Master Seminar Sociology: From Theory to Research
Master Thesis
Programme: MSc Sociology
Academic year: 2016/2017 (Unit1 and 2)
Course number: 400816-2016-2017
ECTS: 12 (9 ECTS in Unit1 and 3 ECTS in Unit2)
(1 ECTS = 28 hours of work)
Linked to course: 400991 Master's Thesis Sociology
(24 ECTS divided between Unit2 (6), Unit3 (9) and Unit4 (9))

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Objectives

The curriculum of the Sociology master has a strong link with the research program of the Sociology Department. We expect from the master's students that they contribute autonomously to this research program. The master seminar is the bridge between the 4 courses in the master, the research program and the master's thesis.

The objectives of the master seminar are:

1. To fresh-up academic and research skills. The purpose of this part of the master seminar is to help the students to improve their ability to communicate ideas and findings in written English.
2. To get acquainted with the research program of the Sociology Department.
3. To identify relevant literature for systematic reviews of a given topic. Students learn to critically read and evaluate sociological, quantitative research articles. From these articles, students will be able to extract relevant information, which has to be systematically summarized.
4. To get acquainted with state of the art topics in sociological research, e.g., causal analysis, micro-macro questions and the application of (statistical) multilevel models. Students will learn to formulate adequate (multilevel) hypotheses and to test these using tabular analysis and linear (multilevel) regression techniques. The emphasis will be on applying research methods in a hands-on training that teaches students how to answer interesting questions empirically.

5. Students learn to develop innovative, scientifically and societally relevant research question based on literature reviews, which are the basis for the Individual Research Proposal, the start of the master's thesis.
6. Finally, students learn how to critically read a piece of academic writing and how to formulate and provide constructive feedback to each other's work

Contents

In the first three weeks of unit 1, there will be a refresher of basic statistical analyses. During week 4, there will be presentations of the research topics covered by members of the Sociology Department.

Starting from week 4 (until the third week of unit 2), there will be six half-day workshops (introductory lecture, supervised lab) on several more advanced statistical techniques. During the lecture, we will discuss (1) what kind of data we need to answer the research question and (2) which statistical technique is appropriate for testing the hypothesis for this kind of question. Subsequently, we will study an example of this technique in SPSS during the computer lab. After that the students have to write a short paper carrying out analyses on a given data set. A few examples of questions we may cover: Are religious people less in favor of legal abortions than non-religious people? What is the effect of the social status of the family of origin on the educational level that people attain? Is this effect diminishing over time? And is this effect different in different countries? Is this because some countries are more modernized than others?

Starting from week 5 of unit 1 until week 5 in unit 2 students attend workgroups that further refine their research skills. First, students learn how to find and critically read relevant quantitative empirical articles. Students will look at articles and discuss the main characteristics. Criteria to assess the quality of articles are introduced and students practice to identify the most relevant information in an article. Focusing on quantitative empirical articles, students learn to systematically summarize previous literature. Second, students use the knowledge on systematically summarizing previous literature in relation to their chosen topic for the master thesis and they provide an overview of the state of the art for this topic. Based on this review, students learn to develop innovative research questions. In addition, students practice academic writing, get acquainted with various resources and tools for academic research and develop skills to critically read and provide feedback on various academic texts.

Starting from unit 2, we will develop a thesis subject and students will get a supervisor to develop their Research Proposal and the Theory chapter of their thesis. We will pay attention to: the methodology of problem selection and formulation, the methodology of theory construction and modelling and the methodology of research designs. During the seminar, students write their individual research proposal. The research proposal should contain a theoretical foundation of the research subject, leading to a problem definition, research questions and hypotheses. It also should contain an overview of the data(-base) and the research methods and techniques to be used. The research proposal will be submitted to the thesis supervisor and the second reader of the thesis. The product is an approved research proposal and first draft of the theory chapter.

In units 3 and 4, there will be seminars to support the analysis for the thesis. For the students that follow the Extended Master program, there will be additional seminars organized in units 1 and 2 of the academic year 2017-2018.

Preliminary Schedule

These are the topics / themes covered during the course's sessions. This is a preliminary schedule that is subject to adjustments.

Date	Type	Lecturer	Theme	Topic
29-8-2016	OV	PA; IvD	General information	Introduction to the Master program
29-8-2016	HC	LH	General information	The Extended Master program
29-8-2016				After 16:00 drinks at Esplanade bar (campus)
30-8-2016	LA	TR	Statistical training	Introduction
2-9-2016	LA	RL	Statistical training	Table Analysis
6-9-2016	LA	RL	Statistical training	Regression Analysis
16-9-2016	LA	TR	Statistical training	Multiple Regression – dummy variables and interactions
20-9-2016	LA	RL	Statistical training	Path Analysis
20-9-2016	HC	IvD	IRP preparation	Get to know the Sociology department
28-9-2016	LA	RL	Statistical training	Reliability and Factor Analysis
29-9-2016	LA	IvD	Academic skills	Critically reading an article
4-10-2016	LA	RL	Statistical training	Logistic regression
6-10-2016	LA	IvD	Academic skills	More on critical reading
11-10-2016	LA	RL	Statistical training	Multinomial Logistic Regression
13-10-2016	LA	IvD	Academic skills	Quality of articles and literature reviews
20-10-2016	LA	IvD	Academic skills	Tools and skills for academic writing
2-11-2016	HC	IvD	IRP preparation	The Individual Research Proposal
09-11-2016	HC	IvD	IRP preparation	Developing new research questions
10-11-2016	LA	TR	Statistical training	Multilevel Analysis I
16-11-2016	HC	IvD	IRP preparation	Data sources for your research
17-11-2016	LA	TR	Statistical training	Multilevel Analysis II
23-11-2016	HC	IvD	IRP preparation	Research design and causation
30-11-2016	HC	IvD	IRP preparation	Peer review and feed-back

Notes: RL = Ruud Luijkx; IvD = Ioana van Deurzen; TR = Tim Reeskens; PA: Peter Achterberg; LH = Loek Halman.

Specifics

Class attendance

Attendance is mandatory for all sessions that are booked as labs (LA), but strongly advised for all meetings.

Master thesis supervision

The Individual Research Proposal (the IRP) is an important step toward writing the master thesis. Students write the IRP under the guidance of their thesis supervisor. In order to facilitate finding a thesis supervisor, a meeting is planned on **20 September**. During this meeting, members of the Sociology Department present their research interests. Students try to align their research interest to a specific supervisor by sending an e-mail with a preliminary research question and preferred supervisor to Ioana van Deurzen.

Deadline for delivering preliminary research question and preferred supervisor: by **October 21 2016**, for the students following the regular master program and by **21 January 2017**, for the students following the Extended Master program. Decision regarding the main supervisors will be communicated within a week after these deadlines.

Assessments

The final grade of this course consists of several parts and the grade / evaluation for each part needs to be sufficient (either a 6 or pass):

- Students will write six individual short papers demonstrating the statistical skills acquired during the course. The average grade for these short papers accounts for 50% of the final grade.
    - o In case the average grade is lower than 6, students can improve their grade by writing a separate paper. The deadline for delivering the paper is **January 27 2017** for all students.
- Students write a literature review that demonstrate their skills of critical reading, integrating literature and developing novel research questions. The grade for this literature review accounts for 50% of the final grade.
    - o Deadline for delivering the review of the literature*:* by **18 December 2016** for the students following the regular master program and **March 5 2017** for the students following the Extended Master program. In case students receive a grade lower than 6 for the submitted literature review, they have the possibility to resubmit a revised version. The deadline for the revised version is **January 27 2017** for the students following the regular master program and **21April 2017** for the students following the Extended Master program.
- The evaluation of the Individual Research Proposal has to be positive (pass).
    - o Deadline for delivering the IRP: by **15 January 2017** for the students following the regular master program and **April 9 2017** for the students following the Extended Master program. The IRP will be discussed with the supervisor and the second reader, who evaluate it. The appointments for discussing the IRP are made within 2 weeks after the deadline. In case the IRP is evaluated as having an insufficient quality ("fail"), students need to revise and resubmit a new version within 3 weeks.
- Students make a presentation of their thesis that needs to be evaluated positively (pass).
    - o Presentation day: **around late May 2017** for the students following the regular master program.
        - ▪ If the presentation is not satisfactory, students can re-do it during the presentation day schedules by end August 2016.
- Students will practice their critical reading and giving feedback skills by reviewing the work of co-students. Students need to receive a pass evaluation.
    - o Students will act as reviewers of their fellow peers work during the IRP preparation meetings and also during the presentation day.

The master thesis – some procedural issues

Students write a master thesis based on autonomously undertaken scientific research in the field of Sociology. In the master thesis, the different stages of sociological analysis must be advanced, but some stages might be more emphasized than others. Consequently, a thesis can have a more empirical theoretical accent with scientifically relevant conclusions or can be a sociological analysis of a social or practice problem and existing interventions leading to relevant policy conclusions.

Students conduct the research that lead to their master thesis under supervision of a member of the Sociology department. The development of the IRP is also undertaken under

supervision of the master thesis supervisor. A second reader will be appointed for each thesis. The role of the second reader is to read and evaluate the IRP and read and evaluate the final version of the master thesis. For the students that follow a double degree program, the second reader is selected from the partner institution.

For the students that want to finish their program **before August 31st 2017**, there are two moments when they can deliver and defend their thesis: June 2017 and August 2017. If you decide to deliver your thesis in June, you will have a second chance in August. However, if you decide to deliver your thesis in August and fail, you will not have a second chance this academic year.

June 2017

- Students will make a presentation of their thesis (late May 2017, date will be communicated on time). After passing the presentation/questions, the final grade for the master seminar can be set;
- Thesis has to be handed in to supervisor and second reader on **June 23rd 9:00 the latest**; students need to arrange details with supervisor;
- Secretary will make an appointment for the discussion of the thesis in the last week of June (or early July);
- if you fail, you have to hand in the revised version on **August 22nd the latest**; this version will be only graded, not discussed;
- If you want to go for a higher grade, hand in also before **August 22nd**. But remember a higher grade can only be obtained on the basis of own improvements, not on the basis of the comments you got from your supervisor or second reader;
- You will need to send a copy of final thesis in pdf to Els.Kusters@uvt.nl .

August 2017

- thesis has to be handed by **August 21nd the latest**--arrange details with supervisor;
- students have to do a presentation and comment the thesis of another student: session will be organized in **the week of 21nd August**. After passing the presentation/questions, the final grade for the master seminar can be set;
- there will be a discussion with supervisor and second reader **before September 1st**;
- when failed the next hand in of theses is in **December 2017**;
- You will need to send a copy of final thesis in pdf to Els.Kusters@uvt.nl.

Suggested literature / resources

The suggested literature will be posted timely on BB or will be communicated during the scheduled meetings.