

# HGO4010 Assessment Exercise 1:

## WRITE A RESEARCH PROPOSAL

### 1. Instruction to students

Your assignment is to write a research proposal, based on a self-determined research topic.

The research proposal will give you an opportunity to show your ability to apply your *methodological competence* to a self-determined topic, either based your own MA project or another research project you would like to do.

The purpose of a research proposal is to account for methodological choices prior to conducting data collection and analysis. Consequently, you will use phrases like “I will..” and “I intend to..”, in contrast to the language of a research report, which accounts for these choices in retrospect.

You will be assessed on your ability to make methodological choices, and to reflect and communicate these choices in a convincing manner. In other words, this is not a test of your understanding of a particular research *topic*, but you will still need to offer a minimum of background information and theoretical context to let the reader assess the suitability of your research design.

The text cannot exceed 3000 words. It can be structured as you see fit, but should include the following elements:

- A brief background to the topic
- Some indication as to how your proposed research can be located in the academic literature
- A problem statement or research question
- A description of the overall research design and a justification of its suitability
- An account of your data collection strategy and a justification of why this is the best way to investigate your question
- An account for your data analysis strategy and a justification of why this is appropriate given your research question, empirical material and theoretical context
- A reflection anticipating and acknowledging practical challenges and ethical dilemmas and discussing how these are best solved
- An evaluation of the rigour of your proposed research design

You do not need to specify timeframe or budget in this proposal, but you should design a research project that can be carried out by a single researcher with resources comparable to an MA student. Follow department guidelines for academic citations.

### 2. Examiner's guide

As an examiner, you will assess the overall quality of the research proposal in light of the instructions given above. Students are likely to use their own research project as a basis for the proposal. In some cases, TIK students will either hand in similar-looking proposal (because they write their MA projects in pairs), or identical proposals (but then as a 4,500 words text).

While the points above are relatively self-explanatory, and you are advised to consult with the readings (the Hay [2016] book as well as the articles guiding each seminar), a couple of points require some further explanation.

As for ethical guidelines, the students have been discussing unequal power relations, informed consent, confidentiality and anonymity, NSD guidelines, building trust in the field, revealing your subjectivity etc.

As for rigour, the students of 2019, 2020 and 2021 have themselves suggested criteria for incorporating rigour into a research design, based on their perusal of a variety of proposals by staff at ISS, TIK, STK (gender studies) and OLA. These are as follows:

- **The best proposals present a coherent research design**
  - This includes formulating research questions that are consistent with the choice of design, collection and analysis
  - The could include a motivation for the study's relevance
  - This could also include letting appropriate theory inform research questions
  - This could include locating your study in relation to previous research
- **The best proposals have a plan for how rigour is incorporated into the design**
  - This could include an awareness of basic principles of rigour in qualitative research
  - This could also include suitable checks and balances with the interpretative community and the research field
  - This could including triangulating sources or perspectives, and making sure you achieve a degree of representation of the subject(s) you intend to study
  - This could also include having a strategy for analysing qualitative data
- **The best proposals should discuss strengths and weaknesses of the chosen data collection strategy**
  - This could also include reflecting on choice of research subjects, and how it will affect findings, and issues of access
  - This can also include demonstrating the ability to foresee possible problems of a logistical or ethical nature
- **The best proposal demonstrate an awareness of the ethical implications of the proposed research**

# HGO4010 Assessment Exercise 2:

## PLANNING FOR EMERGENCE IN AN EMERGENCY

### 1. Instruction to students (sent out at the start of the semester)

The case problem exam question will be revealed to you on April 16 at 10:00 AM. This marks the start of the 10-day home exam period with a submission deadline on April 26 at 12:15 PM.

The research proposal will give you an opportunity to show your ability to apply your methodological competence to a pre-given topic. As with the research proposal, you will be assessed on your ability to make methodological choices, and to reflect and communicate these choices in a convincing manner. In other words, this is not a test of your understanding of the details of the subject matter, but on your ability to apply your methodological competence to a context somebody else has chosen for you.

The best preparation for the case problem is an active participation in group and individual exercises throughout the semester. The text cannot exceed 3000 words. It can be structured as you see fit, as long as you answer the question given to you.

### 2. Exam question (announced at the start of the exam period)

Your assignment is to demonstrate your ability to tackle a practical methodological situation.

You tackle the case problem by writing a 3000-word text written as a retrospective reflection the choices you have made in a hypothetical situation. Write as if you evaluate your research process in hindsight, using the same writing format and retrospective style that is common in a methods chapter of a master thesis.

BRIEF

At the time of the covid-19 shutdown, you are more than half a year into your MA degree, and have constructed a research design based on the following research question:

- **What characterises the relationship between MA students and academic staff at the University of Oslo?**

You have already made yourself acquainted with the relevant literature, read up on articles discussing concepts such as the research–teaching nexus, staff-student collaborations, and the scholarship of teaching and learning characterising the university model of higher education.

For your methodological design, you have devised a data collection strategy based on focus groups and observation in two departments across different faculties. Due to the nature of the research question, you are interested in group dynamics, and in particular how students self-regulate in the presence of staff. Therefore, you have set up three sets of focus groups: i) one with students only, ii) one with staff only and iii) one with students and staff co-represented.

In addition, you plan to be present and observe the introduction meeting for new MA students and a social event at each of the two departments where MA students are invited. Your design plan for *emergence* in the sense that you have sequenced the observational events and the different kinds of

focus groups so that they will inform each other – in other words, what you learn about your research question from some of the data can help you to conduct further data collection.

#### CASE PROBLEM

Due to the corona virus outbreak, you are suddenly faced with state-sanctioned mobility restrictions and social distancing requirements. Due to these restrictions, the in-person focus groups are advised against and the observation events are cancelled. Neither are likely to take place in the period of your planned data collection.

Describe how you dealt with the situation, in retrospect, and in particular the following considerations: Did the situation make you reformulate the research question? How did you revise your data collection strategy? How did your revised data collection strategy allow you to develop emergent themes?

### 3. Examiner's guide

As the exam is a test of the students' ability to combine knowledge from different parts of the curriculum and seminar series, and explicitly asks students to demonstrate practical methodological abilities, it is very hard to assess exactly what the best assignments would look like. Students would have to think creatively and independently, and I think this ability is more important in the overall assessment than detailed knowledge of particular issues. The best assignments would solve the case problem with a combination of alternative methods and provide an honest assessment of the thought exercise.

As for rigour, the students of 2019, 2020 and 2021 have themselves suggested criteria for evaluating rigour retrospectively in a report on conducted research. These criteria are based on their perusal of a set of MA thesis in Human Geography, as well as in TIK-, STK- and OLA-related fields. These criteria include:

- **The best reports show clear and open reporting of methodological choices and practices**
  - o This could include being clear on what kind of interpretation framework is used
  - o This could include clarifying alternative choices based on issues of access
- **The best reports should demonstrate reflexive management, by showing how the researcher reflected on and adapted to dilemmas (cf. the 'case problem')**
  - o This could also include relevant checks and balances with your interpretative community and your research field
  - o This could include referring to memos, a research diary or other techniques documenting flexibility and reflexivity along the process
  - o This could include demonstrating how ethical dilemmas were dealt with through open reporting
- **The best reports should demonstrate flexibility and sensitivity to emergent themes throughout the process**
  - o This could include accounting for the experiences of agents that it portrayed in the research
- **The best reports should be explicit on issues of rigour, not assume these virtues implicitly**
  - o This could include recognising researcher influence
  - o This could include showing how perspectives and/or sources were triangulated
  - o This could include demonstrating transferability by contextualising the case in the field of study
- **The best reports combine creativity and rigour**