Grading guidelines for MES4020

Field Work in the Middle East

Autumn 2025

General information

In Autumn 2025, MES4020 Field Work in the Middle East was offered to third semester MA students at our Middle East Studies program option. The course is a 20-credit topic and is designed to be taken in conjunction with MES4610 – Voices from the Middle East: How to Communicate Research Results

There were six students who followed the seminars and took the exam.[1] The five seminars offered in this course took place at regular intervals between September and November. They consisted of a mix of short lectures by the topic instructor, based on the syllabus and on his own experiences in doing fieldwork in various countries in the Middle East. The students also presented selected items from the syllabus, chosen based on their research projects and ongoing fieldwork. Most meetings also contained student presentations of their specific projects, fieldwork experiences, challenges, and lessons learned.

Below follows a description of the topic's content and learning outcome (available at https://www.uio.no/studier/emner/hf/ikos/MES4020/):

The purpose of this course is to train you in the collection, processing, critical assessment and initial analysis of data in preparation for work on your master's thesis. Based on your project description, and under guidance of your supervisor, you will identify and collect different kinds of data. Depending on the topic of research, these may include data from:

- literary, historical, political or other kinds of texts
- interviews, participant observation, other kinds of fieldwork
- online sources, radio and TV programmes, films, etc.

All methodologies of collecting relevant data require a conscious and critical approach. Therefore, an important part of the course implies reflection on the methodology and practices of data collection.

You will learn how to determine the relevance and validity of different sources through identifying and collecting data for your project. Depending on your chosen methodology you will for instance:

- learn how to communicate in your language of specialization with interviewees

[1] This topic has previously been offered without seminars. The students' supervisors were expected to assist and guide the students' data collection and provide individualized advice regarding methodology. In 2021, it was decided – in response to the various challenges resulting from the Covid-19 crisis – to offer a series of five online seminars with voluntary participation in order to assist the students in completing the course. This worked quite well, and the same number of seminars have been given since then.

- learn how to find historical texts through local and/or digital archives
- learn how to work as a researcher in different cultural or political settings
- learn how to identify different versions of the same text in an Middle Eastern language

As for compulsory activity, the topic required the submission of a 6-10-page field report (draft) explaining the choice of methodologies, the process of data collection, and reflections on the research process. The paper should engage with at least one of the texts on the syllabus. This draft needed to be approved by the students' supervisors in order for to qualify for the final exam.

The exam / final submission:

The exam for MES4020 is a portfolio that consists of two papers:

- Field report, revised after comments from your academic supervisor.
- One of the following options, to be determined after consulting with your supervisor:
    - Translation (into English or a Scandinavian language) of an original text (2-4 pages) within your Middle East language of specialization.
    - Transcription in your language of specialization of 1-3 recorded interviews (depending on length).
    - Translation into English or a Scandinavian language of 1-3 recorded interviews (depending on length).
    - Translation of any kind of sources in your language of specialization, for instance parts of a movie, a TV show, blog discussions, speeches, etc.

Guidelines for grading

In MES4020, grades are awarded on a pass/fail scale:

The requirements for the fieldwork paper are as follows:

1) that it contains observations on:

- the choice of methodologies,
- the process of data collection,
- reflections on the research process.

2) that the paper should engage with at least one of the texts on the syllabus

3) The length should be between 6-10 pages and should be approved by the students' supervisors.

(All students have had their field reports approved by their supervisor)

If these requirements are observed, the paper should be graded "pass".

Regarding the second paper (translation or transcription of a source document), the requirement is that the translation or transliteration is satisfactory. A few errors are acceptable as long as it does not prevent the reader from understanding the meaning and content of the given text.

As for formal aspects, such as observance of a concise academic style copy-edited (incl. language check), consisted citation style (preferably Chicago), they will not by themselves be sufficient to

“fail” a paper, but in conjunction with other grave flaws, weaknesses, and omission, they may be given weight in the overall grading assessment.

When considering grading a paper “fail”, the examiners should also consult the UiO’s general grade descriptions (see below). Fail should be equivalent to F. (“A performance that does not meet the minimum academic criteria. The candidate demonstrates an absence of both judgement and independent thinking.”),

UiO’s general grade descriptions

The portfolio submission will be graded on the basis of UiO’s general grade descriptions https://www.uio.no/english/studies/examinations/grades/index.html (as of June 2021):

A – Excellent

An excellent performance, clearly outstanding. The candidate demonstrates excellent judgement and a high degree of independent thinking.

B – Very good

A very good performance. The candidate demonstrates sound judgement and a very good degree of independent thinking.

C – Good

A good performance in most areas. The candidate demonstrates a reasonable degree of judgement and independent thinking in the most important areas.

D – Satisfactory

A satisfactory performance, but with significant shortcomings. The candidate demonstrates a limited degree of judgement and independent thinking.

E – Sufficient

A performance that meets the minimum criteria, but no more. The candidate demonstrates a very limited degree of judgement and independent thinking.

F – Fail

A performance that does not meet the minimum academic criteria. The candidate demonstrates an absence of both judgement and independent thinking.