

IS123A – Academic Research in the Humanities and Social Sciences

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Office Hours: by appointment

Course Schedule: Mondays, 9:00-10:30

Course location: K24-1-Seminar Room 12

1. Course Description

As the final step in for successfully graduating from your BA studies, a thesis is one of the most important assignments since it can have a double role. On the one hand, a thesis is a tool that reflects, to a certain extent, your academic performance throughout your BA studies; on the other hand, it is a mean to help you acquire fundamental skills in conducting scientific research. The thesis writing process activates and enhances your abilities to plan, design, conduct and present an original piece of research whilst relying on your personal (i.e., self-management) and inter-personal skills (i.e., receiving feedback from peers or advisor). This course aims to help you prepare, design and draft sections of your final thesis project by familiarizing you with main components in research design (research question, case selection, literature review, analysis, use of sources, recommendations, etc.) and creating a space for effective presentation of the final work, as well as peer review and constructive feedback.

2. Course Objectives

The general goal of the course is support students in their thesis writing process. 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 prove they have advance knowledge in their field of study and identify research gaps and potential original contributions to the field. By developing a clear design of their thesis, the students prove they have the relevant knowledge on the literature, on the theoretical and methodological developments of the selected topic and are capable of further developing it.

By the end of this course, the students will 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
- critically review existing research regarding their research design and methodological choices
- draft substantial parts of their thesis (about 10 pages)*
- provide constructive feedback and evaluate other research projects
- present academic research to peers and academics

*Throughout the course, complementing the graded written work, students are encouraged to submit short ungraded assignments which will help them in the thesis writing process.

3. Course Structure

The first half of the semester aims to refresh students' knowledge on core academic research components and, in parallel, students will develop a series of written assignments. The second half of the semester provides a space for individual presentations and feedback.

| Week | Session Topic |
|------------------------|--|
| W 1 – Aug. 31- Sept. 4 | Introduction – Online Joint Session |
| W 2 – Sept. 7- 11 | Selecting a research topic & What makes a good thesis? |
| W 3 – Sept. 14-18 | Literature review, theory and concepts |
| W 4 – Sept. 21-25 | Faculty panel on research – (Online) Joint Session |
| W 5 – Sept. 28- Oct. 2 | Research methods |
| W 6 – Oct. 5-9 | Data analysis and discussion |
| W 7 – Oct. 12-16 | Presentations and peer feedback |
| W 8 – Oct. 19-23 | Fall term break |
| W 9 – Oct. 26-30 | CV and cover letter workshop – online joint session |
| W 10 – Nov. 2-6 | Rolling synopsis & Reverse outline |
| W 11 – Nov. 9-13 | Working with academic sources |
| W 12 – Nov. 16-20 | Citation and reference management tools |
| W 13 – Nov. 23-27 | Individual presentations |
| W 14 – Nov. 30- Dec. 4 | Individual presentations |
| W 15 – Dec. 7-11 | Individual presentations & Course wrap-up |
| W 16 – Dec. 14-18 | Completion week |

Week 1 – Monday, August 31: 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.
Ungraded assignment 0: In 250 words summarize the details of your intended thesis project. Alternatively, reflect on 1-2 possible research topics and questions/problems; think on what is the aim of your research e.g. do you want to describe something, to explain something?

Week 2 – Monday, September 7: Selecting a research topic & What makes a good thesis?

- Formulating a research question is a key step in the research process, yet it is just one of the many research design components. In this session we will explore what makes a good research question and what are the main expectations from a BA thesis. The texts we will work with will be provided in the class.
Required reading: Creswell, John W. (2014). Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches (5th ed.), Chapter 7.
Ungraded assignment 1: Based on Assignment 0, provide a list of 3-4 versions of your research question and, if the case, the corresponding sub-questions. If possible, try to define your dependent and independent variables or provide some operationalizations of your key concepts (about 400 words).

Week 3 – Monday, September 14: Literature review, theory and concepts

- In this session we will talk about is a literature review and why it is needed but also about the different strategies for conducting a literature review and its relationship with theoretical and conceptual frameworks. In this session we will unpack 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.

Recommended reading: Randolph, J. (2009). A Guide to Writing the Dissertation Literature Review. *Practical Assessment, Research & Evaluation*, 14(13):1-13.

Ungraded assignment 2: You should provide a list of 2-3 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 (about 500 words).

Week 4 – Monday, September 21: Faculty panel on research

- Faculty at BCB have extensive experience in conducting research. This panel discussion provides a space for closer interactions with senior researchers in your field of study.

Ungraded assignment 3: In this assignment you should propose 2-3 concepts or theories that can be applied/used in their research (about 500 words).

Week 5 – Monday, September 28: Research methods

- Based on students' needs and preferences this session is dedicated to exploring various research methods. In groups students will explore a research method of their choice and will apply it to specific practical cases.

Required reading: TBD

Ungraded assignment 4: After you have defined your research question and set specific parameters for your research the next logical step would be to think what methods you can use to answer your question. Why is this method suitable to answer your question? Which data do you plan on using, and how will you collect them? In other words, how will you conduct your research? (no word count).

Week 6 – Monday, October 5: Data analysis and discussion

- 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 7 – Monday, October 12: Peer feedback

- This session aims to bring together the different research elements we have discussed and practiced, and now you will have the chance to present and get feedback from your instructor and peers on your thesis outline. The draft thesis outline should be submitted no later than October 9, 2020.

Week 8 – October 19-23, Fall term break

Week 9 – Monday, October 26 – CV and cover letter workshop – Online Joint Session

Week 10 – Monday, November 2: Rolling synopsis & Reverse outline

- After having the opportunity to get feedback from peers and colleagues in this session we will work on the overall overview of the thesis.

Required reading: Dunleavy P. (2003) Planning an Integrated Thesis: the Macro-Structure. In: Authoring a PhD. Palgrave Study Skills. Palgrave, London. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-0-230-80208-7_3

Week 11 – Monday, November 9: Working with academic sources

- This session is a hands-on training on using existing knowledge, working with academic sources (i.e., citation, paraphrasing) and we will also touch upon research ethics and issues of positionality

Week 12 – Monday, November 16: Citation and reference management tools

- Depending on students' needs 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 13 – Monday, November 23: Individual presentations

Week 14 – Monday, November 30: Individual presentations

- Declaration of your thesis title on Friday, December 1, 2020 at 15:00. You must complete the declaration of BA Thesis Title form.
- See: https://tools.bard.edu/wwwmedia/files/3333161/2/Declaration_of_BA_thesis_title.pdf
- You must obtain the signatures of your supervisor and second reader before submitting the form to the Registrar's office by the deadline above.

Week 15 – Monday, December 7: Individual presentations & Course wrap-up

Week 16 – December 14-18: Completion week

A 10-page thesis excerpt is due to thesis advisors during Completion Week. The specific due date will be determined by the thesis advisor.

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. 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%

This course is a very hands-on one: 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. Students are expected to attend all classes, prepare the required reading for each session as well as take active part in class discussions. Participation will be assessed both quantitatively and qualitatively. 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.

Draft thesis outline presentation - 10%, and written peer feedback - 10%

Step 1 – In week 7 you will have the chance to present (in 10 minutes) and get feedback from your instructor and peers on your thesis outline. Using the submitted ungraded assignments and following course lessons and discussions, you should be able to hand in a 7-10 pages outline of your thesis project design. A draft thesis outline should be uploaded on the Class Drive Folder no later than **October 9, 2020**. Specific criteria assessing your presentation will be provided a week in advance.

Step 2 – Every student is expected to offer approx. 700 words written feedback to the s draft thesis outline submitted and presented by one of your peers. The feedback should provide a critical reading of the outline and suggestions on how to improve the proposed research question, literature review and research design but also presentation delivery. 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. Deadline: **October 23, 2020**.

Final thesis outline - 30%

The outline should incorporate previous feedback received and 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;
- 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. **Deadline – 18 December 2020**.

Individual presentation of written material - 20%

Ahead of your presentation, you will need to circulate a 10-page (2500-3000 words) thesis draft to the class (and your supervisor). You will need to upload your draft 1 day prior to your presentation. Late submission will be downgraded in accordance with the course standard.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.