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

Course code and semester-year: HGO4011 – H20
Type of examination: *[underline the option that applies]*
Written school exam / take-home exam / term paper given topic / term paper self-chosen topic

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 assignment. 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 one of the questions.

Particular circumstances relating to teaching autumn 2020
Due to the pandemic and the course being offered to exchange students unable to travel to Oslo, all lectures and seminars were conducted online in different formats depending on the preferences of invited lecturers.

Question 1

Norman Blaikie identifies six pairs of ontological and epistemological positions. Among these, three are especially relevant for contemporary human geography: (1) cautious realist - falsificationism, (2) depth realist- neo-realism, and (3) idealist- constructionism. Choose one position and provide an account of its understanding of ontology and epistemology. Proceed to discuss how the chosen position has provided the basis for knowledge production in Human Geography. Finally, elaborate on strengths and limitations of the chosen position by contrasting it to one or both of the other positions.

Guidelines

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 importance 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

Describe a research topic of your own choice. Feel free to use your planned MA project and submitted concept note as point of departure, or pick any other topic. Proceed by formulating one or two research questions, and describe a research strategy (cf. different strategies for using and constructing theory covered in the course, and different methodological approaches) you believe is relevant for addressing the question(s). Identify and discuss the ontological and epistemological positions you are taking by way of the research questions themselves, and the research design. Critically assess implications of your design for which goals of social science that might be met, and what types of inferences (generalisations) that can, and cannot, be expected made on this basis.

Guidelines

As this question mobilises the candidate to reflect on core issues and choices in own research that remains to be conducted, the grading needs to take the latter into account. Still, it is expected that the candidate is able to connect one or two research questions derived from the described topic to a relevant strategy for using and constructing theory (e.g. ideal types, critical realism, grounded theory, or feminist theory) and a methodological design (e.g. quantitative, comparative, case study research). Moreover, the candidate should be able to provide knowledgeable descriptions of the meaning of ontology and epistemology, and identify the ontological (and related epistemological) taken in the design. Solid discussions of 'why' such positions are taken draw in the direction of a strong marking. The candidate is also asked to relate their described research to overall goals of social sciences, and assess what types of inferences/generalisations that might be made/drawn. The former could be done by drawing on Ragin and Amoroso where distinction are made between: i) identifying general patterns and relationships, ii) testing and refining theories, iii) making predictions, iv) interpreting culturally or historically significant phenomena, v) exploring diversity, vi) giving voice and/or vii) advancing new theories. The latter could be done by drawing on Danemark et al where distinctions are made between empiricist and realist concepts of generality, and different modes of inference. It is NOT mandatory for the candidates provide exhaustive accounts of all social science goals and different types of inferences; instead, they should be amply rewarded for ability to see how their own designs and related ontological/epistemological positions are conditioning the goals that might be met and inferences that potentially can be made.