

HGO 4090 Masters Thesis Course Revisions

Andrea J. Nightingale

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Background:

1. The course was established in 2020 to help support student's development of and writing of the Masters Thesis in Human Geography
2. The original intention was 1 seminar in autumn semester of Y1 (the former 'cabin seminar'), and 2 seminars in spring semester of Y1. These seminars were to be focussed on:
 - a. Topic development
 - b. Research design development
 - c. Writing
3. Because Y2 students also need support, an additional seminar was organised for them in Y2 S1 on thesis data collection and writing.
4. The course ran in 2020 with current Y2 students (spring 2020) and current Y1 students (autumn 2020) (topics above).
5. Having run a total of 4 seminars (combined Y1 & Y2 students), the flow of these seminars and coordination with other courses needs to be refined.

Justification for suggested changes:

1. Students are encouraged in S1 to define thesis topics but they have a very narrow exposure to possible topics in Geography at that stage. As a result, we have a concentration of topics in a few sub-disciplines and too few in others. This makes MA supervision loads very uneven.
2. As the program grows, there is a need to ensure that supervision possibilities and loads are more even within the group.
3. Students do not have enough exposure to theory or research design to develop good topics in S1. By the END of S1 they have these tools, but the timing of the concept note means they have not digested these ideas yet. Many students are more focused on exams at that point in the term.
4. Group topic development work can bring students to well-developed topics more effectively than individual supervision meaning that 'getting started early' is less urgent.
5. Students realistically do not work on their theses between November – January of Y1 so concept notes turned in S2 will not set students behind.
6. There was a big jump between the seminars on research design development and writing in 2020. The writing seminar came way too early.
7. Students in Y2 also need organised thesis support.

Suggested Changes:

1. A topic development seminar is run in Y1 S1 but later. Proposed to be held between Lectures 7 & 8 of 4011 so in approximately W42 or 43 (TBC) (end of October).
2. Students will turn in concept notes in early March of Y1 S2 after having had a research design seminar in addition to topic development. They will also have completed qualitative methods giving them better tools for thinking through a

research project and questions. This will allow them to develop the topic before they are distributed for individual supervision.

3. Concept notes should have brief comments on them for students (many asked for this). 2-3 people can be allocated for this task as they divide students among potential supervisors.
4. A project management / data collection workshop can be run in early May of Y1 S2 to help them think about managing the thesis work over the summer, etc.
5. A thesis data analysis / writing workshop is held in Y2 S1 to help bring focus on the thesis after the summer.

Rough Schedule:

Seminar no	Year group / semester / approximate week	Topic
1	Y1 S1 W 42-43	Masters Topic Development: Videos produced by Andrea plus 2 hour seminar with 5-6 members of staff to talk about potential topics. Managed under 4011.
2	Y1 S2 W 6-7	Research Design: Videos produced by Andrea and 3 hour seminar with 5-6 members of staff on how to develop research questions and link them to a methodology. 4090 (in coordination with Qual. Methods) GDPR and Ethics (possibly as a stand-alone session?)
Assignment	Y1 S2 W 9	Concept note due
3	Y1 S2 W 18-19	Project Management and Data Collection: 2 hour plenary seminar
4	Y2 S1 W 36-38	Data Analysis and Writing: 2-3 hour seminar on managing data and getting going on writing. Plenary lecture plus small groups with 4-5 members of staff.