

Periodic course evaluation

HGO4011 Philosophy and methodology of human geography

Fall 2017

Course information

This course is a compulsory component of the master's degree in human geography. The course covers the history and methodology of human geography with the aim of facilitating the development of the student's own research project for the master's degree. The course consists of three parts, the first of which presents the main lines of development and key concepts in the history of human geography. The second part discusses general strategies for establishing knowledge – realism, 'ideal type' methodology and grounded theory. The last part highlights three methodological alternatives: individual case studies, comparative analysis and quantitative modelling. Lectures and seminars focus on the history and methodology of human geography generally, while emphasis is also placed on relevance to the student's own master's degree project. However, this course does not cover more specific choice of methods.

The course has the following learning goals:

Knowledge

- Students will learn about the history of human geography with a focus on the main lines of development and key concepts
- Students will learn about general strategies for knowledge production and overarching methodological alternatives

Skills

- Students will be able to account for and discuss concepts and approaches in the history and methodology of human geography with a high degree of precision and reflection
- Students will be able to write advanced-level, independent texts about the history and methodology of human geography within stated time limits
- Students will be able to develop a general project description for an independent research project

General competence

- Students will be able to critically analyze strategies for acquiring knowledge of human geography
- Students will be able to make an independent choice of methodology in your work on the master's thesis

The teaching consists of 12 lectures and 3 seminars organized in 3 thematic sections:

1. History of Human Geographic Thought
2. Strategies for Using and Constructing Theory
3. Methodological Design

The reading package consists of a selection of articles and book chapters, totalling 845 pages.

The examination is based on a combination of portfolio assessment (two essays) and written examination (3 hours). The portfolio assessment accounts for 60% and the written examination for 40% of the grade.

Course results in 2017

Number of students completing the course: 22.

Grade distribution: A: 4; B: 11; C: 6; D: 1; E: 0, F: 0.

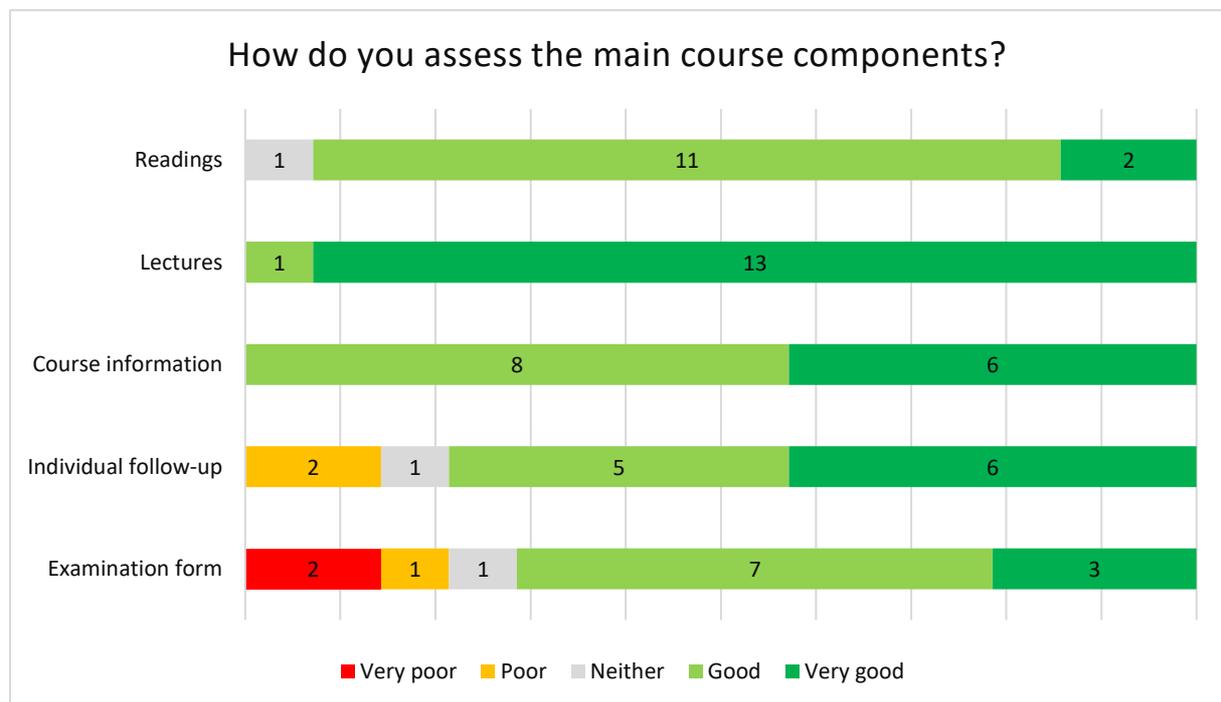
Course evaluation

This periodic course evaluation is based on an online questionnaire that was distributed to all students that completed the course in 2017. Out of a total of 24 students, 14 completed the survey. The survey consisted of the following three questions.

QUESTION 1: How do you rate the quality of the following components in the course (very poor – poor – neither – good – very good):

- Readings
- Lectures
- Course information
- Individual follow-up
- Examination form

The following figure shows the distribution of answers for question no. 1:

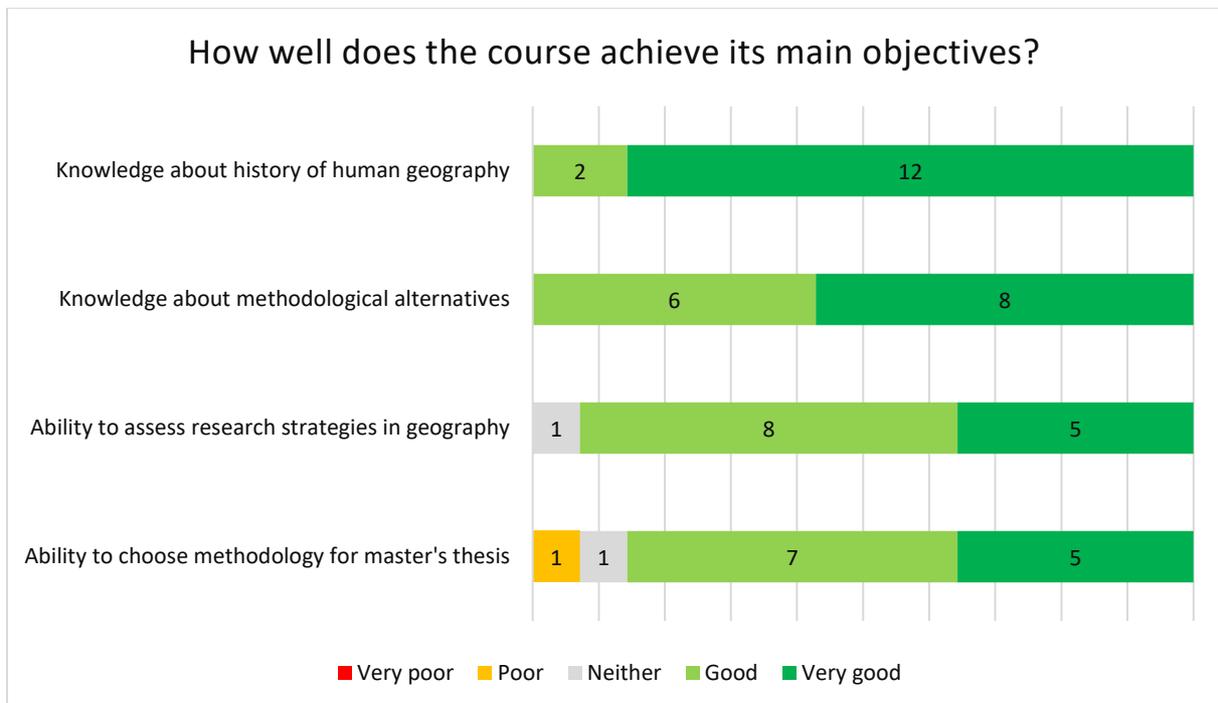


QUESTION 2: How well do you think the course has enabled you to reach the following learning outcomes (very poor – poor – neither – good – very good):

- You will learn about the history of human geography with a focus on the main lines of development and key concepts
- You will learn about general strategies for knowledge production and overarching methodological alternatives

- You will be able to critically analyse strategies for acquiring knowledge of human geography
- You will be able to make an independent choice of methodology in your work on the master's thesis

The following figure shows the distribution of answers for question no. 2:



QUESTION 3: Do you have any positive or negative feedback that we should take into consideration for the future of the course?

The following comments were provided in response to question no. 3:

- *Please do not force students to go through two exams. One is enough. Personally I prefer a take home exam, but IF you must use a school exam, use Inspira so that the students can have a real chance of writing a good answer. We're in 2018, pen and paper is very outdated (other universities are perfectly able to do this).*
- *Even though I get that the combination of a home- and school exam enables you to test both the breadth and depth of our knowledge, I think it was too much. Both me and other students felt we put in a lot of effort, only to be able to perform half-way on both exams.*
- *I really enjoyed this class, and felt it opened a lot of doors for me in terms of understanding the perspectives from which different researchers write about and understands reality (if one such thing even exists).*
- *This course is perfect for a 6-hour exam evaluation. Then you will really get an overview and learn about every part of the curriculum. Most of the students spent very little time on the portfolio and expressed that they didn't learn all that much from that process.*

Observations and recommendations

The submitted answers to questions 1 and 2 indicate that HGO4011 functions very well. While the subject matter of the course is challenging and the workload is substantive, the answers to questions 1 and 2 are largely "good" and "very good". The evaluation does not point to any need for major restructuring of the course structure or content. Based on my experiences as course coordinator, I will however recommend that the reading package should be reviewed, especially for sections 2 and 3.

The submitted comments to question 3 indicate that the exam form should be changed. It is correctly observed by the students that the double exam is demanding, while it is not clear that it has a positive impact on the students' learning or gives a better basis for setting grades. Based on the feedback from the students and my own experiences as course coordinator I will recommend that future assessments should be based on a take-home exam.

Blindern, 15 February 2018



Kristian Stokke