Instructions for independent projects at first and second-cycle level

Content

1 Introduction

As of the autumn semester 2018, there are new guidelines for independent projects (also called degree projects or thesis projects) at first-cycle and second-cycle level at SLU. The course syllabus for independent projects is largely the same for all SLU programmes at the same level. In addition to this common content, professional programmes may have additional supplements.

Independent projects are an important part of a student's education. All degree programmes include at least one independent project. Longer programmes must include two.

Independent projects can be included in the following:
 - a coherent course with multiple students sharing a joint course beginning, components and conclusion, or
 - a flexible course without a joint beginning, teaching steps and conclusion in which each.

If taught as a coherent course, implementation of the independent project is planned within the course's framework, which means that it can differ from certain parts of the description below. The course coordinator must provide information on what applies to coherent courses at the beginning of the course at the latest. Basic level thesis projects are generally and preferably carried out in pairs, but each student's work effort must be reported and assessed individually. At the advanced (i.e. masters') level, these are individual.

Each student must have a principal supervisor from one of the departments within the Faculty of Forestry when carrying out their independent project. The supervisor and examiner cannot be the same person.

An independent project can only be classified into one main field of study (subject). Double classification is never allowed. The main field of study (subject) of the independent project must be the same as the main field of study for the qualification you are aiming for. This information is available in the programme syllabus or examination procedures.

All independent projects must be checked for plagiarism before being awarded a grade. They are then published in SLU's electronic student projects archive.

2 Preparations and planning

How is an independent project carried out, and what is it exactly? A lot of students wonder how to write an independent project and what to write about.

2.1 When should I start preparing my independent project?

You should start planning your independent project in good time, ideally a year in

advance. This makes it more likely that the supervisor and the subject area you wish to study are available. Programme directors of studies are responsible for providing information on independent projects during both spring and autumn, although students are free to approach any potential supervisor with their own ideas. See the *dates* *on the academic calendar page*. Independent projects can be carried out as soon as you meet the course entry requirements, but most students write it during their final year. If an independent project requires field work, you may need to include it in your summer plans. This may involve applying to the thesis course offered during the summer semester.

2.2 Three paths to an independent project

The three most common paths leading to an independent project are the following:

1. You personally decide on a field.
2. Departments at the Faculty of Forestry advertise projects suitable for independent projects.
3. The independent project is carried out in cooperation with a company, public authority or other organisation.

If you want to personally pick your independent project, you should start planning it in good time. You must also decide if your work will be more scientific or investigative (see section below on various types of projects). This process should preferably start in good time before you start work on your project, e.g. 6 months to 1 year in advance. Ask your fellow students or teachers for feedback on your project idea. Sometimes, ideas that seem brilliant can fail for various reasons or simply be impractical. You should not focus too long on something that turns out to be impossible.

If you are looking for ideas from your department, most departments advertise independent project proposals on their web, but you can also approach potential supervisors with your ideas. They can be more or less specific, and are often of a scientific nature. This means that you formulate a testable hypothesis, conduct experiments or field experiments and write an article.

Sometimes the framework has already been defined because the independent project is included in one of the department's research projects.

It is also common to carry out an independent project in cooperation with a company, public authority or other organisation. These projects are also sometimes advertised on the web. However, you can also discuss a personal independent project idea with a suitable company, public authority or other organisation. Before planning too much, you should contact potential supervisors at one of the faculty's departments to discuss your idea. Independent projects carried out in cooperation with a company, public authority or other organisation often focus on the development of methods, their evaluation or other investigation. Survey studies, market analyses or experiments are common. Remember that external hosts expect the project to meet the set deadline. Basically, you have an assignment, and you are

expected to deliver within the given timeframe. The faculty encourages independent projects in cooperation with such external hosts. These projects enable you to further understand the working world while providing contact with potential employers. They also increase your knowledge about the outside world and contribute to giving possible employers clearer ideas of our courses and programmes.

Various types of independent projects

The characteristics of independent projects may vary depending on the purpose. They can have one of three specialisations, which are defined in the following way:

1. Basic research – a systematic and methodical quest for new knowledge and ideas without a specific application in mind.
2. Applied research – a systematic and methodical quest for new knowledge and ideas intended for a specific application.
3. Development work – systematically and methodically use research findings and scientific knowledge to create new products, processes, systems, services, or to improve those that already exist.

In addition to the three methods listed above, there is also investigative work, which is defined as a project that aims to compile existing information about an issue or problem. This type of work is not classified as research as defined above, but the resulting conclusions must be based on a scientific foundation. Investigative work is normally not carried out at the university, but at companies, public authorities or other organisations.

Most independent projects at the Faculty of Forestry are applied research, development work or investigative work.

3   Formalities

Before you begin, there are a few formalities. Firstly, you must apply to be admitted to the course as for all courses, but independent projects also involve specific rules that differ from regular courses.

3.1 Application, admission and registration form

As usual, as the student, it is your responsibility to identify and select a suitable subject for your independent project. You must also discuss, with a course coordinator or potential supervisor, whether doing your project at a specific department is achievable. When you, the supervisor and course coordinator have agreed to carry out the independent project at the department, you must apply to the course on the student web, just as you do for other courses, using the application code provided by the course coordinator. Autumn semester applications must be submitted by 15 April and spring semester applications by 15 October. It is possible to submit a late application for an independent project course.

All students are conditionally admitted to the independent project course. This means that the course coordinator must ensure that the student has the prior knowledge needed to carry out the project and that supervision is available before confirming that the student can take the course and be registered.

To register a student on an independent project course, the course coordinator, together with the student, fills in a registration form where the course coordinator confirms that the student meets the entry requirements, and that there are available supervisors. The department uses the form as a basis when registering a student on the course.

3.2 Independent project work plan

An important part of independent project work is the initial planning of project content and implementation, which is documented in the work plan. The student, supported by the supervisor, drafts the work plan. The student must begin writing the work plan when the course starts, but it is even better if it is already done by then. This means that more time can be spent on implementing the project. The work plan must be approved by the course coordinator no later than 2 weeks after the course starts. The oral presentation date must be listed in the work plan, and this date counts as the first examination session. The following presentation date counts as to the second examination session.

4 The work process

Once the formalities have been dealt with, it is time to begin work on your project. There are a few important things you should remember.

4.1 The supervision process

The student carries out the work in accordance with the work plan and with the *support* of the supervisor. The student is project leader and responsible for driving the work forward. SLU must facilitate project implementation by creating good conditions. The student and supervisor should be in continual contact with each other during the project process. The student is primarily responsible for initiating contact, but the supervisor should contact the student if scheduled contact does not occur. In order for supervision to go smoothly, at the start the student and supervisor must discuss how they will work. This may, for example, involve how to stay in contact, how and when texts should be submitted, when and how a response is given, etc. This should be described in the work plan.

4.2 Implementation and report writing

The student writes a report with the support of the supervisor, and in accordance with given instructions. A report can look different depending on the subject area and publication type. Most departments have instructions that describe what reports should contain and how they should be designed. However, the front and title page must look the same in all reports. These are created in connection with publication when the project is completed. Read more in the section about publication. A good way to learn how to structure and write a degree project within

a field is to read already published projects within the same field. Supervisors or the library can help you find suitable projects. The library also has good information on writing reports and managing references:

There are also a number of handbooks that describe how to write scientific papers. For example:

 - The good paper: a handbook for writing papers in higher education – by Lotte Rienecker and Peter Stray Jørgensen. Liber AB, 2018. ISBN 9789147113644

 - How to write and publish a scientific paper – by Barbara Gastel and Robert A. Day. Cambridge UP, 2018. ISBN9781316640432

At SLU the general policy is that Bachelor's essays should be written in Swedish, and Master's essays in English. Students in professional programmes such as the BSc in Forest Management or the MSc in Forestry can choose either language, but we recommend Swedish at undergraduate level and English at Master's level.

4.3 Publication

When the project is finished and has received a pass grade, it must be published in SLU's electronic archive for student projects, Epsilon. The department helps with the publication.

All independent projects must be checked for plagiarism in *Urkund* before receiving a pass grade. Read more about cheating and plagiarism.

5 Presentations

5.1 Fixed presentation weeks

Independent project presentations are carried out during 5 fixed presentation weeks spread over the academic year. The purpose of fixed presentation dates is, among other things, to create clear and well-known procedures where students, course coordinators and examiners are, in good time, made aware of when presentations will be held. These presentations take place during the last week of each study period as well as during the week before the autumn semester starts. For the 18/19 academic year, this means the weeks starting 29 October, 14 January, 18 March, 3 May and 26 August. The forest sciences programme board fixes the presentation weeks before each academic year starts. This is done in connection with establishing the range of courses and programmes offered and other important dates for the coming academic year.

The department responsible for the course decides which day during these weeks they will schedule presentations. These decisions must be made well in advance, at least 6 months, because the presentation dates must be included in the student's work plan that is drawn up and completed when the course starts. The department

responsible for the course must plan and ensure that the presentations take place.

5.2 Oral presentations and public discussion and examination

Before presenting their project, the student must submit the report for public discussion and examination. The report should in principle be finalised and must contain all vital parts; it should basically act as the basis of assessment. The supervisor assesses if the report is thorough enough to act as the basis for another student's public discussion and examination. This is done to make it possible for the peer reviewer to carry out a satisfactory public discussion and examination. The peer reviewer must provide the author with constructive feedback on the independent project; this may lead to an improved final version of the written report. The peer reviewer's task is to review the project and provide constructive criticism, both positive and negative. Feedback consists of both a written summary (about 2–3 pages) and comments made directly in the report.

The course coordinator is responsible for assigning peer reviewers. Two students should not review each other's work. It is better to spread the work among the students. If necessary, other course coordinators will be contacted to organise joint presentations and public discussions and examinations. Students from various forestry programmes can review each other's projects since the intended learning outcomes are the same for all independent projects at the same level. However, it can be difficult for a student to review a project that differs greatly from their subject specialisation. This must be considered when selecting peer reviewers.

At least two weeks before the presentations take place, following the approval by their supervisor, students must confirm that they will take part in presentations and public discussions and examination. This is done by applying for the presentation date on the student web (see the table below). Students presenting their project must submit their final project to the course coordinator at least eight days before the presentation takes place. The course coordinator must inform students on their presentation slot and which student work they will publicly discuss and examine a week before the presentations take place. The peer reviewer then has a week to prepare, and must submit their written examination to the examiner and course coordinator by noon the day before the presentation. This text is then the basis for the public discussion and examination assessment. The written examination must be submitted to the author of the report directly after the presentation.

Table with dates: Compilation of presentation dates using specific dates as examples (January 2019).

	Calendar days	Example 2019
The <u>course coordinator</u> opens online application.	At least 3 weeks before the presentation.	28 December 2018 at the latest

The student confirms that they will take part in presentations and public discussions and examinations by submitting an application on the web.	At least 14 days before the presentation.	4 January at the latest
The student submits their report to the course coordinator for public discussion and examination.	At least 8 days before the presentation.	10 January at the latest
The course coordinator tells the student which report they will publicly discuss and examine (the report must be enclosed).	At least 7 days before the presentation.	11 January at the latest

The peer reviewer submits a written review to the examiner and course coordinator.	Noon the day before the presentation, at the latest.	By noon on 17 January.
Presentation	Presentation date.	Friday 18 January
The student submits their revised report to the examiner and course coordinator.	At least 7 days after the presentation.	25 January at the latest.
The examiner grades the project.	3 weeks after the report was submitted at the latest.	15 February at the latest

5.3 Presentation with public discussion and examination

The furniture in the room where presentations are held must be arranged so that both the presenting student and peer reviewer can sit/stand at the front of the room. If necessary, a chair is appointed. In total, a complete presentation and public discussion and examination of an independent project should take about 60 minutes. This presupposes that all students who have signed up for presentations carry them out.

- The student presents their independent project. No questions are allowed during the presentation. This should take about 20 min.
- The peer reviewer presents their review asks questions and discusses the project with the presenting student. This should take 20 minutes at the most.
- The examiner may ask both the presenting student and peer reviewer

supplementary questions. This should take 10 minutes at the most.

- Finally, the floor is open to further questions and discussion from the other participants. This may take 10 minutes at the most. If the chair or examiner believes that more time is needed to make a fair assessment of the project, the seminar may be extended.
- After the seminar, the presenting student and peer reviewer are given feedback by the examiner. This can occur in front of a group or individually.

6 Assessment and grade

6.1 Assessment

In order to receive a pass grade, the student must implement their independent project in accordance with their work plan as well as present the project orally and in writing according to the given instructions. They must also publicly discuss and examine another student's project, both orally and in writing.

The assessment of the final project is based on the written report the student submits following their presentation and the public discussion and examination of their report. The examiner also has access to the version submitted before the public discussion and examination. This is so they can, if necessary, review how the project changed following the presentation and public discussion and examination.

The role of the examiner during the oral presentation is somewhat different with the new format. Previously, examiners often acted as reviewers and commented on the written project. Now, this task lies with the peer reviewer. The examiner now focuses more clearly on the assessment of the presentation and the peer reviewer's performance.

That is, the examiner assesses both the presenting student's work and the peer reviewer's written and oral feedback. The submitted written review and feedback in the report, as well as the public discussion, are bases for assessment. The peer reviewer's principal examiner is notified of the presenting student's grade and of the review comments, which the examiner will then use to decide on their student's (i.e. the peer reviewer's) final grade.

6.2 Grade and retake sessions

The examiner informs the student of their grade no later than 3 weeks after they have submitted their report (or the final part that is assessed, e.g. if the public discussion and examination occur at a later date).

 - If the student fails their presentation or public discussion and examination, they can try again at the next presentation date. A higher grade (4 or 5) can only be awarded at the first and presentation dates, as stated in the work plan. Subsequently, only a pass or fail grade can be awarded.

- If the student fails their written report, the examiner must set a deadline for a renewed submission date (normally 2 weeks) but at the next presentation date at the latest.

There are grading criteria for independent projects, which apply to all degree projects at first- and second-cycle level at the Faculty of Forest Sciences. They replace the previous criteria that applied until the autumn semester 2018. Link to grading criteria at first- and second-cycle level.

7 Supplementary information and links Out of date see page Degree project

These instructions for independent projects at the Faculty of Forest Sciences will be supplemented with more information during autumn. During autumn, many departments will also provide further, specific information for their courses.

Useful links:

- Registration form for independent projects at the S Faculty
- Work plan for independent projects at the S Faculty
- Betygskriterier grundnivå/kandidat (grading criteria at first-cycle/Bachelor's level)
- Assessment using grading criteria for second-cycle/Master's level
- SLU web pages for independent projects
- Literature searches, write and cite and cheating and plagiarism
- Urkund
- Epsilon
- Good to know about public discussion and examination
- The education planning and administration handbook at SLU (see chapter 9 – independent projects)
- Minor field studies MFS