Part I Course Overview

Research Design for the Social Sciences

Course Title: AIS5026
Course Code: One semester
Course Duration: 3
Credit Units: P5
Level: English
Medium of Instruction: English
Medium of Assessment: English
Prerequisites: Nil
Precursors: Nil
Equivalent Courses: Nil
Exclusive Courses: AIS5022
Part II   Course Details

1. Abstract

This course offers an introduction to key methodological approaches required to understand, critically analyze, and explain problems in social sciences. It first covers philosophical, ethical and practical issues regarding systematic social inquiry. It then provides students with specific tools and techniques for empirical research in social sciences, including literature review, case studies, qualitative interviews, focus group and participant observation, quantitative surveys and questionnaires, archival research and e-research. Students will learn the necessary skills for conducting and evaluating social inquiry as well as crafting an independent research project. The core assignment is a research “proposal” (not a “paper”) in which students wishing to write a Master’s Thesis in Semester B must design an original “project” (successful completion of the course with a grade of B+ or above is required to do so). The course will be an opportunity for students to bring their own research questions into the class, on a topic of their choice and discuss their research design and methodology.

Course Aims

This course aims to provide students with the ability to: (1) design, plan, write and disseminate a polished research project, (2) identify a research problem in social sciences and develop hypotheses to effectively describe, examine, critique, and solve that problem, (3) build arguments that are coherent, empirically supported, theoretically grounded, and logically sound, as well as evaluate arguments made by others, (4) understand the values and limitations of different methodological approaches and evaluate scholarly work based on the merits of research design and instruments, (5) collect data and evaluate the reliability and validity of selected references and sources, and (6) identify, and comply with, ethical issues related to social inquiry.
2. **Course Intended Learning Outcomes (CILOs)**

(CILOs state what the student is expected to be able to do at the end of the course according to a given standard of performance.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>CILOs</th>
<th>Weighting (if applicable)</th>
<th>Discovery-enriched curriculum related learning outcomes (please tick where appropriate)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Identify the strengths and weaknesses of various methodological approaches to social science research</td>
<td></td>
<td>A1 √ A2 √</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Evaluate the validity and reliability of secondary data sources, independently design data collection and conduct data analysis</td>
<td></td>
<td>√ √ √</td>
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<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Identify and assess ethical issues related to research and writing in social sciences</td>
<td></td>
<td>√ √</td>
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<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Design a study (‘research proposal’) to solve open research questions in the social sciences and test original, innovative research hypotheses.</td>
<td></td>
<td>√ √ √</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

| 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. **Teaching and Learning Activities (TLAs)**

(TLAs designed to facilitate students’ achievement of the CILOs.)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TLA</th>
<th>Brief Description</th>
<th>CILO No.</th>
<th>Hours/week (if applicable)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Lectures</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Classroom exercises and debates</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Weekly required readings</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Presentation in class</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Final research project</td>
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4. Assessment Tasks/Activities (ATs)  
(ATs are designed to assess how well the students achieve the CILOs.)

Attendance and active participation in class discussion is expected. Discussions are based on weekly required readings as well as oral presentations. Several skills exercises will be carried out, and evaluated, weekly; they can include data search, literature reviews, focus groups, interviews and questionnaire preparation. Students will start thinking about a research problem of their choice early on in Semester A, discuss it with the instructor, present their draft project in class and write a full research proposal before the last session.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment Tasks/Activities</th>
<th>CILO No.</th>
<th>Weighting</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Continuous Assessment: 100 %</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance, class participation and skills exercises</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literature review</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>10% Week 6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Methodology plan</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>10% Week 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research proposal</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>√</td>
<td>50% Week 13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examination: Nil % (duration: N/A, if applicable)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
5. **Assessment Rubrics**

*(Grading of student achievements is based on student performance in assessment tasks/activities with the following rubrics.)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assessment Task</th>
<th>Criterion</th>
<th>Excellent (A+, A, A-)</th>
<th>Good (B+, B, B-)</th>
<th>Fair (C+, C, C-)</th>
<th>Marginal (D)</th>
<th>Failure (F)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Attendance, class participation, and exercises</td>
<td>Frequency and quality of contributions in discussions, exercises and homework</td>
<td>Excellent contributions to discussions, exercises and homework</td>
<td>Good contributions to discussions, exercises and homework</td>
<td>Fair contributions to discussions, exercises and homework</td>
<td>Poor contributions to discussions, exercises and homework</td>
<td>Failure to contribute in discussions, exercises and homework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Class presentation</td>
<td>Innovativeness, quality, and style of in-class presentation.</td>
<td>Excellent analysis of existing research, discussion of innovative ideas, and design</td>
<td>Effective analysis of existing research, discussion of innovative ideas, and design</td>
<td>Fair but superficial analysis of existing research, lack of original ideas with regard to theory/method, and design</td>
<td>Incomplete, shallow analysis of existing research, Poor presentation delivery and supporting materials</td>
<td>Failure to complete the assignment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Research proposal</td>
<td>Ability to write a proposal for a hypothetical research project (ideally a master’s thesis) designed to test an innovative explanatory theory</td>
<td>Outstanding with regard to research question, review and critique of the relevant literature, specification of theory or hypothesis, methods and research design.</td>
<td>Generally effective but not especially original or innovative with regard to research question, review and critique of the relevant literature, specification of theory or hypothesis, methods and research design.</td>
<td>Minimally acceptable in its understanding/application of course materials, but lack of any original ideas with regard to research question, review and critique of the relevant literature, specification of theory or hypothesis, methods and research design.</td>
<td>Major misunderstanding or misuse of course materials, no original ideas with regard to research question, review and critique of the relevant literature, specification of theory or hypothesis, methods and research design.</td>
<td>Failure to complete the assignment, or major portions thereof</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Part III Other Information (more details can be provided separately in the teaching plan)

1. Keyword Syllabus
   (An indication of the key topics of the course.)

   Social Research; Research Design; Ethics of Research; Research Methodology; Theory Building; Concept Formation; Measurement; Causal Inference; Qualitative Methods; Quantitative Methods; Survey; Comparative Methods; Case Studies; Ethnography; Fieldwork; Interview; Focus Group; Participant Observation; Informed Consent; Archival Research; Data Collection; E-Research; Dissemination of Research.

2. Course Schedule and Reading List

   2.1 Weekly Schedule

   Week 1 – Introduction

   Guiding questions
   What are the key components of social research? Can we study political, economic and social phenomena scientifically? Why are research methods and research designs important?

   Required readings

   Further readings

   Week 2 – Ethics of Social Research

   Guiding questions
   What is ethics in research and why is it important? How does it apply to research on/with human participants? How do you assess risks in your research? Why are privacy and confidentiality important? What is an informed consent? What is plagiarism (and self-plagiarism)? What is a conflict of interest? How does research funding come into the picture?

   Required readings

   Exemplary empirical work

Further readings

Week 3 – Questions, Puzzles, and Hypotheses

Guiding questions
Why is identifying a research “puzzle” important? How to understand a “puzzle” in our everyday social life? Why should researcher in social sciences pursue a “problem”? How to formulate an open research question? What is the purpose of a research hypothesis? What is casual inference?

Required readings

Exemplary empirical work

Further readings

Week 4 – Theory and Concept Formation

Guiding questions
What is a concept? How to agree on terms and definitions? Why using theory in a social inquiry? How to think about a theoretical framework? Why, and how, should social scientists propose new theories? What is the significance of theory-building in social sciences?

Required readings

Exemplary empirical work

Further readings
Week 5 – Literature Reviews

Guiding questions

Why is a review of extant scholarship required in a social research? How do you conduct a literature review? What is a “critical review”? What does a good literature review look like? What are the differences between literature review, review essay, and book review? What are the differences between Harvard and Chicago styles? Why is plagiarism wrong?

Required readings

Exemplary empirical work

Week 6 – Research Designs: The Qualitative-Quantitative Divide

Guiding questions

Why choosing different research designs? Are there designs that are more adapted to specific research questions? What is content analysis? What is distinctive about qualitative and quantitative research methods? Can we combine both?

Required readings

Exemplary empirical work

Further readings

Week 7 – The Logic of Case Study Research

Guiding questions

What is a case study? What are the strengths and weaknesses of single and multiple case studies? How to select a case study? How to avoid (or diminish) selection bias?
Required readings

Exemplary empirical work

Further reading

Week 8 – CLASS PRESENTATIONS
This set of three hours will be fully devoted to the presentation of students’ research proposals.

Week 9 – The Comparative Method

Guiding questions
What are the forms of comparative explanation? What are the strengths and weaknesses of a comparative research design? How to write on/about comparisons in social science?

Required readings

Exemplary empirical work

Further readings

Week 10 – Interviews and Participant Observation

Guiding questions
What can interviews tell us (or not) in a social inquiry? How to prepare and conduct qualitative interviews? What is a focus group? What can we learn (and not learn) from participant observation? How to mitigate your own biases during an observation/interview? What are the ethical considerations involved?

Required readings
Exemplary empirical work

Further readings

Week 1 – Surveys and Questionnaires

Guiding questions
Why conducting surveys? How to decide on sampling? What are the good (and bad) questions in a questionnaire? What can we learn from a questionnaire?

Required readings

Exemplary empirical work

Further readings

Week 12 – Archival and Internet Research

Guiding questions
Why searching archives? How and where can you do archival research? What can Internet bring you (or not) in your research? What is an e-Research? How to avoid the common mistakes in an Internet search?

Required readings

Exemplary empirical work
Week 13 – Writing Down and Disseminating Your Research

Guiding questions

How to start writing your research? How do you structure a research paper? How do you include references and sources? How to write a concise abstract? Are footnotes and endnotes useful tools? How to structure your bibliography? How to present efficiently your paper (and research ideas)? How do you make your research available to others? What are some examples of effective dissemination?

Required readings


Further readings

- Please find and browse a handful of university blogs and journals to read how graduate students contribute and disseminate their own research. For instance:
  - http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/
  - http://ieas.berkeley.edu/gas/sjas/
  - http://www.cseashawaii.org/students/explorations/
  - http://www.asia-studies.com/GJAPS.html

2.2 Additional Readings

(Additional references for students to learn to expand their knowledge about the subject.)