

OLive 04

Introduction to Social Sciences

OLive-Plus 2019

Seminar Leaders: Johannes Gunesch & Prem Kumar Rajaram

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Credits: 4 ECTS, 2 U.S. credits

Course Dates: Sep. 2 - Oct. 8, 2019

Class Hours: Mondays, 14:00-15:30, Tuesdays: 09:00 - 10:30

Office Hours: Mondays, 12:30-13:30, every student is expected to consult with Johannes at least once

Course Description

The aim of this course is to introduce students to key concepts of the social sciences. The key focus is to think of how we 'know' in the social sciences - what constitutes knowledge in the social sciences and what are the political and other implications of such knowledge?

The course will centre on thinking through the relation of knowledge to power. By the end of the course, students will have an introductory sense of how social scientists come to define a subject of inquiry and how, as we study or research, we as social scientists emphasise some issues and questions while dismissing or making invisible others. What are the gendered, racial and class biases of social sciences thinking?

Requirements

This is a mandatory course for OLive Plus students. The course starts on 2 September and ends on 8 October. It has 6 sessions that consist of two 1.5-hour classes. The classes take place on Mondays from 2-3:30 pm and on Tuesdays from 9-10:30 am.

Academic Integrity

OLive-Plus and Bard College Berlin maintains the staunchest regard for academic integrity and expects good academic practice from students in their studies. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the relevant sections dealing with student conduct in the [Bard College Berlin Student handbook](#).

Attendance

You are expected to attend ALL classes. In cases of absence caused by illness, students must inform their instructor and the Program Director in advance of the scheduled class. Students are expected to make up for any work missed in arr.

Assessment

Students will be assessed through a final paper due two weeks after the end of class (and worth 60% of grade), in-class presentation (30%) and class participation (10%).

The final paper assignment is:

- Write 2 to 3 pages (12 pt, 1,5 spacing) on “*What is knowledge and how do you think about it in relation to two or more readings in this class and your research interests.*”
- This assignment is supposed to help you prepare your applications to MA programs because it familiarizes you with the format and content of research-projects, even if this is a smaller one.
- As part of the preparation for this assignment, you are expected to talk to Johannes at least once in the allocated office hours, but feel free to be in touch more regularly.

Note that papers submitted late will be subject to the following policy from the [Bard College Berlin Student handbook](#): *essays that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded 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 and cannot receive a grade of higher than C. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment.*

The presentations are taking place in the second class of each session (i.e. Tuesdays).

- In it, each student is encouraged to engage with the topic of the session in a way that goes beyond the main reading(s), for example by relating the reading to another text or by working out a particular argument.
- The presentation is expected to last between 15 and 20 minutes, followed by a discussion that the presenter is supposed to facilitate, for example by raising discussion-points.
- The presentation should be based on a short piece of writing which outlines the arguments you wish to make. This outline should be no more than 2 pages long, is to be submitted after the presentation, and will be graded along with your presentation.
- For the presentation the use of powerpoint is optional, every student is encouraged to think of the best possible way to present information and convey points for discussion. If you require powerpoint, please ensure that you inform the instructor ONE WEEK before your presentation.
- You are all welcome to come to talk to Johannes about your presentations during office-hours on Mondays.

In-class participation consists of:

- Coming to class,
- being prepared by reading the texts (i.e. highlighting points of interests, things you like or dislike about it, if there is anything you do not understand, taking notes on what you might know of the author, the topic, the debates around it),
- participating actively in class (asking and answering questions, paying attention to your classmates, contributing to the discussions).

Schedule

Session 1. Mon, Sep. 2 - Tue, Sep. 3, 2019 (Prem Kumar Rajaram & Johannes Gunesch):

Introduction: What is social science? What is knowledge?

Aim: To give students a general account of the social sciences through Wright Mills and then to explore the politics of doing research through the film.

Readings:

- C. Wright Mills (1959) The Sociological Imagination Chapter 1 [excerpts]
- James Baldwin (2017) I am not your Negro. Raoul Peck, director. Excerpts, shown in class.

Alternative suggestions/further reading:

- [Jauhola/Kontinen, "Knowing Development"](#): this introduction to a special issue succinctly outlines and illustrates different accounts of knowledge with regard to development
- Vitebsky, "Is death the same everywhere? Contexts of knowing and doubting": as part of a book on [anthropology and development](#), this chapter makes some strong/powerful arguments about knowledge, how we come to consider and assume it

Session 2. Mon, Sep. 9 - Tue, Sep. 10, 2019 (Johannes Gunesch):

Class and modes of production

Aim: Recognize modes of production and reflect on how (symbolic) capital shapes research

Readings:

- Cox, Robert (1981). "[Social forces, states, and world orders: Beyond International Relations Theory](#)". Millennium 10, 2: 126-155

Alternative suggestions/further reading:

- [Winegar, "A civilized revolution: Aesthetics and political action in Egypt"](#): a good illustration of aesthetic ordering, pertinent to the social/symbolic capital associated with being "middle class" in Egypt

Session 3. Mon, Sep. 16 - Tue, Sep. 17, 2019 (Johannes Gunesch):

Eurocentrism and the social sciences

Aim: Think through eurocentrism and social sciences

Readings:

- Wallerstein, Immanuel (1997). "[Eurocentrism and its Avatars: the dilemmas of social science](#)". New Left Review. 226: 93-107.

Alternative suggestions/further reading:

- [Bhambra: Rethinking Modernity. Postcolonialism and the Sociological Imagination](#), ch. 1: a good overview of different approaches, not only picks up Wallerstein, but also criticizes post-colonial approaches for re-producing eurocentrism

Session 4. Mon, Sep. 23 - Tue, Sep. 24, 2019 (Johannes Gunesch):

Gender and the social sciences

Aim: Give students a general account of gender and the social sciences

Readings:

- hooks, bell (1994). "Theory as Liberatory Practice." In Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom. New York: Routledge.

Alternative suggestions/further reading:

- [Cohn, "Sex and death in the rational world of defense intellectuals"](#): a classic in ethnographic IR, this text is about the violence of male experts, and how difficult it is to get away from it

Session 5. Mon, Sep. 30 - Tue, Oct. 1, 2019 (Johannes Gunesch):

Critique and its limitations

Aim: Familiarize students with tools/approaches for critical thinking, but also its limitations

Readings:

- Latour, Bruno (2004). "[Why has Critique run out of Steam?](#)" Critical Inquiry 30: 225-248.

Alternative suggestions/further reading:

- [Rengger, "Still critical after all those years? The past, present and future of Critical Theory in International Relations."](#): provides a broader overview of different strands of critical research, but focuses on IR more narrowly

Session 6. Mon, Oct. 7 - Tue, Oct. 8, 2019 (Johannes Gunesch):

Rethinking knowledge and the social sciences

Aim: Move beyond these questions and try to examine a bit more what we mean by thinking and knowledge

Readings:

- Foucault, Michel (1991). "Questions of Method". In Burchell et al (eds). The Foucault Effect. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Alternative suggestions/further reading:

- [Kanafani/Sawaf: "Being, doing and knowing in the field: reflections on ethnographic practice in the Arab region"](#): outlines how research is mediated (by fear for example), what that means for subjects and objects of research, and why it warrants a different engagement
- [Tilley's "Resisting piratic methods"](#) and [Tuck/Yang "Decolonization is not a metaphor"](#) could also be interesting even if maybe a "too much"