

MES4010 – Readings in Middle East Studies

Censoring Guidelines (Spring 2025)

The course aims to develop students' ability to:

- Refine an academic project description
- Critically read and analyse research literature and formulate an interpretation of the issues and arguments presented in the literature
- Summarize and present a research debate in an independent and reflective manner.
- Situate a research project, theoretically and methodologically, in the context of academic disciplines, fields and sub-fields.

During our course, consisting 7 x 2-hour seminars, we used several handbooks and manuals as references for understanding and conducting a critical literature review, including Wayne Booth et al., *The Craft of Research* (2011), and Duncan Branley, et al, "Doing a literature review." (2018), a book chapter in Clive Seale (red.) *Researching society and culture* (London: Sage).

The students were expected to read relevant sections of the syllabus and submit drafts on literature review relevant for the topic of their master thesis. The drafts would be based on a self-compiled reading list consisting of thematic, methodological and theoretical aspects related to their thesis.

The seminars were designed to give the students a fair exercise on how to critically read and write research literature reviews on the topics that they were expected to cover in their term papers. The seminars also aimed to give an opportunity for the students to develop their drafts and receive feedback on parts of the final term paper from both the teacher and the other students.

Formal requirements for the exam:

- The term paper should be between 8-10 pages, not counting front page and references.
- The term paper must have references to literature amounting to around 1,000 pages, and should preferably include works in both English and in a Middle Eastern language.
- Topic for the term paper: The students are expected to provide a critical analysis of research literature relevant to the subject of their master thesis. This includes covering thematic issues, theoretical perspectives, and methodological approaches.
- The exam paper should include **a brief two-page outline of the project description**. This part of the paper is meant to provide the necessary context to the critical literature review. Hence, this part **should not be graded**, only evaluated on a pass-fail basis. In other words, **only the eight page paper devoted to the actual literature review should be the basis for the A-F-grading**.

Criteria for evaluation:

In the term paper, the students should summarise and present a research debate: accurately re-present & critically analyse research literature; formulate an interpretation of the literature's issues, arguments, and open questions. The point of departure is normally the project description and the research questions that was developed for MES4000. In evaluating the term paper, emphasis will be given to how faithfully the research literature's positions are represented; how well the student work out the arguments, debates, and open questions. Formalities such as correct ways of citing, bibliographic referencing, and academic transcription will also be considered. If the reading list also include contributions in one of the regional languages of the Middle East it is considered a plus. The students have been advised that about 20% of the reading list should be a Middle Eastern language.

The literature sources must be presented and discussed in the context of a research perspective where the student compares, pits one perspective against another, etc. in order to find out what the research stand is and what are open questions. Theory and method should then preferably be taken in this context, i.e. whether specific theoretical frameworks help (or limit) the analysis, and whether specific methodological approaches are suitable for moving forward with the open questions. In that sense, it is not a fixed structure where the student consider method / theory etc. separately, but theory will come in as an integral part of how the existing literature has dealt with the topics.