

HOW TO WRITE YOUR THESIS ON SUSTAINABILITY

LEIDEN UNIVERSITY
GREEN OFFICE HELPS OUT



Leiden University
Green Office

*A guide with tips, tricks and solutions for every
problem you might encounter!*

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INTRODUCING: YOUR THESIS

Your thesis is a milestone in your university career: in most cases it is the end of your bachelors- or masters program and the end of an era. Writing your thesis means that all your knowledge of the past educational years comes to use.

The reason for this document

Leiden University Green office noticed that a lot of students are interested in (writing about) sustainability. Students are aware of the fact that we are in the midst of a climate crisis. Students also realize that there is still a whole new world of research to be done regarding this topic. In addition to the fact that sustainability is interesting, you can create added value with your thesis on a socially relevant topic.

However, not every study provides electives to gain more knowledge about this worldwide challenge. More so, studies almost never encourage to write your thesis about sustainability, which is remarkable as there still is so much ambiguity about the climate crisis, together with the fact that research is one of the most important pillars of the university.

Yes, some of the University's minors are very well aligned with our vision about research about the climate crisis; but we think there is much more possible for students and their research about sustainability.

In respect of the availability of courses and the lack of thesis about sustainability or the climate crisis, finding a subject for writing your thesis a challenge in itself.

Leiden University Green Office aims to help you out! If you're interested in sustainability: accept the challenge and write your thesis about a topic related to sustainability!

It may not be easy: finding the right supervisor, deviating from default topics or deciding on the direction within sustainability which to take.

Of course, it is not unusual, since the Climate Crisis is part of all our lives in this moment!

Let's get started in the thesis process. Follow the steps, try out some of the solutions we created for several problems and contribute to the research trend to gain more knowledge about sustainability!

STEPS TO FOLLOW

1

Interest: Reflect about our interests within your study programme and also certain topics you have a good understanding of. Then think of possible connections between your interests and sustainability. mind-mapping is always helpful or draw circles and see where sustainability and your interest overlaps. Once you have a clearer idea, it is also useful to conduct a literature research in order to find out if you can base your thesis on previous findings

2

Supervisors: Revise your classes and think of supervisors that included sustainability into the course or emphasised on morality and awareness. Also try to find more supervisors in the internet. Usually every study programme has a list by its Blackboard course about including possible thesis supervisors. It is also an idea to look through other courses of your faculty/programme in the study-e-gids you didn't take. Finally, be open and discuss your ideas with multiple supervisors and see how they react on your idea, before making agreements too early.

3

Topic: Discuss the topic well with your supervisor and make sure there is enough literature about it. You can choose topics about problems certain things cause for the environment and about potential solutions for those. Another angle would be choosing something not directly related, but examine a way to make this method/gadget functioning in a more sustainable manner

4

Practical part: By some studies the thesis is linked to a practical project; this is especially the case for programmes from the faculty of Medicine as well as Science. By having the thesis linked to experimental parts you can pay attention on experimental design. This can help you to design your project as efficient as possible, to enable you to gain enough valid data and limit your waste of resources at the same time. Also discuss with your supervisor on how you could save on materials and disturb the environment as little as possible during field experiments.

5

Contact LUGO: Do you still struggle to find a topic within sustainability or a professor who is going to supervise you for a certain theme? Feel free to reach out to us. We are a group of students of various studies and we're also happy to ask our network for you to find more specific tips which might be useful for your situation.

EXAMPLES

To provide you with some examples we contacted students who recently wrote their thesis about sustainability. For the format we used this set of questions:

A) What is your study programme?

B) Which steps did you follow to come up with your thesis subject? And what is your thesis subject?

C) Did you encounter any troubles by finding a suitable supervisor?

D) Did you get support from the university community while writing your thesis on a sustainable subject?

E) Do you have any tips for other students about integrating sustainability into their thesis?

Francesca Bruni: Global Public Health student

A) Global Public Health;

B) I participated in a Research Clinic at Leiden University College on Food Waste in The Hague which sparked my interest in this subject. So, I approached one of the professors from the clinic to see if it was possible to do something along those lines for my capstone;

C) I had no problem whatsoever. Even though my topic is environmental, the link between health and the environment is important and, fortunately my supervisor thought so too. The GPH professors are very open minded and interested in expanding the field of public health and;

D) Well, not from other professors. however, I did take an Earth, Energy and Sustainability course with Thijs Bosker which taught me a lot about ecotoxicity. However, I mostly spoke with peers about the topic before delving into it but it was mainly my own interest and what I found from the literature.

Soem Zeijlmans: Liberal Arts & Sciences Global Challenges

A) Liberal Arts & Sciences: Global Challenges at LUC The Hague. Major in Governance, Economics, and Development

B) I first looked up topics that I found interesting. I knew I wanted to do something about sustainability, and first thought of things like degrowth or alternative economic systems. Because these topics are very speculative, I couldn't create a research question that I would enjoy working on. Therefore I started looking for something a bit more applied. In the end, I chose do perceptions about integrating sustainability in higher education at our own university.

C) No, LUC has plenty of people working on the interface between governance and sustainability.

D) Yes, I interviewed people in the university community as part of my thesis. Many people were kind to participate.

E) Do a brainstorm to discover how your study programme relates to sustainability. And only start doing a topic you'll enjoy!

Inéz Jiménez Martínez, Liberal Arts & Sciences: Global Challenges

A) My BA is called: Liberal Arts & sciences: Global justice. I majored in International Justice

B) I looked at what interested me the most in my major: human rights, migration and climate change. I mixed them all up and that's how I came up with the thesis. My thesis subject is climate migration and their protection at the international level, including their rights of mobility and access to other countries after climate change made their habitual homes uninhabitable

C) Not at all!

D) In terms of money support? none. In terms of academic support, plenty! I asked around, explained my topic to all professors linked to my thesis (so environmental professors, human rights professors, and those who researched on migration before) and they always gave me great support, always encouraging me, advising me, giving me their ideas...

E) My tip is: open your eyes, the environment affects everything and everyone. I am sure that the issue you want to look at, has a connection to sustainability in some way!

Vera de Regt: Cultural Anthropology and Developmental Sociology

A) Cultural Anthropology and Development Sociology

B) I followed my study guidelines and choose the thesisgroup about sustainability which already provided several articles about different sustainability topics

C) No

D) Only from my supervisor

E) Just be able to see how sustainability connects with your field of study, and be able to advocate for it and explain people why its relevant

Rik den Hoedt, Msc Crisis and Security Management

A) My current study programme is the MSc in Crisis and Security Management. Before this, I studied at Leiden University College from 2015 until 2018 - majoring in World Politics, minoring in International Justice.

B) My thesis subject concerns the role of judiciaries in liberal democratic systems in the 'securitization' of climate change. In other words, how do courts encourage governments to take the necessary steps in limiting their greenhouse gas emissions? I first came up with that idea after reading a book by Jelmer Mommers, which outlined the importance of litigation to ensure a successful climate change policy. From my LUC days, I still have a lot of friends that study sustainability-related topics so that further stimulated my interest. From that point on I wanted to write my thesis about climate litigation, but it was still a very broad topic - which also included international law. I spend most of my time working on my thesis narrowing the topic down and getting the climate science right.

C) Our programme matches you with a supervisor after sending in an outline of the research you want to conduct.

Rik den Hoedt, Msc Crisis and Security Management

D) No, I did not get additional support from the university with regards to my thesis topic. I had a helpful supervisor and group of friends that I could ask questions to when I needed to, though.

E) Do not think that sustainability might be too far away from your field of studies. I initially got a lot of questions about writing about sustainability in my thesis - given that my programme focusses on security. Some people thought that sustainability was too far removed from the core topics of crisis and security management. However, it is important to realise that sustainability questions are multifaceted and require an interdisciplinary approach. By connecting researching the nexus between sustainability and issues not traditionally associated with it, you may come up with new insights - which contribute significantly to our understanding of sustainability.

FURTHER CONSULTING

If your study, in any way, does not provide the possibility of doing your thesis on a sustainable project, consider writing your thesis on one of the pillars of the sustainable development goals.

We need your help!

Did you write your thesis about a sustainable topic or are you interested in writing your thesis about a subject regarding sustainability? Do not hesitate to contact us!

This thesis guideline is a *living document*, which means that we need more examples and more topics to professionalize this guideline.

**Please contact
outreach@lugo.leidenuniv.nl!**



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