

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL SCIENCES

Course leader: Dr. Alina-Sandra Cucu

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Course schedule: Mondays 14.00 – 15.30; Fridays 14:00 – 15.30

Location: SR 12 Kuckhoffstr. 24

Expected workload: 240 hours

Credits 8 ECTS, 4 US Credits

Office hours: Friday, 12.00-14.00

Course description

The course aims to build on students' existing strengths and address gaps in their skills, as required for putting together a successful Master level application in social sciences. The course will offer them the space to acquire fundamental theoretical and methodological instruments that will help them achieve this aim, and that will constitute a solid ground for their own individual intellectual curiosities. By the end of the Fall Semester, the students are expected to progress to the level of a good final year Bachelors student and to possess a solid conceptual and epistemological apparatus in social sciences.

The course is designed as a double introduction into the fundamental topics of social sciences research: methodological and theoretical. Being a general introduction, the course draws mainly on the disciplinary common ground of disciplines like sociology, anthropology, gender studies, and political science, but it is also meant to expose the students to specific areas of interest. The central aim of the course is to get familiar with a particular way of understanding the world through the lenses of these disciplines and to gain a preliminary grasp of what social science research means in practice.

Class sessions

The first three weeks will be dedicated to mapping the types of data and methods in social science research. These first sessions will be a combination of class exercises and methodological practical discussions. In the next few weeks, class sessions will generally proceed as follows: the first session in the week will be a lecture followed by a questions and answers session. The lecture will map the main ways in which several fundamental topics in political and social sciences are treated in the scholarly literature. For the second session, the students will be assigned readings that will represent empirical investigations or theoretical papers within the week's topic. In some weeks, they will be required to watch a documentary instead of being assigned a reading. The second session will combine the discussion of the required readings or documentaries with an extensive analysis of the methodological tools used for the empirical investigations under scrutiny. Wherever relevant, the instructor will use the students' own research cases as examples, to help them advance their Masters applications step by step during

the Fall Semester. During every lecture, students will receive further materials – fundamental readings, documentaries, movies – if they want to deepen their knowledge on the topic.

Students are encouraged to systematically participate in the class discussions and exercises, and are kindly asked *not to engage in parallel conversations, facebook and email checking, or chatting* during the sessions. Laptop use should be restricted to note-taking.

Learning outcomes

By the end of the Fall Semester students will:

- ✓ Gain confidence in reading and understanding academic texts;
- ✓ Be able to confidently express academic arguments and opinions in written and oral form;
- ✓ Develop English for Academic Purposes reading, writing, and presentation skills;
- ✓ Enhance their team-work together with their colleagues;
- ✓ Address critique in a constructive, opened manner, and at the same time defend their arguments and positions.
- ✓ Understand what is meant by a social sciences perspective;
- ✓ Explain how different data collection and analysis are used in the social sciences;
- ✓ Elucidate how social, political, and economic structures impact patterns of human thought.

Baseline requirements

The tutorial is 4 US Credit (8 ECTS). This means there will be two 90-minute classes per week, and students will be expected to dedicate a further 13 hours/week to independent study.

Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the staunchest regard for academic integrity and expects good academic practice from students in their studies. Failing 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.

Attendance

Attendance at ALL classes is expected. More than two absences (that is absences from two sessions of 90 minutes) in a semester will significantly affect the participation grade for the course. The students are required to announce if they are going to miss the class or the individual sessions. Missing a class does not exempt the student from any of the requirements associated with that session.

Please consult the Student Handbook for regulations governing periods of illness or leaves of absence.

Course assessment

Assignment 1:

Four reaction-questions to the weekly readings

Students will send one or two questions regarding the week's readings to the instructor and to their colleagues. The questions will be posted in the evening before the class at the latest and can address anything that seems unclear, comparisons with other readings, or connections with particular empirical cases. They will be preceded by a short synthesis (the main argument, the methods used, the overarching question) and, whenever possible, a brief critical commentary of the week's readings (one page).

Academic skills to be acquired or improved:

- ✓ Extracting essential information from reading;
- ✓ Synthesizing ideas of multiple authors;
- ✓ Specifying one's ignorance in relation to an academic field.

Assignment 2:

Mid-term in-class presentation

The presentation represents the foundation for the final paper. It gives the students the opportunity to brainstorm together with the instructor and their colleagues, while simultaneously improving their academic presentation skills. The students will have 20 minutes to present the topic, the theoretical frame, the research methods, and the structure of their final essay.

*Using PowerPoint or other presentation tools is not a requirement.

Academic skills to be acquired or improved:

- ✓ Improving the students' academic presentation skills;
- ✓ Actively responding and addressing critical comments in professional settings;
- ✓ Providing clarity of argumentation in a presentation.

Assignment 3:

Final paper (3,500-4,000 words)

Based on the tutor's and the colleagues' detailed feedback during and after the mid-term presentation, the students will write an essay, which will be submitted by the end of the semester. The essay will be based on their Master proposal empirical case, using the theoretical and methodological instruments acquired during the semester.

*The topic of the essay will be decided in the first two weeks of the semester, in agreement with the course instructor.

**The students will also be required to reply to the tutor's comments on the final essay.

Academic skills to be acquired or improved:

- ✓ Improving the students' academic writing skills;
- ✓ Actively responding and addressing critical comments;
- ✓ Understanding the idea of "editing" and "polishing" an academic text.
- ✓ Constructing a good abstract;
- ✓ Providing clarity of argumentation in writing;
- ✓ Building essential and expanded academic bibliographies;
- ✓ Making decisions regarding the intellectual dialogues one wants to join (or not);
- ✓ Supporting these decisions by appropriate arguments;
- ✓ Deciding between "fundamental", "up-to-date", "fashionable" and "useful" literature.

Assignments due dates

- Students can freely choose four weeks during the semester to send their questions on the readings;
- Mid-term assignment: October 30, 2020, in class;
- Final assignment: December 15, 2020.

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

According to Bard College policy on late submission of papers as detailed in the 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.

Grade breakdown

Assignment 1: 20 percent of the grade

Assignment 2: 20 percent of the grade

Assignment 3: 30 percent of the grade

Class participation: 30 percent of the grade

Office hours

Students are always encouraged to ask for the tutor's support in the learning process, as well as for supplementary materials if needed. In addition to the office hours, the

students can request an appointment with the tutor whenever they feel it is necessary for their progress. Together with the tutor, they will find a mutually convenient time for a meeting.

Schedule

Module 1 corresponds to the Bard Berlin Fall term with 14 weeks of teaching. Please follow the Academic Calendar at BCB for the structure of the Fall term: <https://berlin.bard.edu/for-students/academic-calendars/>

Teaching starts: Monday, 31 August
Fall Break: 19 - 23 October (1 week)
Completion Week: 14 - 18 December
Semester ends: Friday, 18 December

Course materials

The students are not required to purchase a course reader. The readings will be accessible in a digital version or in the library.

WEEK 1: August 31- September 4
Introductory week

August 31	Discussion of the Summer Module and introduction to the Fall Semester
September 4	The specificity of social sciences research and methodology

WEEK 2: September 7-11
Types of data and the most important methods in social sciences (1)

WEEK 3: September 14-18
Types of data and the most important methods in social sciences (2)

WEEK 4: September 21-25
Becoming a social being

September 21	Lecture: Becoming a social being <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Nature / nurture debate▪ Social theory and child development▪ Culture and integration
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September 25	Class discussion on the reading
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Reading: Mead, Margaret. *Coming of Age in Samoa*. "The education of the Samoan

child" (20-38)

WEEK 5: September 28-October 2

Agency and resistance

September 28

Lecture: Agency and resistance

- An overview of "structure/agency" problem in the social sciences literature
- Social orientation of action
- Intentionality, rationality, consciousness

October 2

Class discussion on the reading

Readings: Abu-Lughod, Lila. 1990. "The Romance of Resistance: Tracing Transformations of Power through Bedouin Women". *American Ethnologist* 17 (1): 41-55.

WEEK 6: October 5-9

Work and labour (1): Basic concepts

October 5

Lecture: Work and labour

- Work as transformation of nature
- Social division(s) of labour and its international ramifications
- Technology, control, and the labour process
- The invisible labour of social reproduction

October 9

Class discussion on the reading

Readings: Biggs, Joanna. 2015. *All Day Long: A Portrait of Britain at Work*. Any chapter. London: Serpent's Tail.

Watch: *The Hand That Feeds* (2014)

WEEK 7: October 12-16

Work and labour (2) : Work and social inequality

October 12

Lecture: Social inequality

- Labour as a commodity
- Current trends in the world of work
- Types of work, types of jobs
- A brief historical overview of labour relations

October 16 Class discussion on the reading

Collier, Jane. 1997. *From Duty to Desire: Remaking Families in a Spanish Village*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. "Social inequality: From inherited property to occupational achievement" (32-67).

WEEK 8: October 19-23

Fall break, no classes

WEEK 9: October 26-30

October 26 The elements of a research proposal: research questions, data, sources, methodology, hypotheses, state of the art

October 30 Students' presentations of their projects

WEEK 10: November 2-6

The politics of race and ethnicity

November 2

Lecture: The politics of race and ethnicity

- Why history is important to understand how we think about race and ethnicity
- Changing definition of "race" and "ethnicity"
- Ethnicity, nationalism, and the nation-states
- "Imagined communities", solidarity, and social conflict
- Class as race and the issue of racialized poverty
- The "white bias" of social sciences and the emergence of a black sociology

November 6

Discussion of the documentary *James Baldwin: I Am Not Your Negro*

Watch: *James Baldwin: I Am Not Your Negro*

WEEK 11: November 9-13

Being pushed out: Migrants, refugees, and border regimes

November 9 Class discussion on the reading

November 13 Methodological discussion: Auto-ethnography; self-reflection; affect; self-referential perspectives in social sciences

Jones, Reece. 2016. *Violent Borders: Refugees and the right to move*. "Introduction". London: Verso.

*Since the topic of the week is potentially triggering, students are encouraged to address any concern about the reading and the conversation, in class or by email. Also, there will be no lecture this week, just an attempt to learn how to objectify personal experiences, to discuss the possibility of "taking distance" and "neutrality", and to understand how to address extremely sensitive topics.

WEEK 12: November 16-20

The public sphere, democracy, and authoritarianism (1) – liberal democracy

November 16 Lecture: Public sphere and liberalism

- Habermas and public sphere
- Social justice: Rawls, Dworkin, Nozick
- Freedom and the market

November 20 Class discussion on the interview

Watch: Bryan Magee in conversation with Ronald Dworkin about the 1960s movements and their impact on liberal political theories of social justice

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hJedzWtu-JM>

WEEK 13: November 23-27

The public sphere, democracy, and authoritarianism (2) – radical alternatives and populism

November 23 Lecture: Radical political alternatives

November 27 Class discussions on the readings

Readings:

Fraser, Nancy. 2019. *The Old is Dying and the New Cannot Be Born: From Progressive Neoliberalism to Trump and Beyond*. London, New York: Verso.

Laclau, Ernesto. 2005. *On Populist Reason*. "Populism: Ambiguities and paradoxes" (3-20). London, New York: Verso.

WEEK 14: November 30 – December 4
The other half and the 99 percent

November 30

December 4 Class discussion on *Feminism for the 99%*

Reading: Arruzza, Cinzia, Tithi Bhattacharya, and Nancy Fraser. 2019. *Feminism for the 99%: A Manifesto*. London: Verso

Watch: She's Beautiful When She's Angry

Week 15: December 7 – 11
Direct action

December 7

December 11

Readings:

- Hansen, Ann. 2002. *Direct Action: Memoirs of an Urban Guerilla*. "Somewhere near squamish" (1-18). Toronto: Between the lines.
- <https://sniggle.net/Manifesti/directAction.php>
- <http://www.spunk.org/library/intro/sp001641.html>

Week 16: December 14 – 18
Completion week

We work on the basis of the students initially getting 15 to 20 pages of reading per week and building up to around 30 to 40 pages per week by the end of the term.