poster presentation thus serves as a natural milestone in their writing process and is also good preparation for the defense of the thesis. Students are not graded on their poster presentation, but they are required to participate.

The Thesis Poster Day for the first semester is on **Monday, November 27**, from 15:30-17:30h, and for the second semester, it is on **Monday, May 6**, from 15:30-17:30h. **Further details about the Faculty Thesis Poster Day will be communicated separately via the thesis's Brightspace page.**

## **Faculty of Philosophy, Theology and Religious Studies**

Master Theology 180EC & Master's Religious Studies Specialisation Theology 60EC

### **1.2 Aim**

By completing the Master's thesis, students demonstrate their academic ability, i.e. their ability to think, write and do research independently, critically, methodically and systematically. In concrete terms, students have to show their insight into a theme and in one or more methods of approaching that theme by means of a well-defined, clear research problem and logically structured arguments.

### **1.3 Link between internship and thesis**

Within the specialization theology of the Master's in Religious Studies (60EC), a research internship of 10 EC is offered as an option. This internship usually connected to the writing of the master's thesis as a graduation project of the programme. Students who do not want a link between internship and thesis can request this with a reasoned letter to the programme coordinator.

In the specialisation '**MARW theology**', the link between internship and thesis presupposes that the research carried out during the internship can be developed into a thesis subject. It is important that students contact the programme coordinator, dr. Justine Bakker, to discuss the rules concerning the internship. The students must carry out literary-historical, systematic or empirical research, possibly on behalf of third parties. It goes without saying that at this stage of the programme high demands are placed on the nature, methodical approach and results of the work carried out by the student and that there must be a clear relationship with the content and level of the programme. In an internship contract, the concrete agreements (question and objective, research design and planning) must be determined.

### **1.4 Period, scheduling and study load**

The course 'Research Design' is preferably taken by students in the first semester. However, students who are enrolled in the part-time program can also take this course in the second semester. Students are required to register for this course through OSIRIS. For the exact details of the sessions, please refer to the relevant course manual.

For the master's thesis, students receive 15 ECTS credits, which corresponds to a workload of 420 hours.

## **2 MASTER'S THESIS**

The requirements and criteria of the Master's thesis appear in the faculty's Rules and Guidelines.

### **2.1 Master's Theology and Master's Religious Studies, specialisation Theology thesis requirements**

The thesis:

- The work must be submitted in PDF format with page size A4. The thesis should be formatted in a standard, consistent, and readable manner.
- The length should be between 15,000-20,000 words, excluding (foot)notes, bibliography and appendices.
- Is written in good, clear, grammatically correct Dutch or English and understandable for qualified religious scholars in general. (this applies *mutatis mutandis* to theses written in any other language).
- Consistent references and a separate bibliography, both prepared according to a common system.
- Quotes source texts or recognized translations.
- Contains a summary of at most 120 words.
- Is provided with a title page with:
  - Title
  - Student name
  - Student number
  - Name of the supervisor(s)
  - Word count (excluding (foot)notes, bibliography and appendices)
  - Date
  - The text: 'Thesis to obtain the degree "Master of arts" in theology Radboud University Nijmegen'. For the master's specialisation in theology, the text: 'Thesis to obtain the degree "Master of Arts" in theology and religious studies Radboud University Nijmegen'.
- The reverse title page features the following text:  
'I hereby declare and assure, [name of student], that this thesis has been drawn up independently by me, that no sources and tools other than those mentioned by me have been used and that the passages in the work whose verbatim content or meaning from other works – including electronic media – has been taken by citing the source are made known as borrowing.'
- Has a structure as is customary for a scientific treatise (for example: title, introduction, problem, purpose and questioning, elaboration, conclusion, summary).
- Has a clear division into parts (such as chapters, paragraphs, paragraphs, paragraphs, appendices, intermezzi, register).
- If two or more students write a thesis together, in addition to common chapters, separate contributions from each student involved must be included.

### **2.2 Assessment criteria and weighting**

The thesis grade is determined on the basis of the following criteria:

- Problem, goal and question (10%)  
Is there a clear problem and objective that fits well with a certain field of research or work (scientific and/or societal relevance)?
- Theoretical embedding (25%)  
Is the research problem placed in a theoretically relevant perspective? Is the theoretical

framework described in such a way that it is in-depth and critically focused on the research problem?

- Method (25%)  
Is the problem being studied with a scientific method? Is the choice of method sufficiently justified? Is the application of the method clearly described and executed correctly?
- Analysis and conclusions (20%)  
Is the problem critically analyzed using theories, models and methods? Based on the research results, are correct, comprehensive and unambiguous conclusions formulated as an answer to the research question?
- Reflection (10%)  
Is there a critical reflection on the design, choice of method and the results of the research? Is there a critical reflection on one's own role as a researcher?
- Structure and presentation (5%)  
Will the research be presented in a clear, consistent, structured and in accordance with the agreed size? Are the own findings presented correctly and scientifically justified (language use, reference of sources)?
- Originality (5%)  
Does the thesis testify to originality and creativity? Is there multidisciplinary?

The final mark is determined for 90% by the thesis grade and for 10% by the defense.

### **2.3 Supervision**

During the semester in which students are working on their thesis, they attend several meetings of 'Research Design' and receive individual guidance from their thesis supervisor. In view of the deadline, it is essential for students to schedule concrete appointments with their supervisor as soon as possible. Students are entitled to five meetings during the supervision process.

If their master's thesis initially receives an insufficient grade, they are entitled to one additional meeting before the re-sit, during which the supervisor's written feedback on the first attempt is discussed. A student who fails to submit their thesis by the deadline is not entitled to guidance before the re-sit.

*If the thesis process is delayed or needs to be adjusted due to personal circumstances, the student should contact the academic advisor as soon as possible.*

## **2.4 Assessment procedure**

1. **At least one month before the intended submission date** (generally one of the deadlines listed above), the thesis supervisor requests the examination board to appoint a committee of examiners (CoE), using a web form available on the faculty's intranet.
2. The examination board appoints the CoE, consisting of the 1<sup>st</sup> examiner, the 2<sup>nd</sup> examiner, and the permanent examiner. Generally, the 1<sup>st</sup> examiner will be the thesis supervisor. The 1<sup>st</sup> examiner informs the student about the members of the CoE.
3. If the supervisor considers the Research Master's Thesis ready to be defended and believes it meets the formal requirements, the student submits it via the course's Brightspace page and notifies their supervisor via email. If the thesis has not been submitted at the time of a deadline, the supervisor registers a 'Niet voldaan' (NVD) in OSIRIS for that particular examination opportunity.
4. The thesis supervisor then checks the thesis for plagiarism. If plagiarism is suspected, this is reported to the examination board, and the procedure is suspended. If no plagiarism is detected, the supervisor submits the thesis using a web form available on the faculty's intranet.
5. Within 2 weeks after submission, all examiners complete the assessment form and submit their reports (only) to the permanent examiner, and:
  - If the thesis is judged *insufficient* by one or several of the examiners:
    - i. A 'Niet voldaan' (NVD) is registered by the permanent examiner in OSIRIS;
    - ii. The supervisor shares and discusses the committee's written concerns with the student;
    - iii. The student must revise the thesis to meet the examiners' objections, and the procedure is then resumed from step 3.
  - If the thesis is judged to be *sufficient* by all examiners:
    - i. The permanent examiner determines the final mark for the thesis by averaging the individual assessments;
    - ii. The 1<sup>st</sup> examiner informs the student that the thesis has been deemed defensible (without sharing the grade);
    - iii. The student then contacts the examiners to plan a date, time and place for the defence, which takes place before the 1<sup>st</sup> and at least one other examiner (normally the 2<sup>nd</sup> examiner).
6. The defence lasts an hour, which includes no more than 10 minutes at the start during which the student gives a presentation on the thesis. If the student wants to use presentation tools for this, it is their responsibility to set these up on time. After the presentation the examiners question the student, wherein the 2<sup>nd</sup> examiner gets the first opportunity to do so. Then the student leaves the room while the examiners determine the grade for the defence, after which the examiners share the *provisional* grade for the thesis with the student. The examiners then send the assessment form to the permanent examiner.
7. The permanent examiner determines the *final* grade and sends all forms to STIP for registration of the result in OSIRIS. The permanent examiner also sends the final assessment form to the 1<sup>st</sup> examiner, who forwards it to the student.



## Appendix A: Master's thesis assessment form

Subject to change. The legally valid version can be found on the PTRS intranet

| <b>Final assessment of Master's thesis</b>   |                 |                 |
|--|-----------------|-----------------|
| Student:   | Student number: |                 |
| Title of thesis:   |                 |                 |
| First examiner:  |                 |                 |
| Second examiner:   | Date:           |                 |
| <b>CRITERION</b>   | <b>MARK</b>     | <b>COMMENTS</b> |
| Student has formulated a clear research problem and aim that corresponds with a given field of research or work (academic and social relevance). (10%)   | 0               |                 |
| Student has put the research problem in a theoretically relevant perspective and has described the theoretical framework in such a way that it focuses on the research problem in a critical and in-depth manner. (25%)                            | 0               |                 |
| Student has studied the problem using an academic method. The choice of this method is adequately justified and the application of the method and techniques is clearly described and correctly conducted. (25%)                                   | 0               | ..              |
| Student has critically analysed the problem using theories, models and methods and, based on the research results, has formulated correct, comprehensive and unambiguous conclusions that answer the initially formulated research question. (20%) | 0               |                 |
| Student has reflected critically on the structure, choice of method, results and his/her performance as a researcher. (10%)  | 0               |                 |
| Student presents the research in a clear, logical and structured manner in accordance with the agreed length. The student articulates the results correctly and in an academic manner (language, source references). (5%)                          | 0               |                 |
| Originality, creativity, language and – if applicable – interdisciplinary approach of the thesis. (5%)   | 0               | ..              |
| <b>Assessment Master's thesis (1st/2<sup>nd</sup>/3<sup>rd</sup> examiner)</b><br><i>(90% of final assessment)</i>   | <b>0</b>        |                 |
| <b>DEFENCE</b>   |                 |                 |
| Student can express him/herself well; presents and responds in a way that is to the point, clear, well-reasoned and critical (also self-critical). <i>(10% of final assessment)</i>  | 0               |                 |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>0</b>        |                 |
| <b>Final assessment exam (rounded)</b>   | <b>0</b>        |                 |

## **Appendix B: Fraud policy**

Radboud University's fraud scheme has been added as an appendix to the Education and Examination Regulations (OER) of the Faculty of FTR (<https://www.ru.nl/courseguides/fftr/>). In accordance with Article 4 of the rules on fraud, fraud shall mean:

### *Article 4. Definition of fraud*

1. At RU, fraud is understood to mean any act or omission by a student which, in its nature, is intended to have as an effect that proper assessment of the knowledge, understanding and skills of that student, or another student, is made fully or partially impossible.
2. Fraud is in any case understood to mean:
  - a) fraud when taking written interim examinations, including i. having materials available which are not permitted under the House Rules Examinations Rooms RU Regulations (Regeling Huisregels Tentamenruimten RU)•, ii. copying or exchanging information; iii. passing oneself off as someone else, or being represented by someone else during interim examinations;
  - b) fraud when producing theses and other papers, including i. plagiarism in the sense of using or copying someone else's texts, data or ideas without complete and correct source references, plagiarism in the sense of copying the work of another student and presenting this as one's own work and other specifically academic forms of plagiarism; ii. fabricating (making up) and/or falsifying (distorting) research data; iii. submitting a thesis or another paper that was written by someone else; iv self-plagiarism in the sense of submitting one's own work that has already been assessed elsewhere as being a new work.
  - c) Other fraud in the context of interim examinations or examinations, including i. taking possession of assignments, answer keys and the like, prior to the time the interim examination or examination is to take place; ii. changing answers to assignments in an interim examination or examination after it has been handed in for assessment; iii. providing incorrect information when applying for an exemption, extension of validity period. and the like. of an interim examination or an examination.
3. An attempt to commit fraud will also be seen as fraud for the purpose of these regulations.

The Royal Dutch Academy of Science (KNAW) has published an excellent brochure explicitly aimed at students and young researchers to cultivate their awareness of academic norms: KNAW [ed. J. Heilbron et al.] (2005). *Wetenschappelijke onderzoek: dilemma's en verleidingen*. Second edition. Free download at <http://knav.nl/nl/actueel/publicaties/wetenschappelijk-onderzoek-dilemmas-en-verleidingen>.

Master's theses are tested for plagiarism by default via Ouriginal on Brightspace.

**Appendix C: Learning outcomes for the Master of Theology**

1. *Acquisition of specific knowledge and insight*

- a) The graduate will have thorough knowledge of and insight into the hermeneutic, systematic, critical and constructive tasks of theology, and the academic methods (literary, historical, systematic and empirical) needed for this.
- b) The graduate will have a thorough understanding of and insight into the historical and contemporary situation of Christianity as regard to its source texts, its philosophical and doctrinal content, and the practices in which it is manifested.
- c) The graduate will have expert knowledge in the chosen field of specialization.
- d) The graduate will have a thorough knowledge of and insight into the many contexts in which the meaning of Christianity has been expressed in the past, and more specifically is expressed in the context of contemporary society.
- e) The graduate will have knowledge of and insight into the professional field of qualified theologians.

2. *Application of specific knowledge and insight*

- a) The graduate is able to apply the above-mentioned knowledge and insight (1a-e) in a differentiated and largely independent manner by adequately describing, analysing and synthesising a new problem situation in a research project.
- b) The graduate is able to apply the above-mentioned knowledge and insight (1a-e) in a differentiated and largely independent manner in one of the following professional contexts: theological research, policy making, spiritual care and education.

3. *Forming a judgement*

The graduate can form an independent judgement of societal, ecclesiastic and/or theological developments based on a reasoned and synthesised synopsis of the knowledge and insight specified in 1a-e by gathering and interpreting relevant information and evaluating it independently according to academically justified internal and external criteria.

4. *Professional skills*

- a) Communication: The graduate is able to report the results of their own research both verbally and in writing and to communicate these results to both theologically and non-theologically trained audiences.
- b) Collaboration: The graduate is able to work together with others towards a (final) product and to make an active contribution to this work. The graduate organises the work in consultation with others and takes responsibility for their part in the collaboration.
- c) Feedback: The graduate is able to evaluate and improve a product, partly based on feedback from others and is able to provide feedback to others that supports them in evaluating and improving their work.

5. *Learning skills*

The graduate possesses the necessary skills to independently reproduce, understand, interpret, analyze, evaluate and develop knowledge about Christianity and its contexts in one of the following professional settings: theological research, policy making, spiritual care and education.

**Appendix D: Learning outcomes for the Master of Religious Studies, specialisation Theology**

*1. Gaining specific knowledge and insight*

- a) The graduate will have a sound knowledge of and insight into research methods and techniques of a selected research area, with the emphasis on ‘comparativity’ and formation of judgement.
- b) The graduate will have a sound knowledge of and insight into the historical origins and the current circumstances of world religions, in particular Islam and Christianity, with a focus on the source texts, doctrinaire content and religious practices, as well as their accompanying societal and cultural expressions.
- c) The graduate will have a sound knowledge of and insight into the history of the relations and interactions in particular between Islam or Christianity and other world religions, with regard to a specific theme.
- d) The graduate will have a sound knowledge of and insight into the current situation of the relations and interactions between in particular Islam or Christianity and other world religions, with regard to a specific theme and against the backdrop of current processes such as globalisation and modernism.
- e) The graduate will have knowledge of and insight into the professional field of qualified theologians and religious scientist.

*2. Applying specific knowledge and insight*

- a) The graduate will be able to apply knowledge and insight into religious traditions and their interaction in a discriminating (and relatively independent) manner following research methods and techniques, by accurately describing, analysing and synthesising a new problem situation in a research environment.
- b) The graduate will be able to apply knowledge and insight into religious traditions, their interactions and research methods and techniques in a discriminating (and relatively independent) manner, within one of the following professional contexts: research, policy and pastoral/spiritual care.

*3. Forming judgement*

The graduate will be able to make an independent scientific assessment of (a number of specific) views, religious practices and the social consequences of religious traditions, by collecting and interpreting relevant information and by evaluating this against a backdrop of scientifically sound internal and external criteria.

*4. Professional skills*

- a) Communication: The graduate is able to report the results of their own research both verbally and in writing and to communicate these results to both theologically and religious studies and non-theologically and religious studies trained audiences.
- b) Collaboration: The graduate is able to work together with others towards a (final) product and to make an active contribution to this work. The graduate organises the work in consultation with others and takes responsibility for their part in the collaboration.

## **Faculty of Philosophy, Theology & Religious Studies**

### Master of Theology

- c) Feedback: The graduate is able to evaluate and improve a product, partly based on feedback from others and is able to provide feedback to others that supports them in evaluating and improving their work.

#### *5. Learning skills*

The graduate will possess the learning skills to independently generate, reproduce, understand, interpret, analyse and evaluate new information regarding religious traditions in one of the following professional contexts: research, policy and pastoral/spiritual care.

## Appendix E: Planning

### Deadline / procedure 1st semester 2023-2024

|    |                 | Faculty Thesis Poster Day  |   |                         |  |
|----|-----------------|--|---|-------------------------|--|
| 48 | 27-11 t/m 01-12 | Supervisors request examination board to appoint committee of examiners.   |   |                         |  |
| 49 | 04-12 t/m 08-12 |  |   |                         |  |
| 50 | 11-12 t/m 15-12 |  |   |                         |  |
| 51 | 18-12 t/m 22-12 |  |   |                         |  |
| 52 | 25-12 t/m 29-12 | WINTER HOLIDAYS  |   |                         |  |
| 1  | 01-01 t/m 05-01 | <b>Deadline 1st opportunity: 7 January</b> (student submits via Brightspace)                                       |   |                         |  |
| 2  | 08-01 t/m 12-01 | 8 January: supervisor checks for plagiarism and submits thesis through web form.                                   |   |                         |  |
|    | T1, week 1      | 1st and 2nd examiner grade the thesis and submit their result to the permanent examiner no later than 19 January.  |   |                         |  |
| 3  | 15-01 t/m 19-01 | <b>SUFFICIENT</b>  | <b>INSUFFICIENT</b>   |                         |  |
|    | T1, week 2      | 1st examiner informs student, student plans thesis defense with 1st and 2nd examiner.                              | Thesis supervisor informs student about the committee's concerns. |                         |  |
| 4  | 22-01 t/m 26-01 | Thesis defense   |   |                         |  |
|    | T1, week 3      |  |   | Student revises thesis. |  |
| 5  | 29-01 t/m 02-02 | <b>Deadline 2nd opportunity: 4 February</b> (student submits via Brightspace)                                      |   |                         |  |
| 6  | 05-02 t/m 09-02 | 5 February: supervisor checks for plagiarism and submits thesis through web form.                                  |   |                         |  |
|    |                 | 1st and 2nd examiner grade the thesis and submit their result to the permanent examiner no later than 16 February. |   |                         |  |
| 7  | 12-02 t/m 16-02 | <b>SUFFICIENT</b>  | <b>INSUFFICIENT</b>   |                         |  |
|    |                 | 1st examiner informs student, student plans thesis defense with 1st and 2nd examiner.                              | Student re-enrolls for the thesis in the new semester.            |                         |  |
| 8  | 19-02 t/m 23-02 | Thesis defense   |   |                         |  |
| 9  | 26-02 t/m 01-03 |  |   |                         |  |
| 10 | 04-03 t/m 08-03 |  |   |                         |  |

**Note:** students may only submit their thesis with the approval of their thesis supervisor. The supervisor must agree that the thesis is ready for evaluation. A student whose supervisor does not believe the thesis is ready at the time of the deadline, loses the 1st exam opportunity. Student and supervisor must then work towards the re-sit.

**Note:** again, students may only submit their thesis with the approval of their thesis supervisor. If the supervisor does not approve, the student must enroll for the thesis again in the next semester, at which point supervision will resume.

## Deadline / procedure 2nd semester 2023-2024

|    |                                | Faculty Thesis Poster Day  |   |   |
|----|--------------------------------|--|---|---|
| 19 | 06-05 t/m 10-05                | Supervisors request examination board to appoint committee of examiners.                                   |   |   |
| 20 | 13-05 t/m 17-05                | <b>Deadline 1st opportunity: June 2</b> (student submits via Brightspace)                                  |   |   |
| 21 | 20-05 t/m 24-05                |  |   |   |
| 22 | 27-05 t/m 31-05                |  |   |   |
| 23 | 03-06 t/m 07-06<br>T2, week 1  |  |   | 3 June: supervisor checks for plagiarism and submits thesis through web form.<br>1st and 2nd examiner grade the thesis and submit their result to the permanent examiner no later than 14 June. |
| 24 | 10-06 t/m 14-06<br>T2, week 2  | <b>SUFFICIENT</b><br>1st examiner informs student, student plans thesis defense with 1st and 2nd examiner. | <b>INSUFFICIENT</b><br>Thesis supervisor informs student about the committee's concerns.  |   |
| 25 | 17-06 t/m 21-06                | Student revises thesis.  |   |   |
| 26 | 24-06 t/m 28-06                | <b>Deadline 2nd opportunity: 30 June</b> (student submits via Brightspace)                                 |   |   |
| 27 | 01-07 t/m 05-07<br>HT2, week 1 | Thesis defense   | 1 July: supervisor checks for plagiarism and submits thesis through web form.<br>1st and 2nd examiner grade the thesis and submit their result to the permanent examiner no later than 12 July. |   |
| 28 | 08-07 t/m 12-07<br>HT2, week 2 |  | <b>SUFFICIENT</b><br>1st examiner informs student, student plans thesis defense with 1st and 2nd examiner.  | <b>INSUFFICIENT</b><br>Student re-enrolls for the thesis in September.  |
| 29 | 15-07 t/m 19-07                | <b>SUMMER HOLIDAYS</b>   |   |   |
| 30 | 22-07 t/m 26-07                |  |   |   |
| 31 | 29-07 t/m 02-08                |  |   |   |
| 32 | 05-08 t/m 09-08                |  |   |   |
| 33 | 12-08 t/m 16-08                |  |   |   |
| 34 | 19-08 t/m 23-08                |  |   |   |
| 35 | 26-08 t/m 30-08                | Thesis defense   |   |   |

**Note:** students may only submit their thesis with the approval of their thesis supervisor. The supervisor must agree that the thesis is ready for evaluation. A student whose supervisor does not believe the thesis is ready at the time of the deadline, loses the 1st exam opportunity. Student and supervisor must then work towards the re-sit.

**Note:** again, students may only submit their thesis with the approval of their thesis supervisor. If the supervisor does not approve, the student must enroll for the thesis again in the next semester, at which point supervision will resume.