

GEOG4003 Honours Dissertation (12 credits)

This is an optional capstone experience course for Geography majors only, and to be registered in the fourth year of study.

Objectives

A major objective of the course is to introduce students to a basic and practical understanding of geographical research and writing a dissertation. Students have to think through the many aspects of crafting, implementing and defending a dissertation.

Course Synopsis

The basis of the honours dissertation should normally be the analysis of a problem through fieldwork or through library documentary study under the supervision of an assigned teacher. The object of the dissertation is for students to demonstrate a mastery of geographical field and practical techniques within the scope of the chosen study. Studies undertaken should be based on courses taken in the second- and third years. Teachers may specify subjects considered suitable for study. ***The dissertation course begins in the latter part of the third-year of study and must be completed by the end of March in the fourth-year of study.*** The completed dissertation should be typed with double-line spacing on A4 sheets, and with a minimum of 12,000 words in length (excluding tables, figures and references). Students are required to give an oral presentation on the research finding.

Assessment

Dissertation: 80%; Oral presentation: 20%.

Note: Eligibility for consideration of the ***TN Chiu Memorial Prize for Best Geography Dissertation.***

Learning Outcomes

Knowledge:

- Specific and in-depth examination of a geographic topic
- Research requirements and processes

Skills:

- Critical analysis and interpretation skills
- Geographic and spatial analytical skills
- Writing and presentation skills
- The ability to work independently



Suggested References

"Writing and Presenting Your Thesis or Dissertation" by S. Joseph Levine, Ph.D., Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan USA. <http://www.learnerassociates.net/dissthes/>

Note: Students should refer to the following BA dissertations of former students for format and organisational structure.

1106 Tse Ming Wai (1997) Biogeography of Trails in Sai Kung Country Parks

1109 Fok Lincoln (1997) A Survey on the Tropical Cyclones of the Western North Pacific Ocean from 1966 to 1995: Origin, Dissipation, Path and Frequency



**Department of Geography
Honours Dissertation**

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Why should I do a Dissertation?

- Independent research that is tailor-made for you.
- Learn organizational, research, presentation and writing skills.
- An opportunity to develop more in-depth learning about a topic from an expert in the field along with independent research by yourself.
- Employers value these skills.
- The Dissertation offers excellent preparation for further studies that require some basic research skills.
- May be nominated by the Department to the University for the Hong Kong - Royal Geographical Society Scholarship, a prestigious award that indicates good scholarship.

2. What if I'm interested?

- You have until end of March in Year 3 of study to find a full-time teacher who is willing to supervise you on the dissertation.
- Both the supervisor and you must complete and sign the 'Honours Dissertation' form.
- You then submit the completed form to the department office for record keeping.
- You may start work on your proposed Dissertation topic once the supervisor has given his/her consent.
- The proposed topic title can be revised during the course of the research work with the supervisor's consent.

3. How do I find a supervisor?

- Know your areas of interest, i.e. topics that you have background in or have taken a few courses.
- Select from the full-time teachers whose courses that you have attended.
- Find out the full-time teachers' specialty areas from the department website.
- Seek advice from the full-time teachers only after you have possible research topic(s) in mind.
- Make a formal appointment by email or phone; do not just drop in.

4. How should I choose a topic?

- Go through the readings provided by the full-time teachers for their courses that you have attended.
- Develop general ideas or broad topics.
- Write down topics on a piece of paper.
- Narrow down to 3-5 topics that interest you the most.

5. When do I start work on the Dissertation?

- You can kick-start the ground work once you have found a supervisor and agreed on the proposed research topic, preferably begin from April in your Year 3 of study.
- You should start asking your supervisor for recommended readings on the research topic to complement your own materials.

6. When to register for the ‘Honours Dissertation’ course?

- In August’s course selection period when you proceed to Year 4 of study – by that time you should have completed most (if not all) of data collection and reading, and preferably have written (or started writing) 1-2 draft chapters.
- You should consult with your supervisor to see whether he/she thinks your progress is satisfactory, before you formally register the Dissertation course in August’s Course Selection Period for your Year 4 of study.

7. What if my progress before course registration is not satisfactory?

If your supervisor advises that your progress is less than satisfactory for registering in the ‘GEOG4003 Honours Dissertation’ course (12 credits), you should discuss with him/her about scaling down the on-going research work and continuing the work as a directed project and then registering in the ‘GEOG4002 Directed Project in Geography’ or ‘GEOG4004 Directed Project in Urban Governance’ course instead.

8. What is the time frame for undertaking the Honours Dissertation?

The chart below provides a general time frame for the students to prepare their work plan and set targets for completing specific tasks in order to complete writing up the dissertation for submission.

Find a supervisor		Completed background reading; about 15-20% of work done					60-70% of work done				Submit completed Dissertation			Oral presentation	
Submit the form ↓		Start ↓	Register for Dissertation In early August ↓				Submit draft to supervisor ↓				↓			↓	
Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr – early May	
Yr 3, Sem 2		Yr 3 Sem 2 & Summer					Yr 4, Sem 1				Yr 4, Sem 2			Yr 4, Sem 2	

9. What are the requirements of the dissertation?

- The requirements consist of completed dissertation (80% of the total mark) and oral presentation (20% of the total mark).
- The completed dissertation should be typed with double-line spacing on A4 sheets, and a minimum of 12,000 words in length for the text (excluding tables, figures and references).
- Students should refer to the following undergraduate dissertations of former geography graduates for format and organisational structure:
1106 Tse Ming Wai (1997) Biogeography of Trails in Sai Kung Country Parks
1109 Fok Lincoln (1997) A Survey on the Tropical Cyclones of the Western North Pacific Ocean from 1966 to 1995: Origin, Dissipation, Path and Frequency

Copy of these two dissertations are available in the Department’s Map Library for students to read and make relevant reference as to how to structure their chapters. The Department will inform the students of the respective dissertation numbers to be used before the submission deadline.

10. When should I submit my dissertation?

- You should submit your dissertation by end of March in Year 4 of study.

11. What about the oral presentation?

- You are expected to give an oral presentation of your research findings by the end of semester 2 in Year 4 of study, before the start of the May examination.

12. How can I ensure successful completion of Dissertation?

- Plan early and work out your research time frame with dates and achievable targets
- Have self-control and good time management, and willingness to work while others might be playing/socializing.
- Seek advice from your supervisor frequently or at least once a month or when you have problems.
- Start writing early, submit draft chapters to your supervisor to offer comments (allow time for this process).
- A complete draft of all chapters should be submitted to your supervisor at least two months before the actual submission deadline to allow time for your supervisor to comment and for you to revise the draft.

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