

1. Title / Titel: ESTER/Posthumus Research Design Course

2. Abstract / Samenvatting (max. 60 woorden/words)

European PhD's in economic and social history write a major paper about their research project, detailing their research questions, hypotheses and research strategy. They present it during the Course to PhD's coming from several European countries. International experts in the field are present to comment and advice. The course is the international element of the Dutch and Flemish PhD's following the curriculum of the Posthumus Instituut.

3. Objectives / Beoogde doelen

The objectives are to focus PhD's upon (and make explicit during the course) 1 the basic choices of their research project, 2 the expected outcomes, 3 the structuring of their research after the initial stage and 4 the structure of their thesis (book). In short to envisage their thesis as a whole. Students are invited to position their project methodologically and in the context of relevant philosophy of social science. Participation enables students to learn at first hand the variance between countries in scientific culture, participants present and discuss research in an international ambiance and it is one of the aims that they also start to start building an international network of contacts.

4. Institutional Context / Organisatorische context

The Research Design Course is organized by ESTER (European graduate school for Training in Economic and social history Research), a loose network of European universities, which at the moment is managed by the Posthumus Instituut. The Posthumus Instituut is a 'national' (Dutch/Flemish) Research School in Economic and Social History. Most universities in this region participate. Their PhD's participate in a collectively designed and operated curriculum. The Research Design Course is the last element of the basic program, the first year of their training, and the first international component stimulating PhD's to present their ambitions and work internationally, well in advance of a completed thesis. The Posthumus Instituut and ESTER encourage PhD's to take part in international conferences, workshops etc. To ease such a step, international Advanced Seminars are organized occasionally. These have a well defined topic and participants are (future) specialists. PhD's write papers - containing first results and encountered problems - and mature academics discuss these and give advice. The meeting is thus specialized, but focused upon the work of young scholars.

5. Implementation / Implementatie

The Research Design Course is organized yearly by a local organizer and the bureau of the Posthumus Instituut. There is a call every year and participants are selected by the Posthumus Instituut. The office also manages the writing of the papers, their distribution and the presence of experts. In principle, experts do constitute a stable team over a number of years. The Course is organized in towns and universities changing from year to year. The local organizer is therefore responsible for the local setting. It is the intention to offer both participants and experts lodging and stay. Both the local organizer

and ESTER/Posthumus Instituut thus have to make this possible financially. Advanced Seminars are organized similarly.

6. Illustration / Illustratie

See the 'reports', descriptions and short evaluations of the activities on:
<http://www.rug.nl/posthumus/newsnwpandester/news/report>

7. Evaluation / Evaluatie

The Research Design Course is evaluated by both the participants and the experts. The Posthumus Instituut builds a personal dossier of the Dutch and Flemish students. International activities are documented in these. A substantial part of the evaluation must be casual by necessity. We think that the program including the Research Design Course improves the quality of dissertations. It seems that PhD's become internationally active sooner and participate more in academic networks than in the past.

8. Additional remarks

As more often with good practices, the Research Design Course is seriously under funded. Cooperative initiatives like this one do not work in a financially easy environment because costs and benefits are not in equilibrium in the short run at the level of the lowest unit and because institutions consider each other primarily as competitors. Enthusiasm within the field and stamina are therefore the prime factors making an idea into a good practice.

9. Contact / Contactpersoon voor nadere informatie

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