

Revised course description for HGO4011 from H21

HGO4011 – Philosophy and methodology of human geography

Course content

This course is a compulsory component of the master's degree in human geography. The purpose is to provide students with an overview of the range of scholarship done across geography's sub-disciplines, and to illustrate similarities and differences in their theoretical foundations. The course starts by introducing the core concepts of space, place, scale and environment that help give coherence to geography, and a brief history of the discipline. The majority of the sessions are dedicated to an exploration of the geographical sub-disciplines and their theoretical and methodological commitments. A common theme *[to be updated]* ties the lectures together and shows the importance of theory for empirical research, with the aim of facilitating the development of the student's own master's thesis research project. The course finishes by introducing students to the fundamentals of research design: how to connect research questions, theory and methods. Lectures and seminars are given, including a seminar on master thesis topic development.

Learning outcomes

Knowledge

- Understand how the discipline of geography has developed over time.
- Distinguish between current, cutting-edge research in different sub-disciplines.
- Comprehend core theoretical concepts in geography and how they are applied to research across the discipline.

Skills

- Apply core concepts and theoretical frameworks in human geography with a high degree of understanding and reflection.
- Evaluate the relation between different theoretical frameworks, methodological choices and research questions within research across the discipline.
- Develop analytical writing and reading skills at a high academic standard.
- Design a research topic and ask analytical questions about that topic.

General competence

- Critically analyze strategies for acquiring knowledge within human geography.
- Discriminate between theoretical and methodological choices that are relevant for your master's thesis.

Teaching

Course tuition consists of a combination of lectures and seminars, **including a seminar on master thesis topic development**. For an overview, please refer to the detailed teaching plan on the semester page.

Compulsory instruction and coursework

Participation in at least 80% of the lectures and seminars is mandatory.

Completed and approved compulsory course work is valid as long as the course is offered. **Students who have failed to complete the compulsory attendance cannot take the exam.**

Examination

The exam is a one-week home exam. The maximum length of the home exam is 3000 words (excluding references).

The exam question will be available from 10.00 am on the day of the exam and must be submitted at 12.00 PM, 7 days later.

[Previous exams and examiner guidelines](#)

Submit assignments in Inpera

You submit your assignment in the digital examination system Inpera. [Read about how to submit your assignment.](#)

Use of sources and citation

You should familiarize yourself with the rules that apply to [the use of sources and citations](#). If you violate the rules, you may be suspected of [cheating/attempted cheating](#).

Language of examination

The examination text is given in English. You may submit your response in English, Norwegian, Swedish or Danish.

Grading scale

Grades are awarded on a scale from A to F, where A is the best grade and F is a fail. Read more about [the grading system](#).

Explanations and appeals

- [Explanation of grades and appeals](#)

Resit an examination

If you are sick or have another valid reason for not attending the regular exam, we offer a [postponed exam](#) later in the same semester.

See also our information about [resitting an exam](#).

Withdrawal from an examination

It is possible to take the exam up to 3 times. If you [withdraw from the exam](#) after the deadline or during the exam, this will be counted as an examination attempt.

Special examination arrangements

Application form, deadline and requirements for [special examination arrangements](#).

Evaluation

The course is subject to continuous evaluation. Midterm and end of semester evaluations are to be expected.

Suggested new format for the course, presented at the Programme Council meeting February 1:

1. A new introductory session on the geographical cross-disciplinary concepts of space, place and environment. That could help navigate the different sub-disciplines and be used as a backdrop against which to discuss different research traditions.
2. Consolidate history of geography and philosophy of science into 1 session each. Include a session on research design which will focus on **design**—how to connect the different aspects and especially how to use theory.
3. Use 1 empirical example and provide sub-disciplinary lectures that explore that example. The emphasis will be on showing how shifting the theoretical frame shifts the research questions, findings and implications drawn from a case study.
4. Schedule 9-10 lectures total including intro and conclusion.

Some clarifications (from Andrea's email March 22):

1. The learning outcome goals for this course are 3-fold:
 - a.) for students to understand how theory informs research and how to recognise and use abstract theory in their work. (Geographical theory)
 - b.) to introduce students to the range of work done in geography both as a pedagogical exercise for them to understand what current research in geography does, and to encourage theses that range across all of our interests rather than the current situation where thesis topics are concentrated in a few sub disciplines. (The 'culture of geography')
 - c.) to bridge between geographical theory / current research and their own thesis work. (Methodological implications of theory)

Proposed lectures and seminars

Lecture/ Seminar no	Topic
1	Introduction. Space, place, scale and environment, introduction to core philosophy of science ideas of ontology and epistemology, overview of course and program.
2	History of Geography. Brief overview of the turns, how the discipline is situated within the wider social sciences. Intro to importance of theory and theorizing.
3	Sub-Discipline 1.
S1	Seminar 1. Critical reading. Use sources which draw on the set reading list and help link between the ideas of space, place, scale and environment outlined in L1 and the sub-discipline lectures.
4	Sub-Discipline 2.
5	Sub-Discipline 3.
6	Sub-Discipline 4.
S2	Seminar 2 (4090). MA thesis Topic development. Where to start? How to start formulating research questions
7	Sub-Discipline 5.
8	Introduction to Research Design. How to connect theory to research questions and methods. Overall considerations in designing research projects
S3	Seminar 2. Exam prep. How to address the exam questions that will appear.
9	Conclusion. Bringing it all together. What did we learn about the overall empirical theme? How does this help us to formulate good MA thesis topics? Learning to read theory in the (non-theoretical) literature.

Suggested format for sub-discipline lectures.

Overall theme: **To be decided at the meeting**

1. First 45 minutes of lecturing (ideally based on a series of dialogues) will help draw out the following aspects of the sub-discipline:
 - a. Current concerns within the sub-discipline empirically and theoretically—not restricted to the theme.
 - b. Critical reflections on the contributions of the sub-discipline.
 - c. Main conceptual frameworks or ideas ***used in thinking about overall theme*** in that sub-discipline.
2. Second 45 minutes will be a flipped classroom approach that engages students in the diversity of work done in the sub-discipline and in particular, how theory is used and the implications of theoretical commitments for the methodologies used. Emphasis will be placed on theoretical understanding and how to operationalise theory discussed through specific empirical examples related to the chosen **theme**.

Inputs needed from all staff:--this is going to have to be finalised later. Note sub-disciplines and revise as needed.

We need to offer at least 4 and max 6 lectures. We initially decided on the theme of borders but there are requests to reconsider. Think about the table on Borders key words below. Are there others you would add? Does this help to think about how you would approach the topic? List key topics that are current in your sub-discipline **whether you use them in your own work or not**.

Geographies of Borders	
<i>Sub-discipline</i>	<i>Empirical focus</i>
Cultural, Feminist and decolonial geographies	Race as produced/challenged through border crossings; everyday operation of power (social boundary making); knowledge borders; subjectivity, the body,
Economic and Labour Geography	The politics of economic borders (global trade); cross-border migration and labour rights
Urban Geography	Bordering cities / ghettoization / gentrification ; urban-rural boundaries
Environmental Geographies	Nature-society borders / fortress conservation; climate change-planetary boundaries
Political Geography	Ethnic discrimination, violence and forced migration Blurred borders between democracy and authoritarian rule, the limits of political mobilisation Borders of the (nation-)state / spatiality of nationalism
Development Geographies	Natural resources and ownership rights Internal displacement and distributive justice