

SCHOOL OF GEOGRAPHY AND THE ENVIRONMENT



# MPhil GEOGRAPHY & THE ENVIRONMENT

## COURSE HANDBOOK 2011/12







## CONTENTS

<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>2</b>
1.2 School of Geography and the Environment	2
1.3 Oxford Learning Environment	3
<b>COURSE INFORMATION</b>	<b>4</b>
2.1 Aims/Objectives	4
2.2 Course Description	4
<b>COURSE ASSESSMENT</b>	<b>5</b>
3.1 Overview	5
3.2 Supervision of the Course	5
3.2 Written Examination	5
3.3 Elective Modules	5
3.4 Thesis	6
3.5 Thesis planning and time-line	7
3.6 Arrangements for Re-assessment	7
3.7 Submission Deadlines	8
3.8 Penalties relating to late submissions	8
3.9 Plagiarism	9
3.10 Role of External Examiners, Colleges and Proctors	9
<b>TRANSFER TO THE DPHIL PROGRAMME</b>	<b>10</b>





## INTRODUCTION

### 1. Course Introduction

Students studying for the MPhil in Geography and the Environment follow the course of study for either the MSc in Water Science, Policy and Management, MSc in Nature, Society and Environmental Policy or the MSc in Biodiversity, Conservation and Management. Details of these taught components of the MPhil are specified each of the three course handbooks of these MSc's. This handbook should be read in conjunction with the course handbook of the MSc course you are taking in your first year. It sets out the aims of the MPhil course and how the degree of Master of Philosophy differs from an MSc degree. Crucially, this document includes important information about the structure of assessment, submitting coursework, thesis guidelines, attending examinations and entry to our DPhil programme should this be something you wish to consider. You should read through the handbook carefully and ensure that you understand your obligations throughout the course. We will provide you with more detailed material for particular parts of the course as appropriate during the year.

Most of all we would like to thank you for choosing to come to Oxford to study for the MPhil in Geography and the Environment. We hope that your two years in Oxford will be a formative and memorable time. Your respective MSc teams will help you get the most from the taught part of the course and help you find an appropriate supervisor for your thesis.

As research council accredited training programmes, the MSc's Nature, Society and Environmental Policy and the Biodiversity, Conservation and Management, as well as the MSc in Water Science, Policy and Management place particular emphasis on the development of research skills and competence in key research methods which will prepare you for your thesis research.

### 1.2 School of Geography and the Environment

The School of Geography and the Environment (SoGE) and its associated research institutes based in Oxford University Centre for the Environment (OUCE), is an internationally-recognised centre of excellence for environmental research and scholarship. The historical origins of OUCE lie in the former School of Geography, the first geography school to be established in Britain over 100 years ago by Halford Mackinder. The School was established through a co-operative effort involving the Royal Geographical Society and Oxford University. From these deep roots the School has grown and prospered. The ethos of the SoGE is to promote research that is bold, innovative and challenging while remaining committed to the highest standards of scholarship.

Today, the School of Geography and the Environment is one of the leading centres of scholarship for environmental and social change. It has been a leading global institution in developing cutting edge research not only in the UK, but around the world. The SoGE is committed to training a new generation of graduate students in the core research fields of environmental science and human geography and in the new and exciting interdisciplinary research frontiers that exist between and across these disciplines.



The School of Geography and the Environment is home to the internationally recognised Environmental Change Institute (ECI), the Oxford Centre for Water Research (OCWR), along with cross-departmental research groups, such as the Climate Systems and Policy, Oxford Centre for Tropical Forests and the Global Environmental Change and Food Systems (GECAFS) international project office. Creative combination of theory and practice provides a relevant and fertile training ground for our postgraduates. Our research programmes span the globe with researchers working in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and North America along with a strong record in European studies and, of course, the UK.

## 1.3 Oxford Learning Environment

### 1.3.1 Learning Approach

During your time at Oxford you will experience a wide range of different formats and styles of teaching from small group discussions to field visits, and from traditional lectures to public talks by some of the world's leading academics. In keeping with Oxford's tradition of academic freedom, the exact nature of the learning experience within any particular tutorial, seminar or lecture is left to the discretion of the lecturer which, we hope, produces a productive variety of learning experiences. Yet, the most typical forum for teaching and learning remains the lecture although there is immense variation from lively class discussions to learned discourse.

In the International Graduate School, we place strong emphasis on peer group and individual learning. Your peer group consists of exceptionally talented scholars from around the world, many of whom have practical experience and extensive knowledge of relevant issues and topics. We strongly recommend that you form strong academic bonds with your MPhil cohort and peers among the MSc courses and in our DPhil Programme.

There is an obligation on you as an individual to develop your own spheres of interest within the subject area and to work hard at identifying gaps in your knowledge and training. Oxford's exceptional learning facilities provide unrivalled opportunities for individual learning, not to mention the array of international researchers and scholars who present their work at external lectures around the university. We urge you to take full advantage of all of these opportunities if you are to get the most out of your time at Oxford.

### 1.3.2 Feedback

University regulations mean that we are only able to offer preliminary information on marks for assessed work during the year. We will however provide feedback on how to improve the quality of written submissions at points during the year. Normally these consist of: i) feedback on an optional short un-assessed essay during Michaelmas Term; ii) feedback on assessed essays associated with elective courses, iii) general feedback on assessed work in late Hilary and Trinity terms (depending on the term submitted), and; iii) feedback on practice exam questions.

### 1.3.3 Library and Learning Facilities

The Oxford University library system is extensive, with dozens of individual facilities around the city. The School of Geography and the Environment Library will fulfil many of your needs, but over the course, you will also need to seek out books from other locations. A tutorial on using the library facilities will be provided during induction week. More information may be found at <http://www.ox.ac.uk/libraries/>



## COURSE INFORMATION

### 2.1 Aims/Objectives

The MPhil programme appeals to students who wish to conduct an extended piece of individual research however may not yet be sure whether they want to commit to the three year DPhil programme or who may not have secured funding for this longer period. It offers students an opportunity to engage more fully with the intellectual life of the department, particularly in their second year when the pressure of course work is reduced.

The programme aims to build students' proficiency in key themes, theory and research skills within human, environmental and physical geography and to link these to established and emerging issues in environmental policy and governance. It is designed as an intellectually challenging programme for those seeking to work at the cutting edge of research and policy. The first two terms involve intense and structured teaching after which students develop and conduct thesis research under the supervision on an academic member of staff. The specific objectives of the taught component of the course are specified in the relevant MSc course handbook.

### 2.2 Course Description

During the first year, you will follow a course of instruction for three terms in one of the three MSc programmes, namely Water Science, Policy and Management (WSPM), Nature Society and Environmental Policy (NSEP) or Biodiversity, Conservation and Management (BCM). You will be assessed in all aspects of the MSc programme with exception of the dissertation.

**The MPhil programme comprises:**

- Six to eight core MSc modules which are assessed by written examination;
- an integrated programme of research design, skills, and methods tuition;
- three elective modules which are assessed through essays and/or coursework;
- a piece of original research which is assessed through a thesis;
- workshops, study tours and field trips throughout the year; and,
- a departmental and a policy dialogue seminar series.



## COURSE ASSESSMENT

### 3.1 Overview

The regulations for the examination are set out in the University “Grey Book” of examination regulations. The assessment will consist of:

1. a written examination of three, three-hour papers based on core modules as described in the schedule (25% of total marks);
2. three assessed essays based on elective modules (25% of total marks);
3. a thesis on a subject selected in consultation with the Academic Supervisor and/or Course Director and approved by the Standing Committee (50% of total marks).

The grades for MPhil completion are:

- 70% and above (Distinction);
- 50-69% (Pass); and,
- 49% or less (Fail)

### 3.2 Supervision of the Course

The supervision of the course will be the responsibility of a Standing Committee, comprising The Director and Deputy Director of the International Graduate School and the three Course Directors of the M.Sc. programmes WSPM, NSEP and BCM. The Director of the International Graduate School is the Course Director for the MPhil programme.

### 3.2 Written Examination

Core modules will be examined by means of three, three-hour written examinations during Trinity Term of the first year. The results of these exams will be communicated to students after the meeting of the relevant exam board which is held during late September of the first year. Examinations at the end of the first year will serve to qualify for entry into the second year of the MPhil course. Candidates who fail one or more papers at the end of the first year without compensating strength on other papers will be required to re-sit and pass the failed paper or papers, as determined by the Standing Committee, by the start of the Michaelmas Term of their second year in order to proceed with the degree.

### 3.3 Elective Modules

Students are also required to submit written essays (of no more than 4,000 words) on three elective courses. One elective course, chosen from those available to MSc students must be taken in Michaelmas Term of Year 1 and the second in Hilary Term of Year 1. The third elective may be taken in either Michaelmas or Hilary Term of Year 2 but the timing should be discussed and approved by your thesis supervisor. The essay topic and scope will be decided in consultation with the elective module leader. Essays must be submitted to the department by noon on the first Monday of the following term after which the elective



module was taken (i.e. a Michaelmas Term elective module requires submission on the first Monday of Hilary Term). The elective shall be accompanied by a statement certifying that the essay is the candidate's own work. The comments of two assessors will be communicated to students in week 7 of the term in which essays were submitted. Precise marks cannot be communicated until after the annual examiners meeting.

Unless otherwise agreed with the module leader, the format for the assessed essays is as follows:

- Copies:** 2 hard copies plus one electronic copy,  
emailed to [msc-coordinator-ecm-wspm@ouce.ox.ac.uk](mailto:msc-coordinator-ecm-wspm@ouce.ox.ac.uk)
- Word count:** 4000 words, including footnotes and appendices but excluding references and abstract
- Type:** 12 point
- Font:** Times New Roman or Arial
- Spacing:** 1.5 or double
- Front Page:** A front page with the title of the essay, title of the elective module and your examination number
- References:** Unless you have been instructed otherwise, use a references section rather than a bibliography
- Printing:** Print on both sides of the paper

### 3.4 Thesis

You must submit for the approval of your relevant MSc Course Director by the end of the first week in Hilary Term in your first year, the title and details of your thesis as laid out in the proposal template, together with the name of a person who has agreed to act as your supervisor during preparation of the thesis. Candidates registered for the MSc programmes may petition for transfer to the MPhil degree by submitting a thesis title and proposal by the deadline stipulated above.

You will be allocated a supervisor for your thesis in Trinity Term of year one, who will give 9 supervisions during the course of the year, along the lines of doctoral supervision.

- Copies:** 2 bound copies. A final bound copy for deposit in Bodleian Library plus one electronic copy
- Type:** 12 point
- Word count:** Maximum 30,000 excluding footnotes and appendices, and the 150 word abstract. A page of tables may be taken as the equivalent of 150 words
- Abstract:** Max 150 words
- Font:** Times New Roman or Arial
- Spacing:** 1.5 or double
- Front Page:** A front page with the title of the thesis, a word count and your examination number
- References:** Unless you have been instructed otherwise, use a references section rather than a bibliography
- Printing:** Print on one side of the paper

Two bound and typewritten or printed copies of the thesis must be delivered to The Chairman of Examiners of the MPhil in Geography and the Environment, Examinations Schools, High Street, Oxford OX1 4BG, by noon on the first weekday of September at the end of the second year of the programme. Each copy of the



thesis shall be securely bound and accompanied by a signed statement clarifying that the dissertation is the candidate's own work except where otherwise indicated

Important notes and forms on the submission process and including guidelines on the presentation of your thesis can be found at: <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/gso/forms/> under the section: **Forms & notes relating to the examination of research degrees.**

The MPhil Theses are assessed by two assessors appointed by the MPhil examiners. A supervisor may choose to discuss the choice of potential assessors with a candidate and provide suggestions to the examiners however the MPhil examiners have the final approval on this. The examiners may require the candidate to present themselves for viva voce examination; however this is normally only enacted in exceptional cases.

Once a student has been granted leave to supplicate, they will be requested to submit a finalised hardbound copy of the thesis, as approved by the examiners, to the Examination Schools for deposit in the Bodleian library. The candidate must also submit an electronic copy to the Oxford Research Archive. Please refer to the Examination Regulations in the section relating to DPhil thesis submission for more information. Successful candidates will be required to sign a form stating whether they will permit their thesis to be consulted.

The thesis will be examined by two assessors from within the University. The examiners may require a candidate to present themselves for viva voce examination.

### 3.5 Thesis planning and time-line

Our expectations and advice regarding the execution of thesis research is as follows:

- 16 weeks fieldwork from mid-June Trinity Term to 0th Week Michaelmas Term (Year 2),
- Michaelmas Term (Year 2) analysing data, attending 3rd assessed elective,
- Christmas vacation (Year 2) write 3rd essay.

or

- Extended field research into Michaelmas Term
- Hilary Term (Year 2) analysing data and attending 3rd assessed elective,
- HT and TT writing thesis, submitting to supervisor for comments before the end of Trinity Term,
- Finalise thesis during August for submission on the first weekday of September in the second year.

The timing and structure of field work may deviate from this outline with the authorisation of your supervisor; however attendance of the third elective in either Michaelmas or Hilary Term of Year 2 is mandatory.

### 3.6 Residency Requirements

M.Phil. students are required to keep statutory residence and pursue their course of study at Oxford for not less than six terms after admission. They may be granted leave of absence for not more than two terms and be dispensed from residence for the same period if it is desirable in the interests of their work that they should be allowed to pursue their studies at some other place. (This refers to fieldwork and study at another institution.)



To be granted leave of absence you need to complete the **Application for dispensation from statutory residence** form available from this link <http://www.admin.ox.ac.uk/gso/forms/>. Once completed this should be signed by the Director of Graduate Studies. We recommend this form is completed if you intend to be away for more than a four week block within term time.

### 3.6 Arrangements for Re-assessment

A candidate who has failed to satisfy the examiners may enter again for examination on one, but not more than one, subsequent occasion.

Arrangements for reassessment will be as follows:

- Examination. Candidates who fail any of the examination papers will be required to re-sit the failed examination paper(s) in the Trinity Term of the second year.
- Dissertation. Candidates who fail the dissertation may resubmit the dissertation by the required date the following academic year.
- Assessed essays. Candidates may not resubmit a failed essay.

Candidates under re-assessment will not be allowed to attend classes nor will they be given further thesis supervision.

### 3.7 Submission Deadlines

The deadlines for submitting assessed course work are as follows:

#### **Elective Module Essays:**

First essay: 1st Monday of Hilary Term of the first year by 12 noon.

Second essay: 1st Monday of Trinity Term of the first year by 12 noon.

Third essay: 1st Monday of Hilary Term of the second year by 12 noon (if elective taken in MT)  
**or** 1st Monday of Trinity Term of the second year by 12 noon (if elective taken in Hilary Term)

Note: There are no elective modules in Trinity Term.

#### **Research Thesis:**

1<sup>st</sup> Weekday of September of the second year of the programme (subsequent students).

### 3.8 Penalties relating to late submissions

Fines and also penalties will apply to the grade awarded for any piece of late submitted work (without prior proctorial permission):

1. Up to 20% deducted from the work submitted between one hour and seven days late;
2. Between 21–30% of the assessed grade for work submitted between 8 and 14 days late; and,
3. No marks (0%) if the work is submitted more than 14 days late.

### 3.9 Plagiarism

Oxford University imposes severe sanctions for cases of plagiarism. In the most extreme case, a student will be judged to have failed the course. These regulations are imposed by the University and if a student is suspected of plagiarism the matter is likely to pass to the Proctors who will rule on the matter independently of the OUCE. We expect students enrolled at Oxford to exhibit the highest standards of academic integrity and not knowingly submit any work or intellectual ideas that have been adapted from or copied from a third-party source without appropriate recognition (see below). In addition, we expect all assessed work you submit to represent new and original writing conducted during your relevant terms in Oxford. It is not acceptable to re-package essays presented for degrees elsewhere (i.e. self-plagiarism). Students found suspected of plagiarism will be referred to the Proctors and if plagiarism is confirmed, the student may be failed.

During Michaelmas Term we will discuss these rules and expectations regarding plagiarism. You will be required to complete the University's on-line course on the topic and sign a 'plagiarism declaration' form which accompanies each piece of submitted assessed work.

### 3.10 Role of External Examiners, Colleges and Proctors

There are several important actors within the examination process all of whom have distinct roles. Below is a brief guide to these roles:

1. **The Exam Board.** The University appoints an exam board comprising three or four members of faculty and an external examiner. The current chair of the MPhil exam board is Professor Gordon Clark. The exam board works in conjunction with the exam boards of the two MSc's to execute its responsibilities for ensuring the examinations are conducted fairly and according to University regulations. The board of examiners may be assisted in setting and marking assessed elements of the course by other internal staff members who are termed assessors.
2. The **External Examiner** is a senior academic from a reputable external academic institution whose role it is to verify the quality of the examination materials, advise the course teams on course content, and sit on the final examination board. It is important to note that a key reason why marks from elective module essays or exams cannot be released during the year is that the external examiner has the right and the duty to modify marks if he sees fit. As such, releasing provisional results early may give a candidate a false guide to their final examination grade.
3. **Colleges** – if you need to ask for an extension on a piece of coursework or your research dissertation, are ill and cannot attend an examination, or have any other reason for not taking part in the examination process in a typical way you should liaise with the university authorities through your college, not through SoGE.
4. **Proctors** are responsible for the integrity, quality and effectiveness of the Oxford University examination system. Ultimately, they are responsible for making decisions on essay and dissertation extensions, resubmission or any other aspect of examination protocol. Requests to proctors can only be made through your College.

### 3.11 Security and care of personal belongings and data

People outside the School have access to the building. It is important therefore that you are vigilant of your own and others valuables at all times. This applies particularly to laptops, tablets and phones. In an effort to combat crime the University runs registration schemes for bikes and personal possessions and you are encouraged to use these. Please contact your college for details. You are strongly advised to back-up your data, lecture notes and drafts of written work at regular intervals. In addition, we request that you are particularly vigilant of 'tail gating' i.e. people coming in through the security barriers behind you and who lack swipe card access to the Department.

## TRANSFER TO THE DPHIL PROGRAMME

Transfer to the DPhil programme is possible subject to high academic standards and proof of funding.

There are two recommended routes:

1. Complete the MPhil, but apply during the second year for admission to the DPhil programme. Under this route:
  - Candidates submit their MPhil dissertation for the award of the MPhil degree.
  - Admission to the DPhil programme is conditional on obtaining a distinction for their MPhil thesis or a distinction overall.
  - If a candidate's proposed DPhil research is an extension of the MPhil work they may be admitted into the second year of the DPhil programme and the thesis may be submitted after a further six terms, for which full fees must be paid.
  - Candidates will normally complete the confirmation of status procedures in the 3rd-5th term after entering the DPhil Programme.
  - It is expected that the thesis be submitted at the end of the 2nd year and before the 3rd year of registration on the DPhil programme.
2. Complete the MPhil, but apply during the second year for admission to enter the first year of the DPhil programme as a PRS student.
  - In this case, both transfer of status (upgrade) and confirmation must be successfully completed in the 3rd and 7th-9th seventh terms respectively.
  - It is expected that the thesis be submitted at the end of the 3rd year and before the 4th year of registration on DPhil Programme.



MPhil GEOGRAPHY & THE ENVIRONMENT

