

DIRECTOR'S ORDER

Tallinn

02.01.2025 No 1-24/3

The Procedure for Supervising, Reviewing and Defending Graduation Theses at the Estonian Maritime Academy

Based on clause 4 of § 26 of the Academic Policies and clause 5.5.2 of the Statutes of the Estonian Maritime Academy,

1. I hereby approve "The Procedure for Supervising, Reviewing and Defending Graduation Theses at the Estonian Maritime Academy" (attached).
2. I hereby repeal order No 1-24/254 of 3 October 2023 of the Director "The Procedure for Supervising, Reviewing and Defending Graduation Theses at the Estonian Maritime Academy".

(signed digitally)

Roomet Leiger
Director

The Procedure for Supervising, Reviewing and Defending Graduation Theses at the Estonian Maritime Academy

1. General provisions

1.1 Purpose of the regulation

1.1.1 The Procedure lays down the principles for the supervision, review, and defence of professional higher education and master's theses at the Estonian Maritime Academy. The procedure sets out also the programme director's and supervisor's responsibilities related to graduation theses and the rights and obligations of the graduating students.

1.2 Basis of the regulation

1.2.1 the university's Academic Policies;

1.2.2 the Rules for Publication and Preservation of Graduation Thesis;

1.2.3 the Procedure for Study Programme Management

2. Definitions and abbreviations

2.1 "EMERA" means the Estonian Maritime Academy;

2.2 "university" means Tallinn University of Technology;

2.3 "graduating student" means a student or an external student who is writing/defending, or who intends to write/defend a graduation thesis;

2.4 "graduation thesis" means a research paper required for graduation and written by a student independently under a supervisor's guidance, with aims and learning outcomes specified in the study programme;

2.5 "supervisor" means the person(s) supervising a graduation thesis who complies/comply with the requirements set out in § 26 of the university's Academic Policies;

2.6 "programme director" means an employee of the Estonian Maritime Academy who is responsible for programme management in compliance with the Procedure for Study Programme Management;

2.7 "reviewer" means a professional with expertise in the field of the thesis, responsible for reviewing the work;

2.8 "review" means an evaluative assessment of a thesis, examining its structure, content, and formatting.

3. Rights and obligations of a graduating student

3.1 A graduating student:

- 3.1.1 shall declare his/her graduation thesis in the individual study plan at the beginning of the semester, whereas the supervisor must be added to the declaration no later than the end of the third week of the semester;
 - 3.1.2 shall agree upon the topic of the planned graduation thesis with the supervisor;
 - 3.1.3 who has not submitted the declaration by the deadline, due to a justified reason, must submit an application previously approved by the supervisor to the Centre of Academic Affairs of the Estonian Maritime Academy for making changes to the individual study plan, requesting a later declaration of the thesis, no later than one week before the preliminary defence;
 - 3.1.4 shall initiate the signing of a confidentiality agreement prior to commencing thesis writing the thesis if the preparation of the thesis involves confidential data and the institution/company providing the data requires such an agreement;
 - 3.1.5 shall prepare a thesis plan, obtain the approval of the supervisor and submit it in accordance with the procedure and deadlines specified in the study programme;
 - 3.1.6 shall submit the thesis and, if necessary, its parts to the supervisor for review according to the deadlines specified in the study programme or agreed upon with the supervisor;
 - 3.1.7 must adhere to the Guidelines for Writing and Formatting Student Papers at the Estonian Maritime Academy” and ensure the use of clear and correct language when preparing and formatting the thesis;
 - 3.1.8 shall submit the thesis defence application via the study information system one week before the preliminary defence;
 - 3.1.9 shall submit an application for a closed defence and/or for imposing a restriction on publication of the thesis if the graduation thesis contains a state secret, trade secret, information to be kept confidential on the basis of the Personal Data Protection Act, unpublished materials or any other classified information as set out in clause 7.4;
 - 3.1.10 shall submit a thesis that meets the requirements for preliminary defence, adhering to the terms and deadlines specified in the study programme;
 - 3.1.11 shall participate in the preliminary defence and make the corrections recommended by the committee in the thesis submitted for preliminary defence;
 - 3.1.12 shall submit a completed graduation thesis in PDF format, incl. the non-exclusive licence (Annex 1 to the Publication and Preservation of Graduation Theses), for defence. These shall be submitted on the portal specified in clause 4.1.1 by the deadlines specified by the programme director. If access to the graduation thesis is restricted, the student shall submit an abstract of the graduation thesis together with the graduation thesis.
- 3.2 A graduating student has the right to:
- 3.2.1 contact the programme director for assistance in the event of problems related to finding a supervisor and supervision;

- 3.2.2 seek advice from the teaching staff or other academic staff on defining a topic and potential supervision (depending on the staff member's expertise);
- 3.2.3 dispute the grade of the graduation thesis in accordance with the university's regulations.

4. Programme director's responsibilities related to graduation theses

4.1 A programme director shall:

- 4.1.1 make sure e-support is provided (on Moodle) for preparing graduation theses in the study programme and guarantee access to it for all individuals involved in the graduation process;
- 4.1.2 determine the procedure and deadlines for submitting a thesis plan and, if necessary, prepare a thesis plan template;
- 4.1.3 determine the need for preliminary defence in the study programme, specify the requirements for the theses to be pre-defended, as well as the terms and conditions and deadlines for the preliminary defence (incl. the deadlines for the activities following the preliminary defence) in the study programme;
- 4.1.4 agree with reviewers upon the review and its deadlines, and manage the circulation of the thesis and reviews;
- 4.1.5 determine the need for reviewing a thesis in a professional higher education study programme;
- 4.1.6 ensure that all the information listed in the previous clauses is available to the secretary of the defence committee and student counsellors, via the EMERA website and e-support no later than the end of the third week of the semester;
- 4.1.7 provide advice to graduating students in the case of problems related to thesis topics, supervision or finding a supervisor;
- 4.1.8 verify the supervisor's qualifications and their relevance to the graduate's chosen thesis topic, and if necessary, approve the co-supervisor;
- 4.1.9 approve the principal supervisor on the thesis declaration in the study information system if the supervisor is not a member of the School's teaching staff.

4.2 A programme director has the right to:

- 4.2.1 set intermediate deadlines for the submission of the parts of a graduation thesis in the study programme. The abovementioned deadlines must be available on the portal specified in clause 4.1.1 no later than the start of the fourth academic week of the semester;
- 4.2.2 turn to the Head of the Centre of Maritime Education and Training and/or the Study Director of the Estonian Maritime Academy in order to solve questions or problems related to the supervision of a thesis.

5. Supervision of graduation theses

- 5.1 The supervisor of a graduation thesis must be a member of TalTech's permanent academic staff. A graduating student may request the involvement of a co-supervisor from outside TalTech by submitting a written application, previously approved by the supervisor, to the programme director, along with evidence of the supervisor's qualifications as required by the Academic Policies.
- 5.2 Experts may be involved in the graduation thesis supervision process to provide discipline-specific input. Their work is not remunerated separately.
- 5.3 Supervisor's responsibilities:
 - 5.3.1 to approve the thesis supervision on the thesis declaration in the study information system no later than the end of the third academic week in the semester;
 - 5.3.2 to provide assistance to the graduating student in discipline-specific and methodological issues arising in the course of the preparation of the thesis, including
 - 5.3.2.1 to provide feedback and give recommendations regarding the thesis plan prepared by the graduating student, incl. the goal, structure, theoretical framework, relevance of the data and methodology of the planned graduation thesis;
 - 5.3.2.2 to read the completed text or its parts, draw attention to the strengths and weaknesses of the graduation thesis written/being prepared, incl. to draw attention to required linguistic corrections, as well as errors in formatting and shortcomings in referencing;
 - 5.3.3 to assess the level of readiness of the thesis for preliminary defence;
 - 5.3.4 to assess whether the thesis is eligible and ready for submission to the defence, and approve it by signing the defence application in the study information system no later than the deadline established in the academic calendar;
 - 5.3.5 to submit his/her assessment to the thesis defence committee.
- 5.4 If the person supervised has failed to comply with the deadlines agreed with the supervisor or any other deadlines set for writing the thesis, the supervisor has the right to refuse further supervision of the graduating student.
- 5.5 As a rule, no separate remuneration is paid to a TalTech academic staff member for supervision, unless permission has been obtained from the head of the Centre of Maritime Education and Training for remuneration. The remuneration of a co-supervisor from outside EMERA is decided and formalised by the programme director.

6. Reviewing graduation theses

- 6.1 All master's theses are subject to review. The programme director determines the need for reviews in the first-level study programmes.
- 6.2 The programme director appoints the reviewer, considering the suggestions of the graduating student and the supervisor.
- 6.3 The review form (see Annex 1) can be used to write a review.

6.4 No separate remuneration is paid to a TalTech academic staff member for reviewing unless permission has been obtained from the head of the Centre of Maritime Education and Training for remuneration. The remuneration of a reviewer from outside EMERA is decided and formalised by the programme director.

6.5 A reviewer of a master's thesis shall have at least a master's degree or an equivalent qualification.

6.6 A reviewer :

6.6.1 shall submit a review in writing to the secretary of the defence committee no later than 3 working days before the defence;

6.6.2 participates at the graduation thesis defence by reading out his/her review, if possible. If the reviewer cannot participate in the defence, the head of the defence session shall read out his/her review.

7. Defending a graduation thesis

7.1 The members of a defence committee are appointed in September of each academic year by the Director's order based on the proposal of the programme directors for the entire academic year. The defence committees shall be approved by the Study Director. The chairman, the deputy chairman, and the secretary of the defence committee shall be appointed by an order. If necessary, the deputy chairman of the defence committee substitutes for the chairman. As a rule, no remuneration is paid for the work of the defence committee, unless otherwise agreed upon with the immediate superior.

7.2 A thesis defence is organised by the head of the defence committee, who may be either the deputy chairman of the committee or the programme director. Regular defences shall be completed by the deadline set out in the academic calendar.

7.3 The defence of graduation theses shall be open, unless the defence has been declared closed.

7.4 The Director of EMERA shall decide on declaring a defence closed and imposing a restriction on publication of the thesis based on a reasoned request of the graduating student that has been approved by the supervisor. In order to submit the relevant request, the graduating student must:

7.4.1 complete the request form available on EMERA's website;

7.4.2 submit the request signed by him/her and his/her supervisor to the secretary of the defence committee no later than one week before the preliminary defence or, if recommended by the defence committee, after the preliminary defence but no later than the deadline for submitting the defence application.

7.5 The Director may, at a reasoned request, allow participation of a graduating student in a defence by using a means of real-time two-way video image and sound communication. To

this end, the graduating student shall submit a signed free-format request to the secretary of the defence committee no later than the deadline for submission of applications for defence.

7.6 The secretary of the defence committee shall forward the request referred to in clause 7.4 or 7.5 to the programme director and thereafter to the Director for approval.

7.7 In the case of a closed defence, the members of the defence committee shall also be subject to the confidentiality requirement.

7.8 All the graduation theses submitted for defence shall be checked for plagiarism.

7.9 Based on the results from the plagiarism detection system, the head of the defence committee shall determine whether plagiarism (a violation of good academic practice) has occurred in the thesis. If plagiarism occurs in a graduation thesis, the defence committee has the right to refuse to admit the thesis for defence and the head of the defence committee shall:

7.9.1 inform of the violation in accordance with the Procedure for Handling Violation of Good Academic Practice;

7.9.2 indicate the main plagiarised sources (those with highest match rates) in the explanation ;

7.9.3 grant the supervisor of the graduating student access to the plagiarism check report.

7.10 The defence committee has the right to refuse to admit a thesis for defence if it does not comply with the requirements. In this case the head of the defence committee shall:

7.10.1 provide the graduating student a written explanation concerning refusal to admit the graduation thesis for defence;

7.10.2 not allow the graduating student to revise and resubmit the thesis for defence in the semester it was initially submitted. However, the head of the defence committee must inform the graduating student of future opportunities to defend the thesis;

7.10.3 forward the information about the exclusion of the work from the defence to the secretary of the defence committee and to the student counsellor of the graduating student's study programme.

7.11 The secretary of the defence committee shall forward the final defence schedule to the graduating students not later than 3 working days before the defence. The defence schedule shall be published on the EMERA's website.

7.12 A defence session is led by the head of the defence committee based on the following principles:

7.12.1 a defence takes place if at least fifty per cent of the members of the defence committee, including the chairman or deputy chairman of the defence committee are present;

7.12.2 the defence speech and defence discussion of each graduating student may be recorded electronically at the proposal of the chairman or member of the committee and with the consent of the graduating student;

7.12.3 the defence language is Estonian in a study programme taught in Estonian, even if the thesis has been written in English, and English in a study programme taught in English;

7.12.4 The defence procedure:

- 7.12.4.1 the defence speech of the graduating student, which shall last 10-12 minutes in the case of a professional higher education thesis and 12-15 minutes in the case of a master's thesis;
 - 7.12.4.2 introduction of the review and answering the reviewer's questions (if required);
 - 7.12.4.3 introduction of the supervisor's opinion;
 - 7.12.4.4 a discussion led by the head of the defence committee, during which questions are first asked by those present, followed by members of the defence committee and the chairman;
 - 7.12.4.5 summary by the head of the defence committee;
 - 7.12.4.6 The summary by the head of the defence committee may be followed by the closing remarks of the graduating student allowing the student to thank those who contributed to the preparation of the thesis and participated in the defence discussion.
- 7.13 The defence committee shall assess graduation theses and their defence based on the established graduation thesis assessment criteria (Annex 2).
- 7.14 Each member of the committee shall read the graduation thesis on Moodle before the defence. At the defence, each member of the defence committee shall assess the graduation theses independently.
- 7.15 The final grade of a thesis shall be determined by taking into account the individual grades given by the members of the defence committee who were present at the defence. The reviewer's and supervisor's opinions are deemed to be informative.
- 7.16 The closed discussion at the thesis defence session is led by the head of the committee. The final grade determined during this discussion is recorded in the minutes of the defence session which shall be signed by all the members of the defence committee present. The individual grades given by the members of the committee shall not be disclosed to third persons and in the event of a dispute, all possible dissenting opinions of committee members indicated in the reply shall remain anonymous.
- 7.17 Based on the minutes of the defence session, the secretary of the defence committee enters the grades into the study information system. The defence report is then drawn up, which shall be signed by the chairman and secretary of the defence committee. The minutes of the defence session and the thesis defence reports in the study information system are stored in a folder of the EMERA Centre of Academic Affairs.
- 7.18 The results of the defence shall be published in the study information system no later than the day following the day of the defence.

8. Preserving graduation theses

- 8.1 The secretary of the defence committee shall make sure that every thesis that has received a positive grade and has no access restrictions, including multimedia files (sound and video or audiovisual recordings) that form part of the thesis, is published in the digital collection of TalTech library immediately after the defence of the thesis. If access to the graduation thesis is restricted, only the abstract of the graduation thesis is published during the validity period of the restriction.