SO104 Methods in Social Studies

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Office Hours: by e-mail appointment
Course Schedule: Mon, Wed 10:45 – 12:15
Course location: TBD + online

1. Course Description

Research methods are our tools to make sense out of complex social phenomena and data. But more importantly, they help to make convincing arguments for ourselves and our audience and to start or build upon a sensible debate, which is the essence of scientific discourse and enquiry. This course explores the philosophy of (social) science, research design and techniques of qualitative data gathering and analysis. It investigates what social scientists do and how they evaluate their theories and empirical material. In the course we explore research design (finding a research question, defining concepts and measurement, case selection), data gathering (interviews, using documents and archives, observation) and data analysis.

2. Course Objectives

The general goal of the course is raising awareness of methodological problems and solutions in qualitative research. As specific learning outcomes students should be able to develop a coherent research design on their own and choose the appropriate method of data gathering and data analysis tailored to their research question. In addition, students should be able to critically review research papers regarding their research design and methodological choices. Students are strongly encouraged to consciously apply principles and methods discussed in the course for the assignments in other courses and in their thesis research.

3. Course Structure

The course has three core components. The first three weeks aim to create a shared understanding on core components of social science research. The second component aims to introduce students to a variety of social science research methods and apply them, whereas the third component aims to able to prepare students critically review research papers regarding their research design and methodological choices.

4. Assessment and Requirements

Attendance at all classes is a crucial part of the education offered by Bard College Berlin. To account for minor circumstances, two absences from twice-per-week courses or the equivalent (e.g. one absence from a once-per-week course) should not affect the participation grade or require documentation. In

case of missing classes, the student will be asked to write a make-up assignment as decided by the instructor. Late arrivals should be avoided. If students are not able to attend a class, they should let the instructor know in advance. Bard College Berlin does not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences, whether excused or unexcused. The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

Participation – 30%

Students are expected to attend all classes, prepare the required reading(s) for each session as well as take active part in class discussions. Participation will be assessed both quantitatively and quantitatively. Students whose performance in respect to participation has not been satisfactory should receive a warning in writing. Temporary remote participation for those needing to miss classes for COVID-19 related reasons will be agreed upon individually on a case-by-case basis.

Midterm Paper: Small Research - 20%

Throughout the course, students will be introduced to specific research methods. This assignment aims to test students' understanding of such methods. Students are expected to apply those methods and conduct a small-scale research using a specific method covered in the class, for instance the preparation and conduction of a qualitative interview, the observation of a phenomenon, etc. Deadline – 2nd of April.

Workshop Report - 15%

The workshop is devised to train students' capacity to analyze the research design of scholarly work on the social sciences. After the workshop, the groups that worked together during the seminar should submit a 1000-1500-word workshop report. There are no formal requirements on the structure of the report. The assignment will be assessed based on clarity, style and quality of arguments put forward. The assignment is graded collectively, unless in exceptional circumstances.

Final Paper: Research Review - 35%

The major requirement of the course is a methodological review of a published scholarly paper. The review should discuss benefits and drawbacks of the applied research design with specific emphasis on the topics discussed in the class. Students should strive to provide a substantiated critique and take a position within a given debate or towards a scholarly contribution from a research design perspective. The structure is not pre-set, but students are encouraged to be inspired by the style and structure of reviews published in scholarly journals. Students will be able to choose the paper/journal article to be reviewed among the ones provided by the instructor or proposed by students (if the case). The reviews will be evaluated upon the accuracy with which the research design and methods are summarized, the quality of insight into benefits and drawbacks of the choices the researcher has made, and the clarity

with which this is presented. The reviews should be around 2000-3000 words and is evaluated on the basis of its substance, clarity and style, and on the quality of writing (including structure and organization, development of argumentation). Deadline – 18th of May.

5. Academic Integrity

All assignments should be students' original work, plagiarism is not accepted nor tolerated. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

Students are encouraged to make use of the tutor office hours and have weekly individual meetings with the course instructor and discuss issues related to their academic performance in the course (presentations, assignments, etc.), and if relevant in the program.

6. Readings

All readings are mandatory and to be completed before class, as they will be the base for the class discussions. There is a possibility of some changes to the scheduled class readings. You will be notified of any changes made if the case.

7. Use of Laptops and Other Electronic Devices in Class

Use of laptops for taking notes in class is allowed, and we will 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.

8. COVID-19 related policies

Due to the current pandemic bringing small groups together can put in risk our health. In-person seminars will allow for physical distancing this term. Classrooms will be ventilated (i.e., open windows for 5 minutes) every 45 minutes. In order to ensure a safe space, students and the instructor are expected to use masks during the class. If you have any symptoms it is recommended to call the Berlin info-hotline at: 03090282828. In addition, all students must refrain from in-person attendance if they are feeling ill. Instructors should make efforts to offer alternatives to in-person attendance where needed, including remote participation or asynchronous options.

9. Policy on Late Submission of Papers

According to BCB's policy, assignments/essays that are up to 24 hours late can be downgraded up to one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where an instructor agrees to accept a late essay, it must be submitted within four weeks of the deadline. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment. Grades and comments will be returned to students in a timely fashion. Students are also entitled to make an appointment to discuss essay assignments and feedback during instructors' office hours. Students are entitled to make an appointment with an instructor to discuss seminar participation, or may be asked to meet with the instructor at any stage in the semester regarding class progress.

10. Detailed Course Schedule

Week	Dates	1st session	2nd session
1	1-5 Feb	Introduction	Building knowledge in the social sciences
2	8-12 Feb	Epistemology and ontology in social research	Research questions and social inquiry
3	15-19 Feb	Working with sources	Literature review (1)
4	22-26 Feb	Literature review (2)	Theories and theoretical frameworks
5	1-5 Mar	Concepts and measurement	Working with cases
6	8-12 Mar	Field surveys	Practice: Field surveys
7	15-19 Mar	Interviews and focus groups	Practice: Interviews and focus groups
8	22-26 Mar	Text coding and the use of software	Practice: Text coding and the use of software
9	29-2 Apr	**Spring term break**	
10	5-9 Apr	Participant observation and ethnography	Practice: Participant observation and ethnography
11	12-16 Apr	Secondary data analysis	Practice: Secondary data analysis
12	19-23 Apr	Use of documents and archival research	Practice: Use of documents and archival research
13	26-30 Apr	Analyzing and interpreting data	Linking research results to recommendations
14	3-7 May	Workshop	Workshop
15	10-14 May	Critical review (1)	Critical review (2)
16	17-21 May	**Completion week**	

Week1/1 –Introduction
- In this introductory session we will get to know each other and our research interests, we will go through the syllabus and present what the course is about. Students are encouraged to point out aspects that need further clarification or provide suggestions on what should be included. We will set some common guidelines and classroom etiquette.

Week 1/2 –Building knowledge in the social sciences
- In this session we will explore the notion of knowledge and we will compare and contrast knowledge production in the natural and social sciences and dig deeper into the traditional and modern approaches in the social sciences.

Required reading: Warren, M. R., Calderón, J., Kupscznk, L. A., Squires, G., & Su, C. (2018). Is Collaborative, Community-Engaged Scholarship More Rigorous Than Traditional Scholarship? On Advocacy, Bias, and Social Science Research. Urban Education, 53(4), 445–472.

Week 2/1 –Epistemology and ontology in social research

- What constitutes valid knowledge and how can we obtain it? What constitutes reality and how can we understand existence? In this session we will set the ground for social science research from a philosophical perspective.
  Required reading: Tuli, F. (2010). The Basis of Distinction Between Qualitative and Quantitative Research in Social Science: Reflection on Ontological, Epistemological and Methodological Perspectives. Ethiopian Journal of Education and Sciences, 6(1), 97-108.

Week 2/2 – Research questions and social inquiry

- Formulating a research question is a key step in the research process, yet it is just one of the many research design components we will explore in this session including the role of existing literatures, theory, data, etc.
  Required reading: King, Gary, Robert Keohane, and Sidney Verba (1994) Designing Social Inquiry. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. Chapter 1.

Week 3/1 – Working with sources

- In this session we will discuss academic integrity issues and we will explore the features of different citation and reference management tools (i.e., Mendeley, Endnote).
- **Required reading:** Steeleworthy, M., & Dewan, P. T. (2013). Web-based Citation Management Systems: Which One Is Best?. Partnership: The Canadian Journal of Library and Information Practice and Research, 8(1). https://doi.org/10.21083/partnership.v8i1.2220

Week 3/2 – Literature review (1)

- In this session we will explore what a literature review is and why it is needed, but also about the different strategies for conducting a literature review.
  Required reading: Randolph, J. (2009). A Guide to Writing the Dissertation Literature Review. Practical Assessment, Research & Evaluation, 14(13):1-13.

Week 4/1 – Literature review (2)

- In this session we will talk about literature review as a method.
  Required reading: TBD

Week 4/2 – Theories and theoretical frameworks

- In this session we will unpack the differences between theoretical and conceptual frameworks: what each of these terms stands for and how our research can benefit from such distinctions.

Required reading: Kivunja, C. (2018). Distinguishing between theory, theoretical framework, and conceptual framework: A systematic review of lessons from the field. *International Journal of Higher Education,* 7(6):44-53.

Week 5/1 - Concepts and measurement

- We can conceive the social world only through theoretical constructs – concepts – we use to describe. Sometimes, the conceptual ideas we use do not correspond to social reality or they are too vague and encompass too many social phenomena to be useful for research. The concept itself is not enough, we also have to be able to assess it by numbers or words to be meaningful for scientific debate.
  Required reading: Gerring, J. (1999). What Makes a Concept Good?, Polity, pp. 357-393.

Week 5/2 –Working with cases

- Cases have an important place in research. Besides many other strengths, and compared with other research methods, they can provide very detailed information about a particular event or subject. In this seminar we aim to answer questions among which: How we select cases? How we interpret the generated data? Under what conditions can the findings of case studies be generalized to the wider population?
  Required reading: Gerring, J. (2008). Case Selection for Case-study Analysis: Qualitative and Quantitative Techniques. In: Box-Steffensmeier, J. M., Brady, H. E. & Collier, D. (Eds.). The Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology (645-684). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Week 6/1 – Field surveys

- Survey research is one of the most often used methods in social sciences. In this session will explore the link between research question, theory and survey design.
  Required reading: Glasgow, P. (2005). Fundamentals of Survey Research Methodology. Available at: https://www.mitre.org/sites/default/files/pdf/05_0638.pdf

Week 6/2 –: Practice - Field surveys

- In this session students will be provided with a research issue/ data set and will explore in a practical way the design and data analysis of a survey.
  No required reading.

Week 7/1 –Interviews and focus groups

- Talking to people is one of the most direct ways of acquiring qualitative data. The advantage is that interviewees often participated in the events we are interested in and report details we wouldn't know otherwise. The disadvantages, however, is that interviewees often have their own agenda, are biased, or difficult to access. When can we use interview data and how can we avoid bias? And how do we prepare for a research project based on interviews?
  Required reading: Keats, Daphne M. 2001. Interviewing: a practical guide for students and professionals. Buckingham – Philadelphia: Open University Press. Chapter 4 and 5.

Week 7/2 – Practice – Interviewing
- In this session, based on a shared research agenda, students will take turns in being interviewers and interviewees. The collected data will be stored collectively, and a collective research report should be finalized.

Week 8/1 – Text coding and the use of software
- In this session students will be provided with a research material and will explore in a practical way text coding and analysis. In case no text analysis is available students will be provided with examples of published text analyses.

Week 8/2 – Text coding and the use of software
- Text coding can help researchers minimize data overload and it is a useful in identifying themes and patterns. Besides, it can be used with many other methods: ethnography, interviews, surveys, discourse analysis, focus groups, etc.
  Required reading: Saldaña, J. (2015), The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers, Sage, Thousand Oaks, CA. Chapter 1 - An Introduction to Codes and Coding.

Week 9 – Fall term break

Week 10/1 - Participant observation and ethnography
- Participant observation doesn't seem to be the right tool for analyzing 'high stakes' politics, as most of such events have strictly limited access. Participant observation can offer significant insight in how processes work (or not). Some scholars also follow ethnographic methods, developed primarily for anthropological studies.
  Required reading: Gans, Herbert J. (1999). Participant observation in the era of "ethnography". Journal of Contemporary Ethnography, 28(5), 540-548.

Week 10/2 –Participant observation
- Prior to the class date students will have to submit a 250 words concept (including a feasible research question) on a potential social aspect they would like to observe (a class, public spaces, etc.). The allotted time slot for the class would be the time for participant observation. Following the research students will submit an 800-1000 words analysis of the observed phenomenon.

Week 11/1 – Secondary data analysis
  Required reading: Johnston, M. P. (2017). Secondary data analysis: A method of which the time has come. Qualitative and quantitative methods in libraries, 3(3), 619-626.

Week 11/2 – Practice: Secondary data analysis
  Required reading: TBD

Week 12/1 – Use of documents and archival research
- There is a lot of written evidence on an array of social, political, economic, etc. events, and most researchers will engage with documents in some form. In order for these documents to bring additional insights to your analysis you will need a clear idea how to approach these texts. Some researchers also gather data from larger archives. This is sometimes misunderstood as a tool for specialists of medieval history only. But it is actually a great source also for social sciences research.
  Required reading: Thies, C. (2002). A Pragmatic Guide to Qualitative Historical Analysis in the Study of International Relations. International Studies Perspectives, 3(4), 351-372.

Week 12/2 – Practice - Use of documents and archival research
- In this session we will explore how social scientists have used documents in their work. We will discuss the strengths and weakness of the method, and its contribution to the social sciences.
  Required reading: TBD

Week 13/1 –Analyzing and interpreting data
- After having worried a lot about what data to use and how to get it, the next worry is how to make sense of the abundance of data you bring back from the field. In this seminar we mainly discuss different experiences on how to handle and manage data.
  Required reading: James, A. (2013). Seeking the analytic imagination: reflections on the process of interpreting qualitative data. Qualitative Research, 13(5), 562–577.

Week 13/2 –Linking research results to recommendations
- Social science research contributes to a great extent to societal development. It is important therefore for the researcher to further communicate his/her own findings to the non-academic world, policy-makers and citizens alike.
- Required reading: Elliott H, Popay J. (2000). How are policy makers using evidence? Models of research utilisation and local NHS policy making Journal of Epidemiology & Community Health, 54(4),61-468.

Week 14/ 1&2 - Workshop
- Reviewing the work of colleagues and others constitute an important part of academic work. In this workshop, students will be divided into groups that will discuss two texts based on questions similar to those that you will need to work with for your individual research review.
  Required reading: TBD

Week 15/1 – Critical review (1)
- This session aims to prepare students for their final assignment and offers students the possibility to explore the differences between book reviews and journal reviews.
  Required reading: TBD

Week 15/2 – Course wrap-up

Week 16 – Completion week