

1. Course overview

Content and scope: This course prepares you for writing a master's thesis by introducing you to the basics of research methods within literary studies. This includes finding and evaluating source material, best practices for argumentative and critical writing, research and writing ethics, developing a thesis topic and argument, and writing a final thesis proposal.

Teaching: Seminar, two hours per week for ten weeks, 20 hours total. Attendance is obligatory in at least 8 out of 10 seminars.

Examination: Portfolio assessment: every student turns in a portfolio that contains final versions of the three assignments handed in during the course period, plus portfolio assignment no. 4 that includes your thesis proposal (to be completed after the last meeting of the class). The portfolio is graded by the course instructor on a pass/fail basis. All four assignments have to be approved in order to pass the exam.

2. Course objectives

I believe the learning outcomes adequately describe the knowledge that students should have acquired after finishing the course.

Learning outcomes:

After completing this course you:

- know how to examine and evaluate basic prerequisites, ideals and conditions of literary research;
- have the knowledge of key methods and practices involved in the writing of your master thesis;
- know how to write a thesis proposal for your master thesis project.

3. Assessment

Grades, dropouts, complaints: 27 registered, 0 ikke møtt;

grade distribution: 27 passed (100%)

Appropriate content, level, prerequisites: yes

Student evaluations (mid-term): (26 responses out of 27 [96%])

Professor rating (1-5, 5=highest): avg.= 4.7

Course rating (1-5, 5=highest): avg.= 4.3

Student feedback at the mid-term was generally very positive. The course was described as helpful and even essential in terms of preparing M.A. students to write a thesis, which would otherwise be seen as intimidating and potentially overwhelming. The assignments were seen as very useful, along with the practical suggestions for writing, particularly in terms of problem statement structure. The professor was described as approachable, engaging, well-organized, encouraging, calming (in relation to the stress of preparing to write a thesis), yet also challenging in terms of expectations and a rigorous approach to literary analysis.

Suggestions included: adapting the library orientation to be more advanced, giving students more opportunities to brainstorm about their own potential thesis ideas earlier in the semester, and providing more examples of appropriate or good thesis topics and problem statements. For students in the lektor program, who must take this course in their first semester, it feels far too early to have an idea for an M.A. thesis. Superlative comments included: "Mike has the unusual ability to inspire ambition in his students. He is able to make them try hard, and they realize that he is both accessible and supportive."; "This course has very much helped me get my head around what a thesis is, and how to therefore approach developing one. Therefore

massive success on the most fundamental level.”; “You make something that can seem quite dull at first glance interesting.”; “I have no idea how it would be possible to write an M.A. thesis in a year without having done this course first. It’s a really valuable experience to build the rest on.”

Student evaluations (end of course): (5 responses out of 27 invitations [19% response rate]; not very representative). With so few responses, the mid-term evaluation seems more relevant, but the few that were returned were generally very positive. Comments included: “Mike is probably one of the best professors I’ve come across during my time at UiO.”

4. Changes since the last periodic evaluation

This is the first time this course has been taught. The previous requirement for MA students was a 5-credit pass/fail course, ENG4391. With the new 10-credit format, ENG4393 now covers additional relevant topics and adds a unit on another literary text in order to practice applying literary theories.

5. Suggestions for improvement

ENG4393 is a crucial course for M.A. students and their feedback confirms it. A few student suggestions are worthwhile to consider for the future in order to improve the course: aiming the library orientation (given by library staff) toward a more appropriate M.A. level; giving more opportunities for students to brainstorm thesis ideas earlier in the semester, perhaps in conjunction with practicing problem statements further; and studying more examples of good thesis topics and problem statements. While some students might hope for more feedback from the professor on their individual drafts of portfolio assignments throughout the semester, they hopefully can recognize the benefits of the professor commenting upon and addressing more general issues in class sessions, which can be useful to a broad range of students. Finally, I would agree with those lektor-program students who think their first semester is too early for a course that requires the production of a potential thesis proposal.