

Guidelines to the anti-plagiarism system for thesis
Bachelor's Degree and Master of Science course of SEM
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Introduction

The School of Economic and Management (SEM) implemented, on request of DISAG and DEPS Departments, the applicative protocol in order to submit all the thesis to the check of the anti-plagiarism system [turnitin®](#), with the collaboration of the Library system coordination division, which is in charge to manage it. The system is available in the online platform e-Learning Usiena integra, logging-in with the institutional credentials UnisiPass.

This Guideline had the purpose to illustrate the practical procedure. It will present all the common perspectives and some specific one for both the cases of the thesis with oral defence (Four year Bachelors' Degree thesis, Master of Science thesis and Bachelors's Degree thesis with traditional procedure) and without oral defence (the so called Bachelor's degree thesis with experimental procedure).

1. Purpose and general mode of operation of the system

The “plagiarism” phenomenon¹ in both the Bachelor's Degree thesis and Master of Science thesis is in strong growth in all the academic realities of the Italian University and also international, due to the easy practice of *Google-and-paste*. This problem could lead to a loss of credibility of our study course, if not contained, and could also impair the way in which the value of our qualifications (good until now) is perceived². For this reason the SEM had established that [all the thesis should be submitted to the check of the system before the final examination on the merit](#).

The utilization of the system had the main purpose to carry on a “mechanical” check in order to find potential non-original parts (and so potential plagiarism) of the thesis. The system had the access to a huge database property, that include all the published and non-published documents and will compare the text of the thesis uploaded with the content of the references in the database, in order to find consistencies of some periods or part of period³. The research results is the so called Originality Report produced by the system, that encompass:

- A synthetic numerical index that measures the percentage of text in which consistencies were found,
- The list of the references in which consistencies were found.

It's also possible to highlight all the consistencies found in the uploaded thesis and compare them with the references, moreover, there are available some functionalities aimed at carry on a more deep verification about the correspondences (exclusion of references from the analysis, ...).

The Board of directors of the School of Economics and Management had identified [a threshold of 25 % for the synthetic index value](#) (see section 2.3).

We would like to notice that the use of the system will bring benefit for the students too, since the thesis will be part of the database of references and a future eventual plagiarism of it will be recognized by [turnitin®](#) and also from other anti-plagiarism system⁴.

2. General Aspects of the procedure

2.1 Thesis assignment

The deposit of the thesis is on student responsibility, according to the modalities described in sections 3 and 4. It's necessary to notify to the system that the student is authorized to upload, who is the supervisor and who is

¹ “Plagiarism is defined as submitting as one's ownwork, irrespective of intent to deceive, that which derives in part or in its entirety from the work of others without due acknowledgement. It is both poor scholarship and a breach of academic integrity” ([University-wide statement on plagiarism, University of Cambridge](#)).

² The loss of credibility will affect not only the SEM but also the supervisor who is guilty of plagiarism (in whole or in part) of someone else work.

³ The length of the period depends on the configuration's parameters of the system.

⁴ Producer's of anti-plagiarism system, exchange the documents acquired on a regularly basis.

authorized to see and analyze the thesis⁵. For this reason, the procedure forecasts that the thesis assignment form should be compiled, signed and brought to the SEM's "Ufficio studenti e didattica" (figure no.1, page 9) within the deadline provided for by the SEM's academic calendar. According to the information embodied in the form, we will provide the authorization for the student to upload and deposit the thesis on the system and we will establish the match between the student's account and those of the supervisor.

The established deadline for the presentation of the "thesis assignment form" is the maximum in order to be able to carry on all the operation necessary to consent students to upload the thesis in time, after the last day available there isn't the guarantee that we will be able to do this. It's not forbidden – on the contrary: it's better – to present the form before the deadline, for example as soon as the supervisor accepts the role. More over if the supervisor will choose to use the system on "expert modality" (see next section 2.2), he could start to work in this modality only after the form is presented and the student authorized.

2.2 Normal and expert modality

In the thesis assignment form the supervisor will choose in which modality use the system: "normal" or "expert" (red zone in figure 1).

According to the normal modality, student will upload only the final version of the thesis and only the last version will be submitted to the analysis.

The expert modality is thought for the ongoing utilization of the system. It's useful for those supervisor who wants to control the thesis during the writing, for example, chapter by chapter. The typical use should be the following: as soon as the student wrote a new part of text and he wants to submit it to the correction, he will upload the paper on the system and he will inform the supervisor. The supervisor should use the system to analyze and read the thesis (and to correct it). It's necessary to inform the Ufficio studenti e didattica about the expert modality use because in this case, also the intermediate version of the thesis once uploaded will be entered in the references database: during the final analysis of the thesis it's necessary to command explicitly to the system to not consider the intermediate uploads, since they could affect the final valuation. Since the supervisor known all the previous version of the thesis, it's on his responsibility to set up the system in order to ignore previous intermediate versions. In this modality, also in the case of thesis without oral defence (see section 4), it's the supervisor's task to send the final report of the system to the Ufficio studenti e didattica (Secretary Office).

2.3 The synthetic index and the report

The system will produce a synthetic report that contain a numerical indicator quantifying in percentage the consistencies observed between the thesis and the references.

The system **should not and must not** produce a final valuation about the presence of real plagiarism in the thesis. This task is on the **evaluators'** hand (the supervisor or the final exam commission). The system acts as an instruments, and not the only one, that the **evaluators** had at disposition. Thanks to the modalities of functioning of the research software, the **system will limit its task** only to the supply of the consistencies between periods or part of period (more or less easily) and it could happen to run into **false positive**, for example:

- Bibliographic references;
- Quoted references not recognized by the system;
- Custom use sentences (**i.e.**)
- Unquoted references but clearly expressed in the text (i.e. "Art. 1 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states that all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood.").

It's useful notice that also **false negative** could happen, that are not recognized by the system. The most common case is those of the paraphrased⁶ text from one references (quoted or unquoted).

⁵ Also the SEM'S Ufficio studenti e didattica will operate on that couple student-supervisor.

⁶ The valuator (supervisor) with a minimum of experience will recognize those case in which period are composed with unusual terms inserted only to substitute in the paraphrases the original text.

The presence of false positive means that a value different from zero of the synthetic index does not imply necessarily that the thesis contains plagiarism. For this reason also on the basis of the experiences after several experimentation, the SEM had identify a **threshold value of 25% of the synthetic index**: a level above the threshold give some **clues about the possibility of plagiarism**, that should take into account more deeply by the supervisor, checking the consistencies revealed by system.

The threshold **should not be interpreted as the passable “quantity” of plagiarism**: it’s just a maximum quantity of false positive that could occur and found in a paper. Moreover, the possibility of false-negative means that a level of the index within the threshold does not guarantee that there aren’t plagiarism.

3. Procedure for thesis with oral defence

In the case of the thesis with oral defence (Bachelor’s degree, four-year degree, and Master of science), the procedure comprises the following steps, graphically illustrated in figure 2, page 10.

1. At the time of the thesis assignment, the **supervisor** should choose which system modality to use: expert or normal (see. Section 2.2). In case of failure to choose, the "normal modality" will be applied.
2. The **Ufficio studenti e didattica**, after receiving the “Thesis assignment form”, will communicate the match Supervisor-student to the **Llibrary System Coordination Division**, which is in charge to activate the use of the system only for the supervisor and student involved. The Ufficio studenti e didattica will have the access only in view modality.
3. The **student** should upload independently his thesis in the system, logging-in through the UnisiPass university credentials. After the deposit on the system, the student should send the receipt of the deposit produced by the system to the supervisor.
4. The **supervisor** should produce the report and examine the final version of the thesis, with the help of the anti-plagiarism system too. At the end of the evaluation, the supervisor should give to the student a copy of the report and sign the application for graduation form
5. The student should present the report to the Ufficio studenti e didattica with the application for graduation.
6. The **Ufficio studenti e didattica** will attach a copy of the report, produced by the system, to the documentation necessary for the President of the final exam commission. In the case in which the synthetic index of the report will be equal to or higher than the threshold, the Secretary Office will inform the President of the final examination commision and the thesis supervisor at least one day in advance.

During the first application of the procedure, for the theses that will be discussed during the **first session of application of the procedure in October 2016** (autumn session for Bachelor’s Degree and extension to the summers session for Master of Science) , there is an **exception** to the provisions of points 4 and 5: the deposit of the thesis on the system can also occur after the presentation of the degree application form (to which is not necessary to attach the report) and the Report of the system can be presented to the Ufficio studenti e didattica together with the paper copy of the thesis. Points 4 and 5 are therefore amended by the derogation:

4. The **supervisor** should produce and examine the final version of the thesis, with the help of the anti-plagiarism system too. In case of positive result of the check, he will send the report to the student.
5. The **student** should present the report to the Ufficio studenti e didattica with the copy of the thesis.

4. Procedure for thesis without oral defence

In the case of the thesis without oral defence (in the so-called Bachlor’s Degree with experimental modality), the procedure is divided into the following phases, graphically illustrated in Figure 3 on page 11.

1. At the time of the thesis assignment, the **supervisor** should choose which system modality to use: expert or normal (see. Section 2.2). In case of failure to choose, the "normal modality" will be applied. *If the supervisor will choose the "expert" modality, students will follow the same procedure as for the thesis with discussion (sec. 3).*
2. The **Ufficio studenti e didattica**, after receiving the "Thesis assignment form", will communicate the match Supervisor-student to the **Llibrary System Coordination Division**, which is in charge to activate the use of the system only for the supervisor and student involved. The Ufficio studenti e didattica will have the access only in view modality.
3. The **student** should upload independently his thesis in the system, through the UnisiPass university credentials. After the deposit on the system, the student should send the receipt of the deposit produced by the system to the supervisor and should also print a copy of it to attach to the application degree form.
4. The supervisor will sign the acceptance of the elaborate presentation with reservation for anti-plagiarism check.
5. At the time of presentation of the application for graduation, the **Ufficio studenti e didattica** that receives it, will also check the report produced by the system.
 - a) If the index does not exceed the threshold, the Office accepts the application for graduation.
 - b) If the index reaches or exceeds the threshold of concern, the Office will invite the **student** to get in touch with the supervisor in order to dissolve the reservation to make a check by using the tools that the system provides. If the supervisor dissolves the reserve in a positive way, he should sign the application for degree a second time.
6. The **Ufficio studenti e didattica** will send to the final exam committee a copy of the thesis uploaded and a copy of the report produced by the system.

Appendix

A. Frequent Asked Question for Professor

QUESTION 1. *The report produced by the system showed a synthetic index of 36% for the thesis of the student, and so it exceed the allowed threshold. I should give a negative opinion to the thesis?*

ANSWER: No. A decision such that couldn't be only on the system responsibility. You should deepen the analysis using also the other instrument that the system provides, in order to decide if there are plagiarism and you should base your decision on the result of your in-depth analysis.

QUESTION 2. *During the preceding final exam discussion, the student showed a synthetic index of 20% while the current student shows an index of only 10%. May I ask for 1 additional point (2 pints, ..., n points) for his thesis since it showed a lower quantity of plagiarism?*

ANSWER: No. the synthetic index is not a measure of the plagiarism quantity but it represent only a percentage of consistencies founded with our database references. A higher value of the index could be just the result of a higher number of false positive case.

QUESTION 3. *I found a plagiarism (I know the reference) in the thesis that I'm reading, but the system didn't recognize it as plagiarism. May I ask to the student and impose him to remove it?*

ANSWER: Yes, you not only should but you must do it! The system could produce false negative.

QUESTION 4. *I decided to use the system on an expert modality and I upload and examined the several chapters by the system, progressively as soon as the students send them me for the correction, plagiarism were not found. Now, after having upload the final version of the thesis, the system produced an index of 100%. How is it possible?*

ANSWER: The chapters uploaded progressively by the students are entered on the database and now are part of it. Probably the system had found consistencies (in a right way) between the final version of the thesis and the individual chapters. Using the specific functionality on the system you should delete form the research the consistencies with the chapters and you could repeat the production of the report.

QUESTION 5. *A student, who participate to a double degree program, had presented the thesis and the report showed a value of 100%. Is it a case of complete plagiarism?*

ANSWER: Not necessarily. He could have already presented the same thesis (as it is forecasted) to the partner University and so he could have already uploaded the thesis on the system. You should conduct an in-depth analysis using the system functionalities.

QUESTION 6. *In the system report I verified that a student of the MSc had copied some parts of his Bachelor's Degree's thesis, carried on on a similar argument. It is legitimize?*

ANSWER: No. even if the self-plagiarism is not a crime, however it is an ethically unfair practice and not acceptable.

QUESTION 7. *The thesis of a student is equal to those presented and discussed by another student in another university (only the name and the title are different). Is it a case of plagiarism or a more serious issue?*

ANSWER: It could be a **crime of (tempted) fraud or those of material misrepresentation.**

QUESTION 8. *Student that didn't present the thesis assignment form within the deadline and so couldn't upload the thesis on the system since he isn't authorized; we could avoid this passage since the student risks to doesn't graduate on time?*

ANSWER: No. The upload of the thesis on the system for the analysis is compulsory. The student could try to present the thesis assignment form as soon as possible but we couldn't guarantee to be able to make it available for the upload of the thesis.

B. Frequent Asked Questions for Students

QUESTION 9. *I have finished the thesis. Before the official check could I make an attempt in order to check if there are plagiarism in my thesis?*

ANSWER: No. The system is just an auxiliary instrument for the valuation of the supervisor and the final exam commission. The utilization for “attempts” was not forecasted. On the other hand, if you have a clean conscience you shouldn’t be afraid: “involuntary plagiarism” doesn’t exist, it’s statistically impossible. If your conscience is not clean...

QUESTION 10. *I haven’t present the thesis assignment form within the deadline and so I couldn’t upload the thesis on the system since I’m not authorized; we could avoid this passage? I risks to don’t graduate on time!*

ANSWER: See Question 8 on the Frequent Asked Questions on the Professor’s section.

QUESTION 11. *In my thesis I wrote some sentences taken form text that I red and I put on the references. Does the system consider them as plagiarism?*

ANSWER: It depends. Let’s see with an example. Suppose that Isaac Newton wrote on one of his text the following sentence “I can calculate the motion of heavenly bodies, but not the madness of people”.

- a) If you wrote this sentence without quoting the author, and doing so you implicitly attribute the sentence to yourself, in this case it is plagiarism and the system revealed it. It’s irrelevant if you wrote the author in the bibliography or in the references’ list.
- b) If you wrote something like “As the author Isaac Newton said, it is clearly evident that [...]”. We are in a undefined situation since it is not clear if you are reporting the exactly observation of the author or just an elaboration of it, and you not agreed to the author. For this reason it’s better to quote the sentences.
- c) If you have quoted the sentence, the system could have identify the consistency as a false positive, in this case you supervisor will be able to recognize as it too.

Figure 1: Thesis assignment form (**highlighted** the choice of the modality)

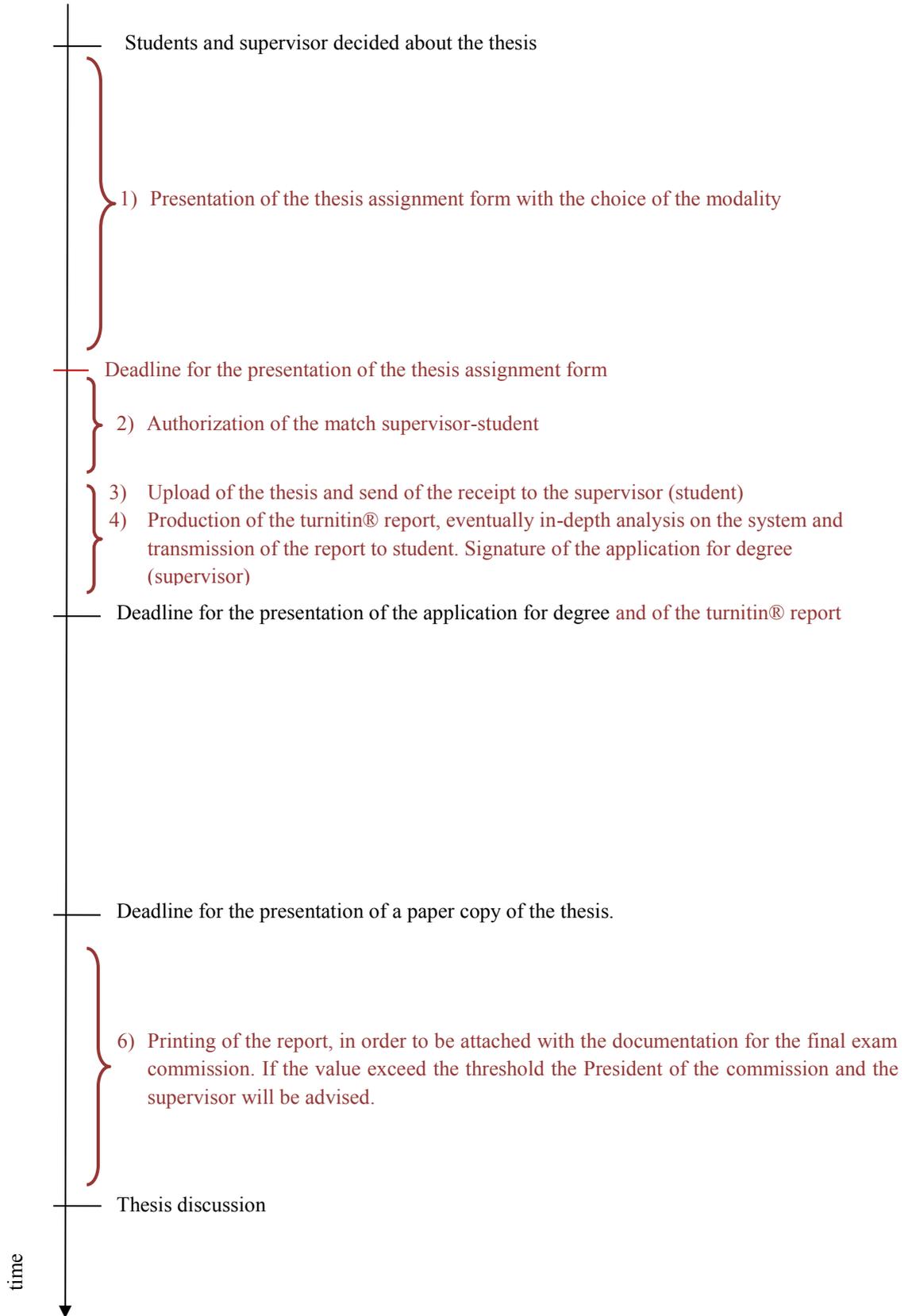


Figure 2 : temporal scheme for thesis with oral discussion (in red the news introduced by this procedure)

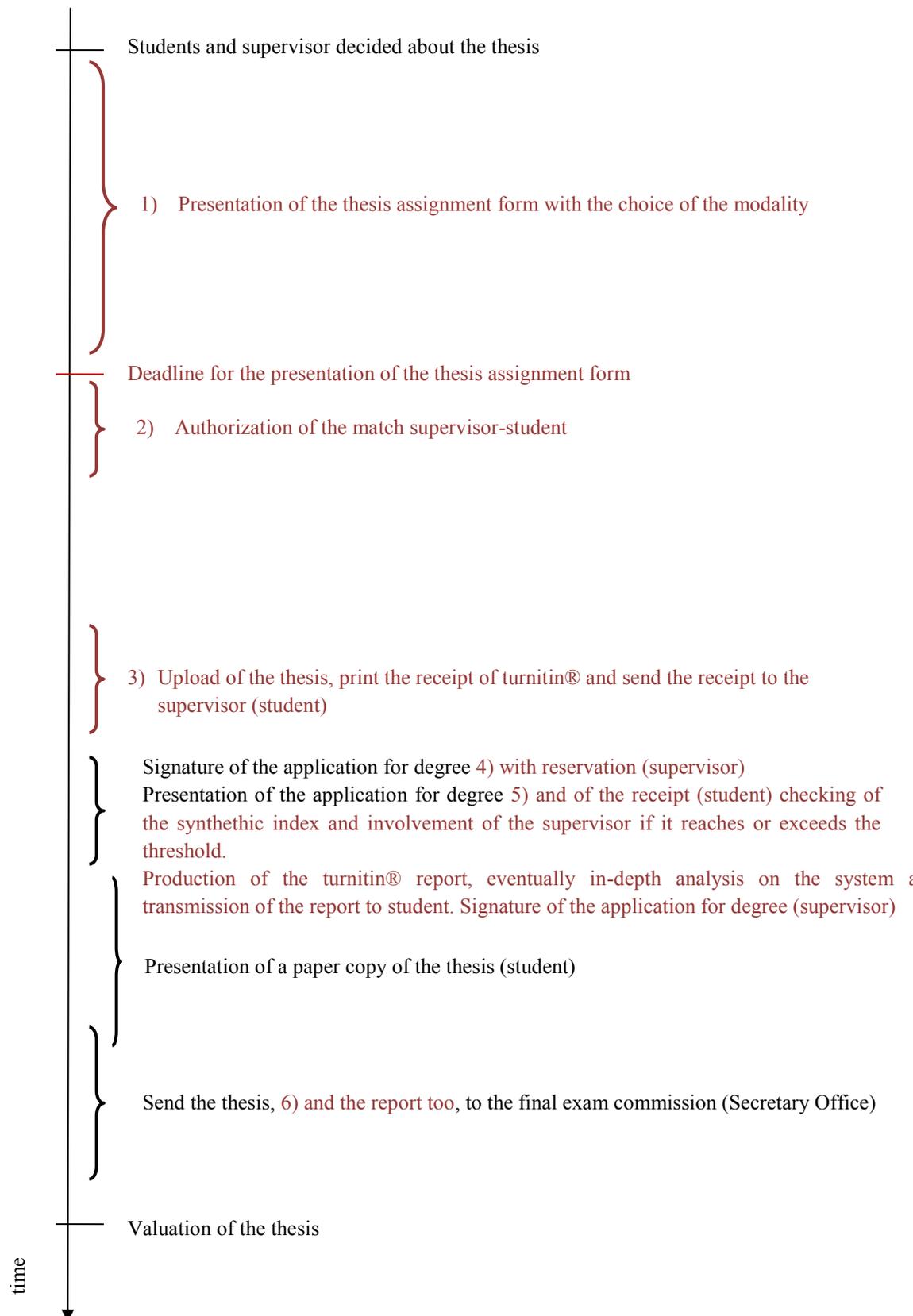


Figure 3 : Temporal scheme for thesis without oral defence (in red the news introduced by this procedure)