



## Guidelines for master thesis module GEO511 in Human Geography

Master students interested in writing their thesis in Human Geography are welcome to approach members of the Human Geography research groups to discuss their ideas early in the process. Possible themes can still be broad to allow working out the concrete research focus together with potential supervisors in any of the research groups. In addition, members of the research groups regularly announce topics for possible master theses on the websites of their units. These themes are introduced in a general way in order to allow for specification according to the interests of prospective applicants.

This document sets out guidelines for the subsequent steps of writing a master thesis in Human Geography. It specifies the process of:

1. Attending a human geography research colloquium
2. Writing the master thesis concept paper
3. Addressing ethical and security challenges
4. Receiving support for master thesis funding

General information on the master thesis applicable to all students at GIUZ is provided in the *Information Sheet on the Master Thesis (GEO511) and Master Exam (GEO512)* at: <http://www.geo.uzh.ch/en/studying/downloads.html>.

### 1. Attending a human geography research colloquium

#### Aims

- Students receive feedback on their planned master thesis projects from peers and other experts.
- Students deepen their knowledge on research design and implementation in human geography by discussing the projects of their peers and external guests.
- Students hone their presentation, discussion and feedback skills.

#### Conditions

- Master students are warmly invited to take part in research colloquium sessions of all human geography units at any time.
- Students writing their master thesis in human geography actively participate in the colloquium of the unit of their supervisors during at least one semester. Colloquium participation counts as part of the master thesis module GEO511 and is not awarded extra credits.
- Students present their planned master project in a presentation of 15-20 minutes, followed by a 15-20-minute discussion. The presentation may be held in either German or English.
- Students serve as discussants for the presentation of one of their peers. This involves opening the discussion with a few comments and questions on the presentation and the thesis concept.

## **Procedure**

- As soon as they have found a supervisor, students contact the person organising the research colloquium of the unit of their main supervisor to get possible dates for their presentation. The presentation is ideally scheduled once students have established their research question, theoretical approach and methodology, but before they collect data.
- Students then check the availability of their main supervisor and (external) co-supervisors who might want to attend and fix the date with them.
- At least one week before their presentation, they send their thesis concept to the colloquium organiser for distribution to all participants.
- The presentation is based on the thesis concept. It covers the research problem, positionality, research question, state of the art, theoretical approach, methodology, ethical challenges and open questions (see guidelines for the master thesis concept paper).
- After the presentation, the student receives feedback from their supervisor and they discuss how the issues raised in the discussion can best be addressed.

## **2. Writing the master thesis concept paper**

### **Aims**

The concept paper provides a concise description of the research problem, the positionality of the researcher, the state of the art, the research question, the theoretical perspective, the methodological approach and a time schedule for the master thesis. It ensures that the master project is clearly defined and realistic in view of the allocated resources and the projected time frame.

### **Procedure**

The master thesis concept paper is original, independent work of the student. It is developed in close contact with the thesis supervisor(s) and revised based on their feedback. Once the concept is finalised and accepted by the supervisor(s), supervisor(s) and student together set the official starting date of the master thesis. The student then fills in the master thesis agreement on Lean Gate ([lean-gate.geo.uzh.ch](http://lean-gate.geo.uzh.ch)) and books the master thesis module GEO511 in the module booking tool in accordance with this date<sup>1</sup>.

### *Form*

The concept paper usually has a length of 3 to 5 pages and can be written either in German or in English. It fulfils the same standards of good academic practice as any scholarly text regarding style, grammar and spelling and includes in-text referencing and a comprehensive and complete bibliography (see “Online Guidelines for Academic Research and Writing”: [www.olwa.ch](http://www.olwa.ch) or comparable sources).

### *Content*

The concept paper includes the following content (changes to the section titles and structure are of course possible).

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<sup>1</sup> Human Geography does not accept “draft concepts”, as mentioned in the GIUZ information sheet, but requires a finalised concept paper before the master agreement can be signed.

### **1 Introduction** (approx. ½ page)

This section introduces the topic, the phenomenon studied or the research problem. The introduction positions the researcher in relation to the research field and gives insight into the researcher's rationale for choosing this topic.

### **2 State of research and research question** (approx. 1-2 pages)

This section provides a first overview of the state of research on the topic. This involves discussing the existing scholarly literature in the particular research area and in related ones. If possible, this section identifies a research gap or an academic debate that the master thesis project wants to contribute to. Based on the engagement with the state of research, this section specifies the research question that the master thesis intends to answer and explains why the question is relevant. It may include additional sub-questions.

### **3 Theoretical approach** (approx. ½ page)

This section introduces the theoretical perspective that is used to approach the topic. It clarifies key concepts and terms. And it explains why the chosen perspective is adequate and helpful in answering the research question.

### **4 Research design** (approx. ½ page)

This section specifies the methods to be employed for data production and data analysis (like interviews, participant observation, or surveys). It justifies the choice of data gathering and data analysis instruments with regard to the research question. And it discusses anticipated ethical and methodological challenges.

### **5 Time plan** (in the form of a table)

This section outlines a realistic schedule for the whole master thesis project, including all necessary steps and their estimated duration. It includes buffers for unexpected developments and allows time for receiving feedback on the thesis draft by the supervisor(s) and for revisions before the final submission.

## **3. Addressing ethical and security challenges**

### **Aims**

Researchers in Human Geography often conduct fieldwork that can be challenging both on personal safety and moral grounds. The procedure outlined below serves to estimating risks of harm to participants, researchers and institutions involved in the actual fieldwork and to balance those risks against benefits that might accrue to society as outcomes of the research.<sup>2</sup>

### **Procedure**

- Students design their fieldwork based on their accepted thesis concept.
- They fill out the UZH fieldwork checklist<sup>3</sup> as well as the Human Geography field work questionnaire (see Guidelines on Ethics and Safety in Fieldwork<sup>4</sup>, section A), which addresses fundamental ethical and personal safety questions.
- Students submit these two documents to their main supervisor between 4 to 6 weeks before fieldwork departure and set up a meeting and discuss them. After the meeting, they write up

<sup>2</sup> For more information see: [http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/other/hi/ethics-guide-ethnog-anthrop\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/research/participants/data/ref/h2020/other/hi/ethics-guide-ethnog-anthrop_en.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.su.uzh.ch/activities/arbeitsicherheit/doku/Fieldwork\\_checklist-ENG\\_Feb2013.pdf](http://www.su.uzh.ch/activities/arbeitsicherheit/doku/Fieldwork_checklist-ENG_Feb2013.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.geo.uzh.ch/dam/jcr:d546eb46-376b-4109-ae9d-719d2d400f3d/Ethics\\_Guidelines.docx](https://www.geo.uzh.ch/dam/jcr:d546eb46-376b-4109-ae9d-719d2d400f3d/Ethics_Guidelines.docx)

the points of concern raised in the meeting including the agreed preventative measures and share this document with their supervisor.

- If the students or the supervisor deem it helpful, the students request a meeting with one of the Human Geography fieldwork counsellors to discuss specific points of the questionnaire or general issues in relation to field work ethics and safety.
- If students do field work in areas determined as risk-prone, they set up a research safety protocol with their supervisor (see Guidelines on Ethics and Safety in Fieldwork<sup>4</sup>, section D). For deciding whether field sites are in risk-prone areas, they consult the website of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (<https://www.eda.admin.ch/eda/en/fdfa/representations-and-travel-advice.html>).
- Before students start their fieldwork, they consult the checklist on administrative fieldwork preparation and on data protection and data management (see Guidelines on Ethics and Safety in Fieldwork<sup>4</sup>, sections B and C).
- From then onwards, they keep reflecting on ethics and safety issues throughout their research. If the need arises, they get in touch with their supervisor or with their fieldwork counsellor.

Human Geography field work counsellors:

- Hannah Hilbrandt: [hanna.hilbrandt@geo.uzh.ch](mailto:hanna.hilbrandt@geo.uzh.ch)
- Sara Landolt: [sara.landolt@geo.uzh.ch](mailto:sara.landolt@geo.uzh.ch)
- Stephan Hochleithner: [stephan.hochleithner@geo.uzh.ch](mailto:stephan.hochleithner@geo.uzh.ch)

## 4. Receiving support for master thesis funding

### Aim

The human geography units strive to support master students in covering the costs of their master thesis research projects that lie above 200 Swiss Francs.

### Procedure

- As soon as students have agreed with their supervisor on how they will collect their data, they may prepare a budget of the estimated project costs. Costs may include:
  - transportation: train and bus tickets, taxis, porters and the like, plus flights (if unavoidable);
  - accommodation: lodge, hotel or room rent, etc.;
  - assistance: salary, transportation and accommodation for a local field assistant/translator;
  - IT equipment: specialised hardware and software required for data collection and analysis;
  - other costs, if applicable.

- They send the budget to their supervisor and discuss with them which shares of the costs can be covered by the human geography unit, by other funding sources<sup>5</sup> and by the students themselves. The students let their supervisor know whether they need an advance to cover the costs. The agreed sums are then included in the finalised budget. Claiming expenses is only possible based on an agreed budget.
- After the costs incurred, the students sort their receipts in chronological order and send them as scans to the human geography administration (human-admin@geo.uzh.ch). They include their IBAN, the name and address of their bank, and their full name and private address that corresponds to their bank account. If the purpose of the expense is not immediately obvious for any of the receipts, they number them and provide a list with a brief explanation for each. Reimbursement is only possible for costs documented by original receipts.
- The reimbursement claim will then be processed by the UZH accounting system and authorised by the thesis supervisor. Within a few weeks, the money will be transferred to the student's bank account.

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<sup>5</sup> E.g. by the young researchers' fund of the UZH Geography Alumni: <https://www.geographie-alumni.uzh.ch/de/Nachwuchsf%C3%B6rderungsfonds.html>