

IS123 Academic Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences (Social Sciences group)

Seminar Leader: Tamara Kolaric

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Course Times: Mon 9:00-12:15

Course location: Seminar Room 3 (BUT always check the location!)

Office Hours: Wednesday, 15:30-17:30

Course Description

This seminar is a training in the methods of academic research. Focusing on representative contemporary research in the humanities and the social sciences, it supports students in proceeding with their own individual research projects by focusing on the essential elements of independent scholarly work: the choice of a topic or object of study; the outline of the main components of an article or scholarly paper; finding, gathering, collating and interpreting the sources needed for the project; correct citation, attribution, and bibliographical documentation, and lastly, the effective presentation of the final work in structure and style, as well as peer review and constructive feedback. Including the participation of thesis supervisors and other faculty members, this course meets in fall term and in spring term.

Please keep in mind that this is a very hands-on course: it is designed to help you do your own work, and it engages you heavily in the work process. Try to actively use it to test and debate your ideas and to get as much useful feedback as possible.

Learning outcomes

The seminar is designed to help students kickstart their thesis project, resulting in a clear draft of the project structure, as well as the first written material to constitute a part of their final thesis. By the end of it, the students will:

- refresh their knowledge of the underlying assumptions behind different traditions in social science research, as well as of the practical steps and elements in designing a thesis project - from the exploratory phase (searching for a topic and shaping an interest into a proper research question) to conceptualization, operationalization, observation, data collection, data analysis and write-up;
- develop a clear project design of their thesis;
- write the first 10 pages of their thesis;
- gain practice in constructive critical evaluation of projects – through peer comments, examination of previous theses as well as through a hands-on editing process;

Requirements

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory for all seminars. Please note the following regulations: You will be allowed no more than one absence during the semester. Repeated lateness also counts as an absence. Each additional absence will lower your final grade by half a point (i.e. if your final grade is a B, and you have

missed two classes and/or been late repeatedly you will be downgraded to a B-). In case you have any medical issues or other concerns that could impact your compliance with the regulations above, please make sure to inform your instructor during the first week of the semester.

Readings

All readings are mandatory and to be completed before class, as they will be the base for the class discussions. All texts are available in the shared Google Drive folder. There is a possibility of some changes to the scheduled class readings. You will be notified of any changes made in class, and updated readings will be posted on Google Drive.

Use of Laptops and Other Electronic Devices in Class

Use of laptops for taking notes in class is allowed, and we will occasionally rely on technology to assist us in class. However, mobile phones are not allowed, and the use of other electronic devices (laptop, tablet) for purposes unrelated to the coursework will result in a 0-points participation grade for that particular session.

Submission of Drafts

All drafts and class readings must be submitted through the shared Google Drive to all course members by the stated deadline (unless agreed otherwise). Please read the syllabus in detail and make sure you are familiar with all the submission deadlines.

Policy on Late Submission

This is a very practical course that relies heavily on student participation: without your input, it cannot go forward, because its aim is to assist you with your projects. Thus, all materials need to be submitted by the deadline noted in the syllabus. Late submission will be penalized, as it creates a delay not just for you, but for everyone else (and thus wastes your colleagues' time): materials submitted up to 24 hours late will be downgraded by half a grade (e.g. from B+ to B), with an extra half a grade for every additional day of being late.

Assessment

Class participation and attendance (40%)

- Class attendance and active participation (30%)

You are expected to do your readings and **come to class prepared, actively participate in class debates and present your ideas and opinions.**

Each student will also be assigned as **a discussant for one fellow student's draft chapter during the last part of the course.** The task consists in delivering suggestions on how to improve the written material in class directly after the draft presentation. The oral presentation of comments should be about 5 minutes long. Moreover, it is the discussant's job to take notes during the discussion and provide the presenter with a written summary of the colloquium participants' suggestions for moving forward with the project. The discussant duty counts as part of your class participation.

- Written feedback to your peers (10%)

In Week 4, you will be expected to **offer written feedback to the assignment 1a submitted by one of your peers**. The feedback should be brief (no more than 300 words) and provide a critical reading and suggestions on how to improve the proposed research topic, puzzle and question. It will need to be circulated to the class on Google Drive **by 23:59 PM on Thursday, September 26**. The feedback should reflect on the quality of the research question (is it relevant; is it well formulated and a 'real' problem - does the author convince you that he/she has identified something worth pursuing; is it clear and answerable; does the proposed way of answering fit the question; does it sound feasible), and be written in a constructive manner.

Assignment 1: 1000-word thesis outline (30%)

There will be three smaller, ungraded written assignments during the first part of the class:

1a: A short (400 words) **elaboration of a research puzzle** at the heart of your future thesis:

- Specify the topic you are working on (and explain it to the reader) and the problem within that topic that you are focusing on: what makes this a problem for social science (political science/economics), and where does this fit within the discipline.
- From the puzzle, articulate a specific research question, and propose a way you will go about answering it.

1b: An **annotated bibliography** of minimum four (4) sources:

- You should provide a list of alphabetically organized sources, each with a bibliographic entry. There should be an annotation for each source: a short paragraph explaining what each particular source covers, what is the core of the argument and how it relates to (and is useful for) your project.

1c: A **short (400 words) specification of your research design**:

- What method will you be using, and why is this method suitable to answer your question (proposed in assignment 1a). Which data do you plan on using, and how will you collect them?

Using these submitted segments and rewriting them following course lessons and discussions, as well as written peer feedback, you should hand in a **1000-1500 words outline of your thesis project design**. The outline should include:

- Your research puzzle and research question(s);
- A brief state of the art / literature review (including works you used for the annotated bibliography), discussing where the research fits into the discipline and how it contributes to it, as well as why it is relevant (the "so what");
- Your theoretical framework, including defining the central concepts;
- Research design: your planned (or already conducted) data collection and analysis, and a justification for the chosen methodological approach;
- A timeline for the research, and a short elaboration of expected chapters and their fit within the whole project.

Please keep in mind that this is no longer a thesis pitch, but a roadmap that you will be following in the next few months. Thus, you are expected to be precise and clear. Moreover, what you write needs

to be realistic: this is the research you are (already) doing, not a plan for an “ideal” project. Don’t strive for perfection – a good thesis is a completed one. It is useful to think of this elaboration as your introduction chapter, guiding your reader (and yourself) through the whole project; you will surely come back to redraft, but it is a stable guideline for now.

You will also need to give a **short (10 minute) presentation of your draft** in the class (during Week 7 or 8; presentation schedule to be agreed on).

Individual presentation of written material (30%)

Ahead of your presentation, you will need to circulate a 10-page (2500-3000 words) chapter draft to the class (and your supervisor). The deadline for uploading your draft to the shared Google Drive is **23:59 PM on the Thursday prior to your presentation** (schedule will be agreed upon in class in advance). Late submission will be downgraded in accordance with the course standard. The presentation will be structured as follows: each student will have 10 minutes to discuss the writing sample, how it fits into their thesis, how far they have gotten in their research process, as well as the timeline they have planned for the remainder of their thesis work. A discussant will then have 5 minutes to provide feedback and will continue to moderate (and take notes on) a 30-45 minutes long class discussion on the presented material, including feedback from the thesis supervisor.

Grade Breakdown

- Class participation and attendance: 40% (30% participation in class including discussant duty, 10% written peer feedback)
- Written assignment (Assignment 1): 30%
- Individual presentation: 30%

Schedule

Week 1: Introduction + thinking about the work ahead (location: Lecture Hall)

Monday, September 2

- Hancke, B. (2010). The Challenge of Research Design. In D. Marsh & G. Stoker (Eds.), *Theory and Methods in Political Science* (Third edition). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Gray, M. M., & Wuffle, A. (2005). Vindicating Anthony Downs. *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 38(3), 737–740.

Week 2: Research puzzles and questions

Monday, September 9

- Punch, K. F. (2005). *Introduction to Social Research: Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches*. London: SAGE Publications. Chapter 3
- Snyder, R. (2005). Creative Hypothesis Generating in Comparative Research. *Qualitative Methods: Newsletter of the American Political Science Association Organized Section on Qualitative Methods*, 3(2), 2–5.

Assignment 1a: 400-word research puzzle to be submitted to Google Drive by 23:59 PM on Thursday, September 12.

Week 3: StaBi visit – TBC

Monday, September 16

Meeting in the StaBi West, near Potsdamer Platz, at 9:45!

Alternative readings for the day (if we cannot confirm the visit):

- Neuman, W. L. (2014). *Basics of Social Research: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* (Third Edit). Edinburgh: Pearson. pp. 91-105
- Tannenwald, N. (1999). The Nuclear Taboo: The United States and the Normative Basis of Nuclear Non-Use. *International Organization*, 53(3), 433–468.

Assignment 1b: Annotated bibliography assignment to be submitted by 23:59 PM on Thursday, September 19.

Week 4: Designing a research project (I): Nomothetic vs. idiographic approaches to understanding the world

Monday, September 23

- Corbetta, P. (2003). *Social Research: Theory, Methods and Techniques*. London: SAGE Publications. Chapter 2
- Desmond, M., & Travis, A. (2018). Political Consequences of Survival Strategies among the Urban Poor. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122418792836>
- [SKIM THROUGH] Haverland, M., & Yanow, D. (2012). A Hitchhiker's Guide to the Public Administration Research Universe: Surviving Conversations on Methodologies and Methods. *Public Administration Review*, 72(3), 401–408.

Feedback on your peers' assignment 1a to be submitted by 23:59 PM on Thursday, September 26.

Week 5: Designing a research project (II): specifics of “top-down” approaches + Mendeley workshop (location: Lecture Hall)

Monday, September 30

- Gerring, J. (2006). What Makes a Concept Good? A Criterial Framework for Understanding Concept Formation in the Social Sciences. *Polity*, 31(3), 357–393. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3235246>
- Luechinger, S., Meier, S., & Stutzer, A. (2007). Bureaucratic Rents and Life Satisfaction. *The Journal Of Law, Economics, & Organization*, 24(2), 476–488. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jleo/ewm057>
- Recommended viewing (but NOT mandatory): Kynodontas (Dogtooth), dir. Yorgos Lanthimos, 2009. <https://www.imdb.com/title/tt1379182/>

We will look at an example of a thesis written in this tradition.

Assignment 1c: 400-word research design assignment to be submitted by 23:59 PM on Thursday, October 3.

Week 6: Designing a research project (III): specifics of “bottom-up” approaches

Monday, October 7

- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2013). Successful Qualitative Research: A Practical Guide for Beginners. London: Sage. Chapter 3
- Zirakzadeh, C. E. (2009). When Nationalists Are Not Separatists: Discarding and Recovering Academic Theories while Doing Fieldwork in the Basque Region of Spain. In *Political Ethnography: What Immersion Contributes to the Study of Power* (pp. 97–117). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

We will look at an example of a thesis written in this tradition.

1000-1500 words elaboration of your thesis project design to be submitted by 23:59 PM on Thursday, October 10.

Week 7: Thesis project design presentations (I)

Monday, October 14

Week 8: Thesis project design presentations (II)

Monday, October 21

FALL BREAK (October 28 – November 03) – No class

Week 9: CV & cover letter workshop (location: Lecture Hall)

Monday, November 4

Week 10: Engaging in debate, making an argument

Monday, November 11

- Graff, G., Birkenstein, C., & Durst, R. (2018). *They Say / I Say: The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing* (Fourth ed). New York, London: W.W. Norton & company. Chapter 15

Week 11: Writing and editing for academia (a practical exercise in avoiding “academese”)

Monday, November 18

- Becker, H. S. (2007). Writing for Social Scientists: How to Start and Finish Your Thesis, Book, or Article. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press. Chapter 2
- The second reading will be a piece of academic writing (TBA). Please **make sure to read it** (and note your interventions/comments) before the class, as we shall engage in a process of editing together.

Week 12: Individual presentations (I)

Monday, November 25

Week 13: Individual presentations (II)

Monday, December 02

Declaration of your thesis title in week 13 of the Fall semester on **Friday, December 6, 2019 at 3pm**. You need to complete the declaration of BA Thesis Title form. The form can be picked up from the shelf on the wall outside the Registrar's Office in the basement of P24. You must obtain the signatures of your supervisor and chosen second reader, before submitting the form to the Registrar's office by the deadline above.

Week 14: Individual presentations (III)

Monday, December 9

COMPLETION WEEK (December 16 – December 20) – no class

10-Page thesis excerpt due to advisors by **December 20**.

Submission of the final thesis in week 10 of the Spring semester, i.e. on **Friday, April 03, 2020** at 3pm. Guidelines for submission will be made available to you over the course of the research seminar this semester.