

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 of borders 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 Inspira

You submit your assignment in the digital examination system Inspira. [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.

## Proposed lectures and seminars

Lecture/ Seminar no	Topic
1 &2	<b>Introduction.</b> Space, place, scale and environment, introduction to core philosophy of science ideas of ontology and epistemology, overview of course and program.
3	<b>History of Geography.</b> Brief overview of the turns, how the discipline is situated within the wider social sciences. Intro to importance of theory and theorizing.
4	<b>Sub-Discipline 1.</b>
S1	<b>Seminar 1.</b> 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.
5	<b>Sub-Discipline 2.</b>
6	<b>Sub-Discipline 3.</b>
7	<b>Sub-Discipline 4.</b>
S2	<b>Seminar 2 (4090).</b> MA thesis Topic development. Where to start? How to start formulating research questions
8	<b>Sub-Discipline 5.</b>
9	<b>Sub-Discipline 6</b>
S3	<b>Seminar 2.</b> Exam prep. How to address the exam questions that will appear.
10	<b>Conclusion and Research Design.</b> 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.

### Description of lectures

#### Session 1: Introduction (Andrea)

In this session we go through the intellectual and practical fundamentals of the course. An overview of key philosophy of science concepts ontology and epistemology is presented and how they are applied throughout the course. The idea of 'borders' is introduced and how it will be used throughout the course.

#### Session 2: Core concepts in Geography (Andrea)

This session provides an overview of core concepts that are considered central to how geography as a discipline is defined: space, place, scale and environment. The differences between Newtonian and Leibnizian conceptions of space and what they have meant for geographical theory and their application to research problems is considered. From these foundations, we look at place from regional theories to space-time. Throughout the influence of scale and how it is conceptualized is emphasized. The session concludes with the importance of human-environment interactions for geography. These concepts will also be applied in the sub-disciplinary lectures so here only an introduction to them is provided.

#### Session 3: History of Geographical Thought (Sverre)

#### Session 4: Economic Geographies (Sverre and Bjørnar)

#### Session 5: Political Geographies (Michael)

#### Session 6: Labour and Development Geographies (David and Hege)

### **Session 7: Urban Geographies (Per Gunnar)**

### **Session 8: Feminist and Decolonial Geographies (Andrea)**

This session covers a range of scholarship in the constructivist tradition that deals with questions of social exclusion. Feminist and post colonial geographers pioneered a number of research topics and insisted on the importance of social exclusion and the everyday to understanding large scale processes like capitalism, colonialism and neo-liberalism. Now, a wide range of scholarship building from feminist, queer theory, race and indigenous studies, and decolonial thinking is significantly challenging other kinds of critical theory. Here, the way that social borders are created and reinforced is central to the operation of power. This session is intended to provide a foundation and an overview so students can peruse in more depth those debates most intriguing. We will talk about how this literature can help conceptually to make sense of social exclusions and social borders.

### **Session 9: Environmental Geographies (Andrea or Guest)**

Human-environment relations lie at the core of geography and today encompass a wide range of scholarship. Here we confront straight on the intellectual border between 'society' and 'nature'. From work on climate change and resilience to more than human ethnographies and affect, it contributes to intellectual debates that span the entire theoretical spectrum within the discipline. In this session we briefly review some of this diversity and then focus in on political ecology. Political ecology emerged in conversation with development and feminist studies and today has split into two main camps. One which is concerned with showing the social politics of environmental issues, the other which is concerned with how socio-natural entanglements occur and change. We will explore these literatures and think about society-nature borders relate to core sustainability challenges.

### **Session 10: Philosophy of Geography and Research Design**

In this final session we will revisit core philosophy of science and geographical concepts and think about how they have been applied to research within the sub-disciplinary sessions. An introduction to research design will be provided to show how to connect abstract ideas to help formulate good research questions about an empirical topic.