

PROGRAMME SPECIFICATION FOR MSc IN NATURE, SOCIETY AND ENVIRONMENTAL POLICY

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| 1. | Awarding institution/body | University of Oxford |
| 2. | Teaching institution | University of Oxford |
| 3. | Programme accredited by | n/a |
| 4. | Final award | MSc |
| 5. | Programme | Nature, Society and Environmental Policy |
| 6. | UCAS code | N/A |
| 7. | Relevant subject benchmark statement | N/A |
| 8. | Date of programme specification | Update September 2008 |

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| 9. | Educational aims of the programme |
| | <p>The programme aims to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• introduce candidates to the advanced themes and issues of contemporary human geography including reference to the ethics of research and practice;• develop and enhance candidates' research skills at a level consistent with best practice in human geography and the social sciences with reference to the standards set by the relevant ESRC guidelines;• provide a broad perspective on the relevant issues concerning nature and society, globalisation and localisation, and environmental management and policy;• provide an entry-point for those who wish to go on to further advanced research in the School and elsewhere. |

10. Programme outcomes

A. *Students will develop a knowledge and understanding of:*

1. The key concepts concerning nature and society in relation to the core themes apparent in contemporary human geography.
2. The fundamental issues affecting the scale and scope of human activity across the landscape including reference to globalisation/localisation.
3. The key concepts of environmental policy and governance, paying particular attention to the integration of theory and practice.
4. The key research skills and methods of analysis consistent with the field of human geography, including reference to the ethics of research and the nature of intellectual property.
5. Specialist topics consistent with candidate's particular interests and the competency of the School.

Related teaching/learning methods and strategies

Lectures provided by staff

Set readings and related literature focused upon the topics covered in lecture courses

Research seminars by staff, visiting faculty and environmental professionals, including opportunities for the candidates to become skilled in the art and science of presentation

Problem sets and projects designed to develop and test research skills

Material designed to distinguish between different methods of research including qualitative and quantitative skills

Tutorials in particular areas of knowledge and skills as required

Field trips and study days to ground theory in practice

The preparation of a research thesis

Assessment of candidates' knowledge and competency through the preparation of extended essays, examinations and research projects

Emphasis on critical appreciation of extant arguments in the field of human geography and related issues of environmental policy.

Assessment

1. Problem sets re research methods, data collection and statistical techniques
2. Submitted assessed essays based upon option courses
3. Critical feedback on candidates' own research and seminar presentations
4. Three three-hour examinations at the end of the course covering (a) research skills, (b) theory and analysis and c) policy and governance.
5. A 15,000 word research thesis.

B. Skills and other attributes

Students will have the opportunity to develop the following skills during the course:

I. Intellectual skills

1. Critical analysis and appreciation of the relevant literature
2. Advanced analytical skills relevant to the formation and assessment of environmental policy and governance
3. Advanced skills of research design including data collection, analysis, and evaluation
4. Advanced skills in the presentation of academic and research argument

Assessment:

As indicated above through the multiple modes of assessment throughout the course and at its end.

II. Transferable skills

1. Critical appreciation of argument and knowledge
2. Research design, and the collection, analysis and evaluation of data
3. Use and presentation of advanced knowledge and data
4. Knowledge of the various ways of organising research teams, their management and evaluation
5. Independent learning, the management of time with respect to deadlines, and the preparation of material for assessment

Assessment:

1. Formative: Problem-based learning involving issue analysis, data collection and analysis; seminar presentations, group work
2. Summative: Submitted assessed essays or equivalent based upon option courses
3. Formative: Critical feedback on candidates' own research and seminar presentations
4. Summative: Three three-hour examinations at the end of the course based on the core courses
5. Summative: A research dissertation

11. Programme Structure and Features

- The Course is offered on a full-time basis, beginning in Michaelmas term and extending over three eight-week terms to the end of Trinity term.
- The Course begins with a week-long orientation programme, an intensive week of instruction and introduction to the relevant issues including the ethics of research and the nature of intellectual property.
- The Course is based upon a set of compulsory core courses and option courses, being four each term over three terms.
- Candidates are required to undertake 3 three-hour length examinations on the core course material, submit two extended essays on the option courses, and prepare and present problem sets in accordance with the requirements of the research design course.
- Candidates are required to prepare a thesis of no more than 15,000 words over the summer and present the thesis for examination by the beginning of September.
- With respect to the thesis, this may be (a) a theoretical argument devoted to a theme drawn from contemporary human geography, (b) a piece of related empirical research, or (c) an extended treatment of an issue designed to be the basis of a DPhil research thesis in the School or University.
- The examinations are normally scheduled at the end of Trinity term, and extend over a week. Where necessary, candidates may be required to also present themselves for a viva on the examinations, submitted work, and/or dissertation.

12. Support for students and their learning

1. One-week induction for orientation to the programme and study skills.
2. Student handbook and reading lists available on the web. The web is used extensively for course-specific materials (only available internal to the University).
3. Course director who takes overall responsibility for the course, co-ordinating teaching, arranging specialist supervision for optional papers and thesis writing.
4. University supervisor for each student who provides academic guidance to the individual student and overseeing their progress.
5. A college tutor who is responsible for the general welfare of the student and is available to deal with any problems that may arise regarding academic and personal issues.
6. There are extensive library resources in Oxford. In addition to the extensive resources of the Bodleian Library, human geography postgraduates use the School Library, which contains all the recommended books on the MSc reading list (multiple copies of key texts) together with the major journal series. There is also a specialist social science library in Nuffield College.
7. Data files and archives are held in the School's IT Support Unit. This provides online access to major machine-readable geographical datasets, which often form a basis for student theses. A technical officer and other staff of the School provide support for statistical and GIS-related analysis.
8. The School of Geography and the Environment has 7 specialist workstations available for postgraduate students in human geography and a further 20 workstations are found in the computing room of the School. Students have access to networked computers in their colleges and the majority of college rooms are connected to the University network.
9. In addition to their college tutor students are supported by many advisors as and when necessary. They have access to college and university hardship schemes in the case of financial hardship. They have access to Women's Advisors, Deans of Divinity etc. in colleges and ultimately to the Head of the College. The University has a counseling service which provides advice both immediate and long term to students in need. There are college nurses and all colleges have a college doctor and many a college dentist.

13. Criteria for Admission

Candidates for admission apply to the University Graduate Studies Office who forward applications first to the department for academic assessment. The criteria for admission will take account of the previous academic record, references, a submitted statement and evidence of English language competence where appropriate. Previous undergraduate training in human geography is not required, but candidates should either have some knowledge of a relevant social science or be able to show evidence of aptitude for geographical enquiry.

The formal requirements for admission are:

1. A good upper second class degree, or its equivalent;
2. For candidates whose first language is not English and who have not undertaken a course of study in an institution where the principal medium of instruction is English are required to demonstrate minimum scores in one of the standard language tests (IELTS, TOEFL). The requirements are a score of 7.0 in IELTS or 600 (or 250 in the new computer-based test) in TOEFL;
3. An ability to write lucidly in the English language, to be able to handle analysis and to show some critical awareness;
4. An aptitude for the conceptual, analytical and methodological approaches that the course employs;
5. For candidates who wish to concentrate on a particular substantive topic for their dissertation, the availability of appropriate supervision within the Division and the University is a precondition for acceptance.

Each successful application is then sent to colleges for consideration and the offer of a college place made subject to confirmation of adequate financial resources.

14. Methods for evaluating and improving the quality and standards of learning

Mechanisms for review and evaluation of teaching, learning and assessment:

new lecturers are given mentors who are available to advise on teaching. The mentor also is required to attend at least some of the lectures given and report back to the Life and Environmental Sciences (LES) division on their quality.

annual staff appraisal;

careful analysis by the MSc Course Committee and the Graduate Studies Committee of the School and the Division of reports from both internal and external examiners and appropriate action taken. Annual report made to the Educational Policy and Standards Committee.

divisional review of the course after first five years of operation (2006-07) (postponed to 2008-09);

review of the department and its component parts, undertaken by the Educational Policy and Standards Committee and the Division alternately on a six year cycle.

Committees with responsibility for monitoring and evaluating quality and standards:

Board of Examiners;

MSc Committee

Graduate Studies Committee;

Departmental Meeting;

Divisional Graduate Studies Committee;

Educational Policy and Standards Committee.

Mechanisms for gaining student feedback on the quality of teaching and their learning experience:

feedback questionnaires on each lecture course or set of classes; students are asked to fill in questionnaires on the various lecture courses, and points raised are discussed in staff-student liaison committee.

end-of-year reports on the course as a whole; prepared by course Director

student/staff discussions of general issues raised by the feedback questionnaires or by the student representatives.

colleges obtain feedback from students during graduate collections, and liaise with departments where appropriate

JCC meeting every term. Recommendations to MSc Committee.

Staff development priorities include:

regular discussions with the Head of Department;

weekly informal research seminars for staff and students.

15. Regulation of assessment

General Regulations

The examinations shall be under the supervision of the Life and Environmental Sciences Divisional Board. The subjects of each examination shall be determined by the MSc Course Committee subject to the approval of the School's Graduate Studies Committee and the Departmental meeting of the School. The Course Committee (subject to the Graduate Studies Committee) shall have power to arrange lectures and courses of instruction for the examination.

Examiners are nominated by the MSc committee and confirmed by the Graduate Studies committee. The proposed appointment of an external examiner is forwarded to the Proctors and Vice-Chancellor for approval

No candidate shall be permitted to take an examination unless he or she has been admitted as a candidate for the examination in question by the body responsible for the course and has satisfied any other conditions prescribed in the regulations for that course.

The Course Committee shall have power to prescribe that examiners be appointed for candidates individually in such manner as shall be appropriate for the course of study.

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

The MSc Course Committee may prescribe by regulation that students undertaking a particular course of study shall take the examination in a specific term as a condition of admission, and a student wishing to take an examination later than one to which he or she has been admitted must apply to the board for permission to do so.

Except where otherwise indicated, all material submitted for examination (dissertations, extended essays, etc.) shall be accompanied by a certificate signed by the candidate indicating that it is the candidate's own work, except where otherwise specified. This certificate must be submitted separately in a sealed envelope addressed to the chairman of examiners.

The MSc Course Committee shall from time to time meet to assess and co-ordinate marking schemes.

As well, the MSc Course Committee shall use established University and School conventions as set-out below. The total course grade shall be distributed between (1) the two assessed essays (10% each), (2) the three final examinations (40% in total), and the thesis (40%). The MSc committee monitors compliance with conventions and marking schemes monitored by review of examiners' reports.]

The grades for MSc completion are:

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| 70 and above | Distinction | Candidate may proceed to PRS status |
| 65-69 | Pass MSc | Candidate may proceed to PRS status |
| 60-64 | Pass MSc | Candidate may proceed to PRS status |
| 55-59 | Pass MSc | Strong case needed for procedure to PRS |
| 50-54 | Pass MSc | Not normally allowed to proceed to PRS |
| 49 or less | Fail MSc | |

Note: **Any candidate** wishing to proceed to PRS status and thence to the DPhil., must have an agreed supervisor, who must be able to assure the Board that the candidate has prepared a viable research proposal.

Marking Procedure

The examining board consists of two internal examiners and one external examiner. Candidates are anonymous. All papers are double-marked. Dissertations are marked by two Examiners and the External. *Viva voce* examinations may be held if deemed necessary.

An Examiner, having received a paper, assigns a mark using the marking scale as shown in the table below. Where the marks assigned by the two Examiners differ by only two or three points (and do not involve a difference of grade), they are averaged to produce an agreed mark for the question. Where agreement cannot be reached by Internal Examiners, the External Examiner is asked to adjudicate. In addition, the External Examiner may query any mark assigned to a question, even if the Internal Examiners are unanimous in their judgement. Any differences of opinion are discussed fully at the Examiners' meeting, and if still unresolved may (in very rare instances) form the basis of questions in the *viva voce* examination

MSc Marking Guidelines

| CLASS OR GRADE | MARK RANGE % | DESCRIPTIVE EQUIVALENT FOR EXAMS | DESCRIPTIVE EQUIVALENT FOR PROJECTS/ESSAY | DESCRIPTIVE EQUIVALENT FOR DISSERTATIONS |
|----------------|----------------------|--|--|--|
| DISTINCTION | 81+ | A comprehensive and complete answer that clearly demonstrates a deep understanding of the subject, high intellectual quality and comprehensive knowledge of the facts. As good as could have been expected under examination conditions. | Worthy of retaining for future reference and application to teaching or research. Outstanding work based on a critical appraisal of a good volume of material that makes an original contribution to the subject. | Potentially publishable as a journal paper with editing and minor revision. |
| | 80 70 | Goes beyond simply answering the question. Perceptive focused use of a good depth of material. Original ideas or structure of argument and critical evaluation of the literature. | Wide breadth and intensity of accessed data or literature plus critical contribution or original finding relevant to the topic. | Identification with professional research approach. Full completion of task, achievement of stated objectives and good philosophical review of shortcomings. Clear critical appreciation of subject, study methods and findings. |
| MSc PASS | 69 63 | Perceptive analytical and critical understanding of the issues plus a coherent, well read and good presentation. MUST show evidence of wide background reading around the subject and a deep approach to study that goes beyond reproducing material given in lectures and seminars. | Thorough, clear treatment showing an understanding of arguments, contribution and context. Efficient use of literature. No serious flaws or misconceptions. Engages with the major issues and comes to sound and coherently argued conclusion. | Clear programme of study and worthwhile objectives. Well conceived and executed. A highly satisfactory piece of work but with some unfulfilled potential. |
| MSc PASS | 62 58 55 50 | A "correct" answer based largely on lecture material. Little detail or originality but presented in an adequate framework. Lacks evidence of significant outside reading and, while sound, does not penetrate the subject sufficiently, nor display much critical evaluation. | Adequate treatment of literature or data but with little spark or critical insight. Efficiently reproduces material covered in lectures/seminars but adds only a little that comes from the student's own course of personal research and investigation. | Good effort and sound outcome but pedestrian or lacking in imagination and critical insight. Failure to achieve objectives fully. Programme of work not particularly ambitious or innovative. Satisfactory, but not stylish or perceptive. |
| FAIL | 49 45 40 | Engages with question but is a poorly structured answer based entirely on lecture material and containing several important errors of concept and/or fact. Overall, concepts are disordered or flawed, factual material is poorly presented and there is only shallow consideration of issues. | Basic approach to a narrow or misguided selection of material. Lacking in background or flawed in arguments. Lines of thought are not sustained and conclusions and not supported by the text/project analysis. | Deficient in effort or arguments/discussions poorly resourced. Uncritical use of literature. Little sign of analytical techniques or depth. No clear programme of work and insufficiently clear objectives. |
| FAIL | 39 30 | Attempts to engage with the question but with significant errors of content and scope, or poor in knowledge, structure and expression. No evidence of relevant outside reading. | Work is shallow and poorly presented. Lacking in sustained lines of thought or reasoning. No conclusions or conclusions incorrect. No evidence or relevant outside reading. | Low input of effort and superficial write-up conveying little of the context or value of the research. Barely adequate effort given the dissertation's importance. |
| FAIL | 29- | Significant inability to engage with the question. Either, an answer to an imaginary question, or mostly irrelevant material to the question posed. | Inadequate and without any serious scholarly content. | Insufficient effort to complete a reasonable piece of work. An inadequate thesis. |

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| | 0 | Copied or plagiarised answer with no intellectual input from the student resulting in immediate academic failure from the module, OR work penalised for late submission submitted without the granting of a specific dated extension by the lecturer of the appropriate module. |
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16. Indicators of quality and standards

The course has yet to complete its first year of operation. Indicators of quality and standards which will be scrutinised include:

- Comments from external examiners' reports.
- Reference quality and standards in internal examiners' reports.
- Reviews by internal or external bodies, and in particular the first review by the division after 5 years of operation.
- RAE ratings of the department
- Comments from the External Advisory Panel
- Information on first destinations from Careers Service
- Feed back from employers and former students
- Annual monitoring of quality of successful applicants