

Internship and Masters Thesis

IN SHORT

Internships

There are two configurations: Model 1 is an integrated combination of the internship with the MA thesis (typically with supervisors in the Faculty of Science) and Model 2 where the internship and the MA thesis are two separate things, however generally related (typically with supervisors in the Faculty of humanities). See below for more.

Students are requested to approach one of the professors of the programme to get guidance and arrange their internship, ideally at the beginning of the spring semester of year 1. Once the internship is confirmed, the students need to inform the administrative coordinator (rachel.sanchez@unine.ch).

Limited funding is available to support the internship. Meet the deadline of April 1st to submit your application. You will receive a reminder and details at the beginning of the spring semester by e-mail.

MA thesis (dissertation)

During the Spring semester of year 1, students approach a professor of the programme to discuss possible subjects and supervision.

Purpose of the Masters thesis and internship in the curriculum

The second year of the program in cognitive science in Neuchâtel is entirely dedicated to the Masters thesis and internship. After a first year of acquisition of a wide range of knowledge and skills, these two activities allow students to specialize in terms of research areas and methods. The purpose of the internship is to gain hands-on experience with research as a member of a research group. Interns will typically play supporting roles in gathering, preparing or analyzing data, which will allow them to develop their skills. The purpose of the Masters thesis is to demonstrate the student's ability to conduct their own research project from A to Z under the supervision of a qualified researcher. The internship thus serves to prepare the student for the Master's thesis.

The thesis and the internship are validated with 30 ECTS each, in other words, 750-900 hours of work each. They both received independent grades, and thus constitute the best opportunity for students to boost their overall grade.

There are two ways to articulate the thesis and internship, Model 1 and Model 2. Which model will be applied depends on the research group that the student is part of (more below on each model). Thesis and internship projects need to be accepted/validated by at least one professor of the cognitive science program.

Each year, at the beginning of the spring semester, students will be asked to submit a description of their plans for their internship and thesis report, indicating a budget (if applicable) and the professor responsible for their projects. The internship typically is completed in the autumn semester and the thesis in the following spring semester. Note that because of the workload involved, work may have to be completed outside of the semesters (as an example, consider that 750 hours corresponds to between 18 and 19 weeks of work at 40 hours per week).

Model 1: Integrated thesis and internship

The thesis and internship are part of one integrated project undertaken in the same lab. The internship is the first part of the thesis work, typically including literature review and developing methods of inquiry. The student writes the first part of the thesis (up to and including the methods section), which is then graded by the supervisor. This counts as the grade for the internship. The student then completes the project (data collection and analysis) and writes up the rest of the thesis (Results, Discussion, Conclusions). This final part is then graded for the thesis grade.

Model 1 is typically applied for projects in biology and comparative cognition that involve extended periods of fieldwork.

Model 2: Independent thesis and internship

The thesis and internship are related in that the latter is the preparation for the former, but they are not necessarily part of the same project, nor are they necessarily completed in the same research groups. For example, a student might want to do their thesis in a project of Professor A in the program. In agreement with professor A, they look for an internship in a research group (in Switzerland or abroad, using contacts provided by Professor A) where they can get experience in the necessary methods for the project. After completing the internship (typically in the autumn semester), they start their thesis in the spring semester in professor A's lab.

The grade of the internship is based on the following elements:

- A written report, which should be about 10-15 pages, including a literature review, the goals and research questions of the internship, a description of the activities completed, and a reflection on what was learned. This report should describe activities in detail and link them to conceptual discussions of methods or analysis. For example, a student who is involved in double-coding of data for reliability assessment should be able to describe how this activity relates to considerations of interrater agreement and understand the way such agreement is computed.
- A letter from the supervisor of the internship (if this person is not the same person as the responsible professor in the program), describing the activities of the student and giving some evaluation of their performance
- At least one meeting between the student and the responsible professor, either during or after the internship

The Masters thesis is typically supervised by a responsible professor from the program. It is graded on the basis of the thesis report and an oral defense. The oral defense lasts one hour. The following people are present: The student, the responsible professor, and a third expert. The defense typically starts with a short presentation of the thesis by the student (15-20 minutes). After that, the professor and expert ask

questions (around 20-25 minutes). Then, the professor and the expert decide on a grade, which they communicate to the student, as well as some feedback about the thesis.

In case the student wants to conduct thesis work under the supervision of another researcher, that researcher should have a PhD and there always needs to be a professor of the program as a contact person. The external supervisor should be willing to assume the task of (co-)grading the thesis and being present at the defense (virtual presence, e.g., via Skype, is also possible).