

Master's thesis in a company for MSc Logistics students at Molde University College

The purpose of this little note is to inform companies of what it implies to be part of a master's thesis.

Setting for the students

For the students the work with a thesis has three parts:

1. During the second or third semester (spring, autumn) they choose a subject for their thesis. A part of this choice is also to find a supervisor among the scientific staff at Molde University College, and to locate a company if the thesis is to be based on a practical case. Associated with the company there will always be a contact person who is willing and able to be the student's helper inside the company.
2. In the third semester (autumn) the student will start working on the thesis. It will be normal with at least one visit to the company. The student will spend about 20% of his or her time on the thesis. The work leads to a *proposal*. This is a written document, 10-20 pages long, describing such as the company and its environment, defining the actual problem the student wishes to study, and discussing relevant literature and possible methods to solve the problem. Finally, the proposal outlines what the student plans to do during the fourth, and final, semester. The proposal is defended in an oral examination in December, and the grading is pass/fail. If the student fails, a new exam will be organized in January.
3. The fourth semester is devoted to writing the master's thesis. Some students will need to visit the company repeatedly, some only once or twice, while still others will need to spend prolonged periods in the company. The thesis is a written document, typically 50-125 pages long, describing the analyses made. A good thesis combines a detailed problem description with good and relevant use of theory and methods, and ends up with conclusions and solutions hopefully useful for the company. Sometimes even a good description of the logistics of the company and its challenges can be of great value and may form the starting point for further investigation and research.

Expectations from the company

The company is expected to

1. Provide a relevant logistics problem for the student. In some cases the problem definition is very specific (if the company has a very specific issue it wants analyzed), in other cases it is very vague (study the supply chain, investigating the inventory, identifying logistics challenges etc.) In the latter case, the specifics of

- the thesis subject will be a result of visits and discussions between company, student and supervisor. Both approaches are equally interesting.
2. Provide a contact person. It is understood that when such a person is appointed, the company accepts that this person spends time accommodating the student. It is also understood that if this person, for some reason, is unable to fulfill the duties, the company will promote a new contact person.
 3. A thesis can be made confidential for at most five years. But it is preferable that the thesis is open, as the student otherwise can not use it while searching for a job after his or her studies.
 4. Within the agreed setting of a confidential or open thesis, it is understood that the company will provide the student with all relevant information. It is acceptable that the student signs a confidentiality contract with the company.
 5. It is normally such that the company covers costs incurred by the student while visiting the company. If this is impossible, it should be made clear before the project starts.

Although the above is written in terms of “the student”, we encourage students to work in pairs. That way they can cover the given subject much better, and it also reflects better the way projects are run in companies.

The thesis is written in English, and many students do not speak Norwegian.

It should be clear to the company that a master student will not possess the real-world experience that you would get hiring a professional logistics consultant. The student will typically need much time to overview the situation in the company and to evaluate different approaches to analysis and problem solving. The students are usually highly motivated for the task. With the combination of good supervision from the school and the required follow-up from the company’s appointed contact person it is likely that the students can come up with valuable solutions and insights for the company.

Agreements to be signed:

There are two relevant forms to sign. One is a general agreement between the student, company and supervisor, outlining the rights of the parties. The second agreement must be signed if the thesis is confidential.

Molde August 31st 2013 – Arild Hoff
(Based on earlier versions by Halvard Arntzen, Stein Wallace)