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Student-guide Master Human Geography



2011
2012



Radboud University Nijmegen



Student guide Master Human Geography 2011-2012

This student guide contains the most important procedures, timetable and deadlines for the Master Human Geography. The first part consists of a global outline for the course *Preparing the Master Thesis*. As the master thesis is taking up a major part of this study year, you should be well aware of the importance of this course. The first blow is half the battle.

Preparing the Master Thesis

As it is the aim of this course to get you ready for starting the *opus magnus* of your university career (writing your master thesis) as soon as possible, preferably within two months, it is of **utmost importance** that you do have preliminary ideas on a possible **topic of your master thesis**. To get some 'food for thought' there is an archive available (<http://www.ru.nl/socgeo/content/courses/masterscripties.html>) containing theses from previous years. It is also the master thesis research which should be guiding the choice of elective courses, and the selection of the host organisation of the research internship (hereafter: research internship organisation). As some courses that you might wish take as an elective already start right away at the beginning of the first term (and sometimes you have to go through a quite lengthy bureaucratic procedure to gain admission to these), it is highly recommendable to make your (preliminary) choices before the start of this PreMaThe-course and consult with the master-coordinator. Also, experience shows that it might take quite some time and efforts to find a **suitable internship organisation** that also fits your research interests and where a position is available at the time you want to start your master thesis research. Therefore, we recommend you to contact your master thesis supervisor as soon as possible and discuss with him/her your ideas about your master thesis research subject and the potential internship organisations which fits this subject. There is also a list available containing organisations where students did their internships in the past (<http://www.ru.nl/socgeo/content/apprenticeshiparchive.html>). It might also be useful to start the process of applying for internship positions as soon as possible, although never contact any potential internship organisation before you have informed the master thesis coordinator dr. Martin van der Velde (he might also be able to assist you how to proceed in contacting the organisation).

Course objectives

In this course, you will learn to structurally reflect on the research design of your master thesis research, the methods used in data collection and analysis, and on the basic choices which have to be made.

Furthermore this course aims at providing insights in state of the art debates and empirical research within the chosen master specialisation and helps you to position yourself in these debates and to design your master specialisation accordingly. Whenever possible, the experiences of our own staff will be used.

Therefore this course will result in two concrete products:

1. Master Education Plan

- After completing this course you will have reflected on your own position and preferences within the field of your specialisation and you will have discussed this with your master thesis supervisor;
- (NB Students that opt for the free specialisation should have **separate approval of their core curriculum by the examination board. A plan should be submitted to this board before July 1**)
- On the basis of this reflection you will make well founded and final choices on your elective courses, the subject of your master thesis research and the selection of the research internship organisation.

2. Research proposal for the Master Thesis Research:

- After completing this course, you will have finished your own research proposal for the master thesis, including a detailed project planning. This proposal is also supposed to clarify the theoretical background of the intended master thesis. Furthermore, the research themes, research designs and lines of argumentation are reflected upon. By doing this you will be able to have a 'flying start' with your master thesis.
- The final proposal will be evaluated by the thesis supervisor and if possible by an (external) 'expert'. Before starting the actual research for your master thesis the proposal has to be graded by your supervisor as sufficient. An important focus will be on the translation of research questions into a concrete research design and how the empirical methods have been selected.

This course is an integral part of the 'rolling assignment' for those students who have opted for the dual study programme.

Teaching structure

This course consists of several plenary sessions, (master) group sessions and individual consultations (with your thesis supervisor). During the course concrete assignments will be carried out. Most of this course is dedicated to determining and formulating the research goals and methods of the master thesis. In the end this will result in a written research proposal according to a prescribed format. You will be assigned a thesis supervisor as soon as possible who will provide feedback on drafts versions. Furthermore, we will also use the expertise that you have gathered during your study so far for discussing, evaluating and (constructively) criticising the work of your fellow students.

With regard to the fact that the eventual research proposal is tied closely to the topic of the master thesis and the accompanying internship, as well as the elective courses, it is of utmost importance that choices in this respect are made as early as possible. Therefore the first weeks of the course are also used to set up your study program, especially with regard to the study load that you are going to fill yourself. Considering the internship we do realise that not everybody is able to take a decision on this at the same time. Therefore the schedule of the second part is 'individualised'. The first part will take place according to a fixed and common schedule that is the same for everyone. The schedule of the second part depends on the actual start of the internship. Approximately 10 weeks before that (based on a workload of appr. 5 hours per week), you should have started with formulating the final proposal. Of course if you have more time at your disposal, this period can obviously be proportionally shorter. When dedicating 40 hours per week to the proposal you should be able to have it ready in a week, provided that you have made good progress in the first (fixed) part of the course. Before starting the internship/thesis you must have completed all the assignments (bibliography, expert interview, etc. and proposal).

Assessment

Two compulsory assignments: Testimonial
Research-proposal: Grade (determines the final grade for the course)
This all has to be completed and graded before you are allowed to start with your internship/actual thesis.

Literature

- Stuart Aitken and Gill Valentine (2006), *Approaches to human geography 2006*. London, Sage Publications ISBN: 0-7619-4263-7
or
- Donatella della Porta and Michael Keating (2008), *Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press ISBN:978-0-521-70966-8

- Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2007), *Research Methods for Business Students*, Essex, Pearson Education ISBN: 978-0-273-70148-4 (there is also a Dutch version available which may be used as well)
- or
- Piet Verschuren and Hans Doorewaard (1999), *Designing a research project*, Utrecht, LEMMA ISBN: 90-5189-383-3 (there is also a Dutch version available which may be used as well)

For those of you who started this human geography master programme with a non-geographic background, it might appear as strange to read about typical human geographical approaches to empirical research. In fact, one encounters the similar kind of approaches in other fields of social science and you are free to have recourse to a more general introduction to social scientific approaches. Nonetheless, given that a key requirement for your master thesis is to develop and locate your own approach within existing human geographic approaches, you are strongly encouraged to become acquainted with the more specific, human geographical perspectives.

Master Education Plan

The Education and Examination Regulation of the master programme Human Geography, prescribes that each student makes, in close collaboration with the master thesis-supervisor and at an early stage in the master programme, decisions on the proposed subject of the master thesis research, as well as on the intended place of internship and the elective courses to be followed. The main purpose of this master education plan is that in the master programme the master thesis research should be guiding the whole master programme, the choice of the internship organisation and for the choice of the elective courses.

The master programme coordinator encourages students, on behalf of the examination board, to make these choices *early* and in a *well-founded* way. It is in order to allow the coordinator to oversee students' choices that an official approval by the master thesis supervisor is required. In this sense these choices are thus not totally free choices, but are assessed on whether they contribute to the deepening and/or broadening of the respective master specialisation and if they are directly functional to the master thesis research. Nevertheless, students have the opportunity to determine to a large degree the final contents of their own personal master programme.

As emphasized previously, it is important that the choices in question are made as *early* as possible, in order to enable an early start with the master thesis research and thus a longer running time for conducting and completing this research. This latter aspect is very important since experience has shown that 'theory-led empirical master thesis research' on a really academic level always takes more time than initially expected, and we do not want to compromise on the academic quality of the master thesis research. Taking decisions as early as possible is thus key to delivering a *high quality* master thesis. Of course it also gives the students a high responsibility themselves. They finally 'make or break' the quality of their master thesis research and they have the control over their own time-schedule.

Requirements for the choice of elective courses

The most important requirement is that the elective courses contribute substantially to the deepening and/or broadening of the respective master specialisation or should be directly relevant for the master thesis research. Thus they should be clearly linked to the focus of your master specialisation and should be related to the other courses. It is also possible that an elective course equips you with the necessary methodological or substantive knowledge for conducting your master thesis research; e.g. it might be necessary to know more about the region in which you will conduct your empirical research or you might need to master a special statistical technique of qualitative research method for your master thesis research. These elective courses must be of sufficient level and in most cases this means *master* level. Only in exceptional cases are bachelor courses acceptable as elective courses, e.g. if a specific statistical technique you need for your master thesis research is only offered in a bachelor

course. In some cases also a relevant bachelor course might be up-graded by the lecturer to master level, e.g. by means of an additional assignment, extra literature or term paper. In that case the lecturer should make this explicit and declare this in writing. Language courses or academic skills courses such as 'academic writing' are of course highly recommended but usually do *not* qualify as elective courses in this master programme (they can be taken extra-curricular). Note that courses which you have taken earlier in a bachelor or master programme cannot be taken into account as an elective course in this human geography master programme. If you have taken courses on master level which were not part of the earlier bachelor or master programme, and if they otherwise fulfil all requirements, you are allowed to indicate them as elective course in your current human geography master programme.

We also advise you to take the opportunity of these elective courses for expanding your horizon beyond the expertise we offer you through our staff, and thus look for relevant elective courses (perhaps in other disciplines) at other universities, other faculties and. Your master thesis supervisor is the first person you can consult and ask for advice in these respects. He/she will be able to suggest possible courses or suggest a successful search strategy and he/she should also be able to provide a first preliminary judgement if an elective course fulfils the requirements.

Master Thesis

The master thesis is the scientific report based on an external research internship. **You can start your research internship only after you have completed the course Preparing the Master Thesis**, i.e. you should have your research proposal ready before starting this phase.

Requirements for the research internship

In our human geography master programme it is a mandatory requirement that you conduct your master thesis research in the framework of a research internship with an *external* organisation. This is closely related to the objective of our master programme to show that scientific knowledge matters. Accordingly, we expect you to relate your scientific and theoretical knowledge to relevant practical problems. This implies that you learn how to translate and apply your theoretical knowledge to problems faced by a professional organisation in our field and how to translate a practical problem into a scientific theoretical research question. Self-evidently this also means that the final formulation of your master thesis research theme depends on the practical situation of your internship organisation. Furthermore, this means also that the internship organisation should be open and supportive of a scientific approach to the practical issues they are dealing with. Consequently, your research proposal guides you in finding the matching internship organisation, or the other way around, the internship organisation often provides circumstances and reasons to adapt your research proposal. It is therefore recommendable to develop your research proposal parallel to searching for a matching internship organisation.

What should be absolutely clear is that a research internship is not the same as a traineeship or as getting some professional experience, through snooping around or doing some assistance work at the internship organisation. A research internship is about conducting a *full fledged scientific (master thesis) research* in a professional organisation.

An important advantage of doing your master thesis research in the framework of a research internship at a practical professional organisation is also that many of your future employers see it as a great plus if you can show that you have seen more than just the inside of a university.

Formally it is required to do a research internship of at least three months (full time, or an equivalent proportion part-time). However, a longer internship might be more advantageous. It gives you more opportunity to 'get used' to your new working place and colleagues, without straining the time budget of your research too much. And since the internship organisation

usually also covers the material costs of your empirical field work for your master thesis research, it is also recommendable to choose for an internship which is long enough to finish your whole master thesis research, including the final writing process, in the framework of your internship. Finally, any serious theory-led and methodologically thorough empirical research will need more than three months, so do not overestimate yourself. Rather we suggest you take your time and produce top quality.

Let us remind you that also other universities can act as an internship organisation. If they for example have a running research programme of which your master thesis research could be part of, and given they can provide the necessary local supervision, it might be feasible to do your research internship there. This is also an opportunity in the framework of an Erasmus exchange programme.

In the same way, but only in a very exceptional situation, you could also do a research internship in the framework of a running research project of our own department. However, this is certainly not the purpose of the *external* internship. Also, in contrast to most external organisations, we will not be able to pay any internship allowance.

Your master thesis supervisor can help you finding an appropriate internship organisation or can assist you in your search process. This search and application process can be time consuming and therefore the sooner you start the better. Remember that the master thesis coordinator Martin van der Velde should be consulted before you contact a potential internship organisation, as he can help you making contact in the right way with the right persons. He also has an archive of earlier internship organisations.

Note also the following:

- The external research internship organisation designates a local supervisor who has sufficient expertise in the field of research and who can advise the student both on contents and on the research process. The local supervisor should also introduce the external organisation to the student and let the student participate in local activities as far as possible and as far as this is useful for conducting the master thesis research.
- The master thesis research should contribute to the fulfilment of the aims and final qualifications of the master programme and should be of academic and scientific level.
- It is useful if the master student can participate in activities within the internship organisation that are only indirectly relevant for the master thesis research, such as: internal work-meetings, conferences, participation in other research activities, consultancy work, etc. These kinds of accompanying activities should, however, not have any negative effects for the conduction of the master thesis research.
- The initiative for making appointments with local or university supervisors lies with the master student himself/herself. So in this respect the master student is himself/herself responsible for the quality and intensity of the supervision of the master thesis research. The students should thus, without being asked, regularly report to the local and university supervisors and arrange bi- or trilateral meetings with them. Note that supervisors might have full calendars or be abroad for conferences etc., so make sure that you arrange these meetings well in advance, or set up a fixed schedule of meetings from the beginning (cancelling is easier than finding new dates).
- It is crucial that the master student timely signals and discusses any problems or questions that arise and that are essential for the progress of the research. So the master students are responsible for 'ringing the bells' in time.

Requirements for the master thesis

As mentioned above the master thesis research is conducted in the framework of an external research internship of which the master thesis is the scientific report of¹. With this research you show that you are able to think through and analyse a specific problem in a scientific way, apply your academic knowledge and skills to a concrete practical problem and conduct a full

¹ Ideally this thesis should be finished by the time the internship ends. However, practice shows that many students need some extra time when finalizing their thesis.

fledged scientific research project. This implies that the perspective and theme of your master thesis research are on the one hand closely linked to the aims and objectives of the master programme in human geography, to the knowledge and skills you have acquired and preferably also to the themes and approaches of the Nijmegen research programme SCAPES, but on the other hand it will also be linked to the problem which the professional internship organisation is confronted with and wants to investigate. The final thematic focus and approach of your master thesis research, therefore, is the result of joint consultations between external internship organisation, master thesis supervisor and master student. It is self-evident that the master thesis research will have to fulfil all the requirements of scientific research.

The master thesis is supposed to be a scientific report on a 'theoryled empirical research' project. It is the acid test for the objectives of the master education programme. It should show that you are able to set up and conduct a scientific research project in the field of human geography, with which you contribute to the current scientific theoretical debates, and with which you contribute to the solution of a current societal problem. In contrast to the bachelor thesis you are expected to position yourself with your master thesis in the debates within the field and to develop your own ideas and contribute to the advancement of scientific knowledge in an innovative way. This implies that you show that you are able to critically reflect on these debates, and locate your own perspective in these debates in a well-founded way. These and other, more standard state of the art requirements are also reflected in the following assessment form used by the supervisor and the 'second reader' of your master thesis. You can use it as a guideline for writing your master thesis.

Making the thesis publicly accessible

Scientists do not just research for themselves to grasp 'reality' (as far as possible and to the extent it exists), but they also make 'public' statements so that colleagues can assess their scientific accuracy. That is why they publish (i.e. to make things public) the results of their research. The degree to which scientific papers are cited by colleagues, is therefore a quality measure used in scientific research. This means that your 'proof of scientific capacity' i.e. your thesis is intended for the public and should be published, maybe not on paper, but digitally on the website(s) of the department or the so-called repository of the university, so that everyone who is interested in it has access to it. Keep this in mind. We also ask you to fill out a consent form when your thesis is finished (which is available on BlackBoard)

	<4	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Contents:								
Foundation of societal relevance:								
Foundation of scientific relevance:								
Clear formulation of problem, objectives and research questions:								
Critical discussion of relevant theories:								
Argumentation behind choice of theoretical framework:								
Critical discussion of relevant methodologies and research methods:								
Argumentation for choice of methodological approach and research methods:								
Collection of necessary data:								
Systematic interpretation of results in relation to research questions:								
Well underpinned conclusions in relation to research questions:								
Originality of contents:								
(Original) contribution to further development of theory:								
Recommendations for praxis:								
Critical reflection on limits of own research, results and recommendations:								
Formal:								
Logical structure:								
Clear (analytical and normative) line of argumentation:								
Total length within the norm:								
Correct way of referencing, quoting, and bibliographing, etc.:								
Comprehensibility, lucidity, directedness, and conciseness:								
Reader-friendliness:								
Correct use of language, style:								
Originality of form:								
Grade for master thesis itself								

Process: (only for supervisor)								
Own initiative and creativity of student:								
Dealing with critiques and suggestions:								
Live up to deadlines and agreements:								
Length of process in relation to quality of product:								
Dealing with special circumstances:								
Possible adaptation of grade for master thesis for reasons of process (max. +/- 1 grade point)								

Note that the final grade is not an arithmetic mean of the grades on specific aspects, since the weight given to the different aspects may vary from thesis to thesis, as they might be quite different in their aim and objectives.

Master research abroad

Students are encouraged to conduct research abroad as far as feasible and as far as it contributes to the aims of the specific master specialisation. Note, however, that:

- Finding a host organisation for your research internship abroad is usually more time consuming than organising a research internship in the Netherlands. It is, therefore, recommended to discuss this option with your master thesis supervisor as early as possible.
- You need to have sufficient language skills, to conduct research abroad and to write a master thesis in English.
- As other universities abroad also qualify as external research internship organisations, you might want to make use of exchange programmes in order to obtain funding and to conduct

your master thesis research abroad. Very often, if you make use of an exchange programme, the guest university offers you a list of courses (offered in English) that you could take at that university. 'Master thesis' usually is not listed as such. Nevertheless, also the master thesis formally has the same status as a 'course'. The only difference is that a master thesis is not collectively 'taught' but individually 'supervised'. So even if it is not listed as a course which you could take, it might be worthwhile exploring what kind of human geographic research (or related research e.g. in the field of political geography and conflict resolution) at the guest university is being conducted, and if you, with your master thesis research could participate in that research. Of course this also implies that you will need to find a local 'supervisor' who is willing to arrange this for you and to offer you the necessary facilities to conduct your master thesis research in this framework. If you have arranged this, it is usually possible to make the 'master thesis' also part of your learning agreement.

Formal criteria

Language

The thesis must be written in English. Only in exceptional cases is it possible to submit a thesis in Dutch or another language. To be able to do so you need to present strong arguments and submit a written request to the examination board. Even if a deviation from the above rule is accorded, the thesis has to contain an executive summary in English.

Structure

A standardised structure for a master thesis is:

- Cover page (which is numbered I, although page number is not shown)
- Title page
- Preface
- Table of contents
- (list of figures and list of tables)
- Until here these front material pages are numbered in roman numbers, i, ii, iii, etc)
- The front material is followed by the actual chapters (of which chapter 1 is the introduction) (At the beginning of chapter 1 numbering of pages starts over again with 1, 2, 3, 4, ... in normal numbers, each chapter starts on a new uneven numbered page, but sections and paragraphs within a chapter can be continuous and need not to start on a new page)
- Bibliography
- Appendices
- (Executive) summary (not longer than 2 A4 pages).

Usually each chapter and subsections of chapters are numbered in the following way:

1. title of chapter (level 1)

1.1 title of section of level 2

1.1.1 title of subsection of level 3

subtitle of section of level 4

xxxxxxxxxxxxx

xxxxxxxxxxxxx

1.2 ...

2. ... etc.

(note where these numbers are followed by a period and where they are not). Do not use more than three numbered levels.

Size/Length

The size of the thesis is minimally 40 and maximally 80 A4 pages, including figures, tables and appendices. Only in exceptional cases and with explicit consent of the master-thesis supervisor can the master thesis be longer. Assuming an average of 500 words per page, this implies a length of 20.000-40.000 words.

Way of quoting and referencing

There are many systems for quotation and referencing. We highly prefer and recommend the APA-standard (<http://apastyle.apa.org/>). Take care to be very systematic and precise from the

beginning in this respect, because this can save you lots of time at the end of the process. Do not invent your own system.

Finalising and grading your master thesis

Also for finalising and grading your master thesis a number of rules should be taken into account:

- At a certain moment during the supervision process the master thesis supervisor (in consultation with the master student) decides that the draft-version of the master thesis is ripe for grading.
- Usually the supervisor asks a colleague who has sufficient expertise in the specific field of the master thesis to be 'second reader' (this 'second reader' should be affiliated to the Nijmegen School of Management. In the exceptional case that the reader is not a NSM staff member, a reasoned request should be approved by the examination board). Both the supervisor and second reader independently of each other assess the master thesis according to the assessment form (see above). They discuss their judgement with each other. On the basis of these results the supervisor determines the final grade for the master thesis and reports this grade to the student administration.
- The formal regulations allow two weeks (both for the supervisor and the second reader) for grading the master thesis after receiving the final master thesis. To make sure that they are available for assessing your master thesis it is important to make early arrangements about the date you will hand in the final version of your thesis. From mid July until mid August in principle no theses are graded.
- If possible the supervisor will motivate and discuss the results of the assessment of the master thesis with the student.
- After finalising the graded version, the master student hands in *four hard-copies of the final version of the master thesis*. These four copies are meant for the supervisor, the 'second reader', the library and the archive of the master programme. In addition the master student hands in *one electronic copy* as a word-file or as a pdf-file, for publishing on the departmental website and the Radboud Repository and a completed consent form for publication. Without these copies and the form the results of the master thesis will not be passed on to the administration!!!

Note also that you will also have to have successfully completed ALL other obligations of your master programme including elective courses, etc. before your master thesis supervisor can grade your master thesis!!!

- Finally we would like to stimulate you to take the initiative to publish an article about your master thesis research in a scientific or popular journal or newspaper. It might be useful and helpful to do this in co-authorship with your master thesis supervisor. Students with a high grade for their master thesis are also encouraged to submit their thesis for the different master-thesis prizes available.
- As soon as you have successfully completed the whole master programme you can request the master graduation. To do so you need to take the following steps (see also http://www.ru.nl/fm/studenten/onderwijsinformatie/aanvragen_diploma's_0/master/ (in Dutch)):
 - First you have to request, at least six weeks before the official graduation ceremony, a full grade list and the official confirmation by the examination board that you have fulfilled all obligations,.
 - This grade list and confirmation has to be passed on to the Central Examination Office to be able to request your graduation.
 - The date of the confirmation of the examination board is also the official date of graduation.
- Usually about four to five times per year a public graduation ceremony takes place in the framework of a special meeting of the examination board. The dates for these graduations are usually published on the website of the Nijmegen School of Management and/or on the blackboard site of the faculty.
- The time between the request for graduation and the graduation ceremony is *at least 30 days*. Therefore you need to make sure you have all the paperwork done well in advance.
- Taking into account the two week processing time of your request for the grade list and confirmation of the examination board, this implies that if you have fulfilled your last obligations after the 15th of the month, your graduation date will be dated in the month

thereafter, which in turn implies that also for that month you are required to pay your tuition fee. Only the month August is an exception to this rule. In August the date of your last examination (usually the assessment of your master thesis) will also be the official date of graduation.

- During the graduation ceremony each candidate is individually called to the fore. By answering a few questions posed by their master thesis supervisor they can explain to their colleagues, family and friends what their master research was about, how they conducted their research and to which conclusions it has led. This is followed by a brief *laudatio* by the master thesis supervisor after which the diploma is handed over by the chairman of the examination board.

To summarise some important dates and activities for the upcoming year

General

If you opt for the Free Specialisation you should send a proposal for the core curriculum for approval to the examination board before **July 1**.

Preparing the Master Thesis

- Week 35: Start Master-programme
Have your 'First Thoughts' ready (send to the course coordinator)
- Week 41: Have your "Autobiography" (incl. a letter of application for the internship) ready (send to the thesis supervisor)
- Week 44: Final Master Education Plan (uploaded to BlackBoard)
- Week 51: "Return"-day

Master Thesis

1. Have all the assignments for the Preparing the Master Thesis-course ready and graded before actually starting your internship.
2. After finishing the thesis, hand in two copies with your thesis supervisor.
3. When the thesis is approved and graded by the supervisor, hand in two hardcopies, an electronic version (one file in Word or PDF-form) and a completed consent form with the master-thesis coordinator (Martin van der Velde).
4. Your grade will only be passed on to the student-administration if you have fulfilled the requirement in point three.
5. Start up the process to get your official Master certificate (see for instructions: http://www.ru.nl/fm/studenten/onderwijsinformatie/aanvragen_diploma's_0/master/ (in Dutch)).