

Course Syllabus

Offered by Department of Public and International Affairs
with effect from Semester A 2024/25

Part I Course Overview

Course Title:	Research Design, Methodology, and Ethics
Course Code:	PIA8617
Course Duration:	one semester
Credit Units:	3
Level:	R8
Medium of Instruction:	English
Medium of Assessment:	English
Prerequisites: <i>(Course Code and Title)</i>	Nil
Precursors: <i>(Course Code and Title)</i>	Nil
Equivalent Courses: <i>(Course Code and Title)</i>	POL8617 Research Design, Methodology, and Ethics
Exclusive Courses: <i>(Course Code and Title)</i>	Nil

Part II Course Details

1. Abstract

The overall goal of the course is for research students to develop the habits of critical and innovative thinking and acquire creative research skills. For that purpose, the course introduces and critically examines the major ontological, epistemological, methodological, and ethical debates in the social sciences. Its primary theoretical focus is the question of whether the social sciences yield objective, value-neutral knowledge about the world or if and in what sense they may be subjective and value-laden. Practically, the course explores the implications of such questions for conceptualization, hypothesis making, and methodological discovery in conducting social research. Special attention is given to the paradigmatic debate between interpretivism (critical hermeneutics) and positivism in the social sciences and, associated with it, the methodological disagreement and possible synthesis between qualitative and quantitative approaches. The course is also designed to help students develop original research topics and get familiar with qualitative and quantitative methods. Students will learn and practice literature search skills as well. They are required to present their proposed research topics and methods at two in-class workshops.

2. Course Intended Learning Outcomes (CILOs)

No.	CILOs	Weighting (if applicable)	Discovery-enriched curriculum related learning outcomes		
			A1	A2	A3
1.	Identify and understand the major ontological, epistemological, and methodological issues, which underline social inquiry and affect research design and research ethics.		x	x	
2.	Evaluate and explain major ethical concerns in social research. Understand the importance of research ethics and explore its implications for conducting research design and choosing appropriate research methods.		x	x	
3.	Explain the major differences among various research strategies. Critically evaluate their advantages and disadvantages and learn to synthesize them where necessary and feasible.		x	x	
4.	Learn and practice literature search skills. At the same time, apply academic knowledge and analytic skills to real-world problems in selected topic areas, especially in relation to students' dissertations and publications.			x	x
5.	Develop the abilities to select good research topics, formulate testable hypotheses, choose appropriate research strategies, and make original and insightful arguments. Demonstrate these abilities by designing a creative and practical research project with both theoretical and empirical implications.		x	x	x

A1: Attitude

Develop an attitude of discovery/innovation/creativity, as demonstrated by students possessing a strong sense of curiosity, asking questions actively, challenging assumptions or engaging in inquiry together with teachers.

A2: Ability

Develop the ability/skill needed to discover/innovate/create, as demonstrated by students possessing critical thinking skills to assess ideas, acquiring research skills, synthesizing knowledge across disciplines or applying academic knowledge to self-life problems.

A3: Accomplishments

Demonstrate accomplishment of discovery/innovation/creativity through producing/constructing creative works/new artefacts, effective solutions to real-life problems or new processes.

3. Learning and Teaching Activities (LTAs)

LTA	Brief Description	CILO No.					Hours/week (if applicable)
		1	2	3	4	5	
Seminar and seminar presentation	Providing opportunities for students to discuss important concepts, theories and approaches with regard to research design. Requiring students to make critical presentations on class materials so they can share alternative views and appreciate different opinions.	X	X	X	X	X	
Consultation	Encouraging students to have individual consultation with the instructor on their research topics, study plans, and selection of research methods, so that they can be better prepared for doing the class assignments and working on their dissertations.	X	X	X	X	X	
Literature search	Developing literature search skills by exploring the library's information system and by conducting literature review which constitutes a key part of the class assignment. Introducing to students the appropriate ways of referencing and the various methods of organizing references.	X	X	X	X	X	
Research design and workshops	Designing a research project and presenting the research plan at two workshops: one focusing on the student's research topic and its theoretical and practical significance and the other dealing with selection of research methods. Receiving critical assessment from the instructor and fellow students at the workshops.	X	X	X	X	X	

4. Assessment Tasks/Activities (ATs)

Assessment Tasks/Activities	CILO No.					Weighting	Remarks
	1	2	3	4	5		
Continuous Assessment: 100%							
Class attendance and participation	X	X	X	X	X	10%	Students are expected to attend every class and actively participate in class discussion.
Presentations, workshop participation, and a short essay	X	X	X	X	X	20%	Students are required to make presentations on class readings and present their research topics and methods.
Paper on research design (At least 5,000 words)	X	X	X	X	X	70%	Students should identify an important social issue and develop a research plan to address it. The purpose is to reflect on the readings, practice what is learned in class, and work out a research proposal that may become the basis of their dissertations.
Examination: % (duration: , if applicable)						100%	

5. Assessment Rubrics

Applicable to students admitted in Semester A 2022/23 to Summer Term 2024

Assessment Task	Criterion	Excellent (A+, A, A-)	Good (B+, B)	Marginal (B-, C+, C)	Failure (F)
Class attendance and participation (10%)	Students are required to attend every class, keep up with assigned readings, and actively participate in discussions.	An excellent level of understanding and knowledge of theoretical, methodological and ethical issues concerning research design in the social sciences, an excellent ability to critically analyze and evaluate academic literature and to engage in theoretically informed and empirically sound analysis, and an excellent capacity to develop original research questions and to formulate well-designed research strategies.	A good level of understanding and knowledge of theoretical, methodological and ethical issues concerning research design in the social sciences, a strong ability to critically analyze and evaluate academic literature and to engage in theoretically informed and empirically sound analysis, and a good capacity to develop original research questions and to formulate well-designed research strategies.	A moderate level of understanding and knowledge of theoretical, methodological and ethical issues concerning research design in the social sciences, a moderate ability to critically analyze and evaluate academic literature and to engage in theoretically informed and empirically sound analysis, and a moderate capacity to develop original research questions and to formulate well-designed research strategies.	A poor level of understanding and knowledge of theoretical, methodological and ethical issues concerning research design in the social sciences, a poor ability to critically analyze and evaluate academic literature and to engage in theoretically informed and empirically sound analysis, and a poor capacity to develop original research questions and to formulate well-designed research strategies.
Presentation, workshop participation, and a short essay (20%)	Students are expected to make presentations on readings critically. They should also develop original research ideas and choose appropriate research strategies and present their research designs in class.				
Paper on research design (5,000 words or so) (70%)	The research proposal should include original research questions, critical review of the existent literature, well-defined concepts and variables, suitable research methods and procedures, expected findings; and theoretical and				

	practical implications of the proposed research.				
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Applicable to students admitted before Semester A 2022/23 and in Semester A 2024/25 & thereafter

Assessment Task	Criterion	Excellent (A+, A, A-)	Good (B+, B, B-)	Fair (C+, C, C-)	Marginal (D)	Failure (F)
Class attendance and participation (10%)	Students are required to attend every class, keep up with assigned readings, and actively participate in discussions.	An excellent level of understanding and knowledge of theoretical, methodological and ethical issues concerning research design in the social sciences, an excellent ability to critically analyze and evaluate academic literature and to engage in theoretically informed and empirically sound analysis, and an excellent capacity to develop original research questions and to formulate well-designed research strategies.	A good level of understanding and knowledge of theoretical, methodological and ethical issues concerning research design in the social sciences, a strong ability to critically analyze and evaluate academic literature and to engage in theoretically informed and empirically sound analysis, and a good capacity to develop original research questions and to formulate well-designed research strategies.	A moderate level of understanding and knowledge of theoretical, methodological and ethical issues concerning research design in the social sciences, a moderate ability to critically analyze and evaluate academic literature and to engage in theoretically informed and empirically sound analysis, and a moderate capacity to develop original research questions and to formulate well-designed research strategies.	A basic level of understanding and knowledge of theoretical, methodological and ethical issues concerning research design in the social sciences, a basic ability to critically analyze and evaluate academic literature and to engage in theoretically informed and empirically sound analysis, and a basic capacity to develop original research questions and to formulate well-designed research strategies.	A poor level of understanding and knowledge of theoretical, methodological and ethical issues concerning research design in the social sciences, a poor ability to critically analyze and evaluate academic literature and to engage in theoretically informed and empirically sound analysis, and a poor capacity to develop original research questions and to formulate well-designed research strategies.
Presentation, workshop participation, and a short essay (20%)	Students are expected to make presentations on readings critically. They should also develop original research ideas and choose appropriate research strategies and present their research designs in class.	An excellent level of understanding and knowledge of theoretical, methodological and ethical issues concerning research design in the social sciences, an excellent ability to critically analyze and evaluate academic literature and to engage in theoretically informed and empirically sound analysis, and an excellent capacity to develop original research questions and to formulate well-designed research strategies.	A good level of understanding and knowledge of theoretical, methodological and ethical issues concerning research design in the social sciences, a strong ability to critically analyze and evaluate academic literature and to engage in theoretically informed and empirically sound analysis, and a good capacity to develop original research questions and to formulate well-designed research strategies.	A moderate level of understanding and knowledge of theoretical, methodological and ethical issues concerning research design in the social sciences, a moderate ability to critically analyze and evaluate academic literature and to engage in theoretically informed and empirically sound analysis, and a moderate capacity to develop original research questions and to formulate well-designed research strategies.	A basic level of understanding and knowledge of theoretical, methodological and ethical issues concerning research design in the social sciences, a basic ability to critically analyze and evaluate academic literature and to engage in theoretically informed and empirically sound analysis, and a basic capacity to develop original research questions and to formulate well-designed research strategies.	A poor level of understanding and knowledge of theoretical, methodological and ethical issues concerning research design in the social sciences, a poor ability to critically analyze and evaluate academic literature and to engage in theoretically informed and empirically sound analysis, and a poor capacity to develop original research questions and to formulate well-designed research strategies.

Paper on research design (5,000 words or so) (70%)	The research proposal should include original research questions, critical review of the existent literature, well-defined concepts and variables, suitable research methods and procedures, expected findings; and theoretical and practical implications of the proposed research.					

Part III Other Information

1. Keyword Syllabus

Theoretical and practical knowledge, objectivity and subjectivity, facts and values, positivism and interpretivism, cultural relativity, the ethics of social research, literature review, quantitative/qualitative approaches, research strategies, concepts, hypotheses, variables, measurements.

2. Reading List

2.1 Compulsory Readings

1. Babbie, Earl. *The Practice of Social Research*, 13th or newer edition. (Australia: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2013).
2. Booth, Wayne C, Gregory G. Colomb and Joseph M. Williams. *The Craft of Research*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008)
3. Box-Steffensmeier, Janet M., Henry E. Brady and David Collier, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology* (Oxford ; New York : Oxford University Press, 2008)
4. Brady, Henry E. and David Collier. *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools and Shared Standards* (Lanham, MD.:Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2004)
5. Creswell, John W. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: SAGE Publications, 2014)
6. Creswell, John W. *Qualitative inquiry & research design : choosing among five approaches* 3rd ed. (Thousand Oaks, Calif. : SAGE, 2013)
7. Geddes, Barbara. *Paradigms and Sand Castles: Theory Building and Research Design in Comparative Politics* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2003).
8. George, Alexander L. and Andrew Bennett. *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 2005).
9. King, Gary, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba. *Design Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994)
10. Little, Daniel. *Varieties of Social Explanation: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Social Science* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991).
11. Machi, Lawrence A. & Brenda T. McEvoy. *The Literature Review: Six Steps to Success* 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Corwin Press, 2012)
12. Mahoney, James and Dietrich Rueschemeyer. *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003)

Note that required readings may be added to reflect the instructor's ongoing assessment of students' study progress or learning needs

2.2 Additional Readings

Additional readings may be added to reflect the instructor's ongoing assessment of students' study progress or learning needs