GRADING GUIDE – HUMAN GEOGRAPHY (bachelor SGO and master HGO)

Course code and semester-year: HGO4011, autumn 2018
Type of examination: Take-home exam

About exams at SGO/HGO: A good examination paper contains solid knowledge, logical and coherent reasoning and a systematic structure. The answer to a discussion question/task must examine, analyze, and connect different parts of the curriculum.

1. The answer responds to the question/task given in a precise and exhaustive way.
2. The answer demonstrates knowledge.
3. The answer must be well-written: coherent and using good academic language.
4. Key concepts – those at the core of the answer – must be defined.
5. The answer demonstrates analytical capacity and reflection.

About this course:

HGO4011 - Philosophy and methodology of human geography - 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.

The students are expected to achieve the following overarching learning outcomes:

(1) Learn about the history of human geography with a focus on the main lines of development and key concepts
(2) Learn about general strategies for knowledge production and overarching methodological alternatives

The exam is a one-week home exam. The maximum length of the home exam is 6000 words (excluding references, +10% is acceptable). The exam questions are given in English. The student can write the essay in Norwegian, Swedish, Danish or English. The exam set consists of two questions, where the student is asked to answer <u>one</u> of the questions.

QUESTION 1

Norman Blaikie identifies six pairs of ontological and epistemological positions. Three of these are especially relevant for contemporary human geography: (1) cautious realist/falsificationism; (2) depth realist/neo-realism; and, (3) idealist/constructionism. Choose one of these three positions and provide a descriptive account of its understanding of ontology and epistemology. Discuss how the chosen position has been the basis for knowledge production in Human Geography. Finally, provide a critical discussion of the limitations of the chosen position, for example by contrasting it to one or both of the other positions.

Grading Guide for question 1:

The essay is expected to give a clear and knowledgeable answer to each of the sub-questions

Ontology/epistemology: The essay should provide a clear and knowledgeable description of the meaning of ontology/epistemology in general and for the chosen pair.

Knowledge production in human geography: The essay should demonstrate how the chosen position on ontology/epistemology has been the basis for general paradigms in Human Geography or specific research traditions within one or more research area(s) in Human Geography. The discussion is expected to provide an assessment of the importance of the position for the discipline and how this has changed over time.

Limitations: This discussion should focus on the strengths and weaknesses of the chosen position on ontology/epistemology. The discussion may do this by contrasting it with other ontological/epistemological positions and/or focus on debates and shifts in the history of modern Human Geography. Discussions that show a comprehensive overview and advanced knowledge and judgement should be rewarded.

QUESTION 2

Human geography has a strong tradition for case studies ("qualitative research" in Ragin and Amoroso's terminology), but case studies can be conducted in different ways. Discuss what it means to do a case study and what the key questions are when designing such a study. Provide a critical discussion of the strengths and limitations of case studies, for example by comparing it with comparative research and quantitative research.

Grading Guide for question 2:

The essay is expected to give a clear and knowledgeable answer to each of the sub-questions

Case study: The essay should provide a clear and knowledgeable description of the what it means to do a case study. This can for example be done by contrasting case studies to comparative and quantitative research. The answer should also identify different ways of doing case study, for example by distinguishing between interpretive case studies and case studies aimed at causal explanation, or by reviewing different typologies of case studies (illustrative/critical/paradigmatic cases, theory-building/theory-testing cases etc.). The essay should on this basis provide an identification of key design questions. Critical reflexivity and good judgement on how the choice of approach to case studies influence the responses to these design questions should be rewarded.

Strengths/limitations: The essay should identify and discuss the main strengths and limitations of case study research. This can for example be done through a comparison with quantitative and comparative research, or with reference to all or some of the goals for social research identified by Ragin and Amoroso. It may be especially relevant to discuss the strengths and weaknesses of case studies through a focus on the use of theory (i.e. questions of empirical/analytical generalization, theory-building, theory-testing, theory-informed explanation in case studies etc.). Comprehensive knowledge, critical reflexivity and good judgement on these strengths/weaknesses should be rewarded.