Examination guide for TFF4005 «Theory and Method in the Study of Theology»

The course TFF4005 introduces students to research methods in the study of religion and theology, with the explicit goal to assist them in the development of your MA thesis project. It covers the development of a good research question, generating a coherent research design, collecting data, ethical challenges of research, and researchers' positionality. The course places a specific emphasis on generating a first draft of a research proposal for the master thesis.

Students undertake a portfolio exam ("mappeeksamen"). The total amount of text should be between 3000 and 4000 words long. The portfolio consists of two items: (1) research proposal for the master thesis and (2) critical reflection on challenges and research ethics.

The wording of the exam is as follows:

> "Undertake the following two tasks and submit them in one file as a portfolio:
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> 1. Draft a coherent research proposal, including (a) introduction into the research topic and preliminary review of existing research in the field, (b) research question, (c) selection and planned application of research methods, (d) references with literature quoted from the reading list of the course and literature related to the topic of the planned master thesis. The research proposal should be between 2000 and 2500 words long. It counts 70% for the final mark.
> 2. Write a critical reflection on potential challenges regarding (a) the research proposal (e.g. quality of research question, implementation of planned methods), and (b) positionality and research ethics. The reflection note should be between 1000-1500 words long. It counts 30% for the final mark.
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> Both tasks need to be submitted and all subtasks should be addressed. The total amount of words should be 3000-4000 words."

Important criteria for the evaluation should be:

In terms of the tasks, the readings and use of knowledge

- Both items/tasks of the portfolio must be submitted.
- All subtasks of the two items should be answered. If one subtask remains unanswered without a clear reason, examinants may consider lowering the grade.
- The submitted portfolio needs to reflect the tasks in terms of its scope. If the submitted texts go beyond the subtasks and show no clear relationship to them, examinants may consider lowering the grade.
- The tasks should be consistent and well-structured allowing the readers to directly identify the subtasks.
- The portfolio should summarize any readings in a correct and concise way: To what extent does the student show the ability to summarize a given argument, idea or knowledge in a concise and understandable way?

In terms of formal criteria and consistency:

- The portfolio needs to include correct references of the given readings. Any reference style can be employed but must be followed consistently.
- Writing style must be clear and use the given terms in a correct and consistent way.
- The portfolio needs to be in the set word range of 3000 to 4000 words. For longer or shorter responses, examinants may consider lowering the grade.

In terms of critical reflection:

- Well-explained critical reflections on the student's own project should be positively considered by the examinants. Potential questions that the examinants may ask with regard to this are (not all of these questions need to be answered positively for a good grading):
- To what extent does the student employ the learned knowledge to formulate their research question and develop a consistent research design?
- To what extent does the student show knowledge about existing research in the selected topic? To what extent does the student show the ability to reflect on existing research and ask critical questions about it to identify a research gap?
- To what extent does the choice of methods and research objects (e.g. sample) match with the research question?
- To what extent does the student reflect on their methodological choices and explain these?
- To what extent does the student show the ability to reflect on their own positionality with regard to the chosen topic and potential ethical issues involved in the planned research?
- To what extent does the student show the ability to identify potential risks and challenges of the research and take into account possible mitigation strategies?

In terms of grading:

An excellent answer is clearly structured, makes active and critical use of the course readings (and potentially other readings), and is polished (correct references and has only a modicum of factual or orthographic errors), communicating to the reader in a clear and concise manner. The reader should have a clear idea of what the student intends to do with their research and how they are planning to go ahead. The answer should demonstrate a sufficient degree of critical reflection to show that the student is not merely leaning on and repeating general arguments in the course literature but employs the readings in a manner relevant to their project.

An acceptable answer is lacking in structure, cohesion, and direction, but includes more or less relevant discussions on each subtask of the two main tasks. The reader should still have a clear idea about what the student wants to do. The research question and design should be relatively clear. If the answer throws doubt as to whether the student will be able to complete their research and master's thesis (and in time), it should be marked down, to give a clear indication that the student must prepare their project better.

Because this course is intended to help students begin their MA research, the student should fail on formal criteria (e.g., one of the main tasks is not answered) or if the project is clearly unfeasible and passing the exam would cause more problems than retaking the exam ("resitting the exam").