

PIA5026: RESEARCH DESIGN FOR THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

Effective Term

Semester A 2025/26

Part I Course Overview

Course Title

Research Design for the Social Sciences

Subject Code

PIA - Public and International Affairs

Course Number

5026

Academic Unit

Public and International Affairs (PIA)

College/School

College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences (CH)

Course Duration

One Semester

Credit Units

3

Level

P5, P6 - Postgraduate Degree

Medium of Instruction

English

Medium of Assessment

English

Prerequisites

Nil

Precursors

Nil

Equivalent Courses

AIS5026 Research Design for the Social Sciences

Exclusive Courses

AIS5022 Theory and Methodology in Asian and International Relations

Part II Course Details

Abstract

This course offers an introduction to key methodological approaches required to understand, critically analyse 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 groups 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 upholding the highest standards of academic integrity. The core assignment is a research *proposal* (not a *paper*) in which students wishing to write an individual Master's thesis across Semester B and the Summer Term (course code: PIA6015/6021) must design an original *project* (successful completion of the course with a grade of A or above is required to do so). The course is thus primarily designed for students who wish to develop an individual thesis and, perhaps, lay the groundwork for a PhD in the near future. It 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. Alternatively this course can prepare for the (team-based) capstone course (PIA6018/6019).

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 or propositions to effectively describe, examine, critique, and solve that problem, (3) build arguments that are coherent, empirically supported, and theoretically grounded, 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) review a literature, and evaluate the reliability and validity of selected references and sources, and (6) identify, and comply with, ethical issues related to social inquiry and academic integrity.

Course Intended Learning Outcomes (CILOs)

CILOs		Weighting (if app.)	DEC-A1	DEC-A2	DEC-A3
1	Identify the strengths and weaknesses of various methodological approaches to social science research	10		x	x
2	Review the appropriate academic literature, evaluate the validity and reliability of secondary data sources, independently design data collection and analysis	30	x	x	x
3	Identify and assess ethical and academic integrity issues related to research and writing in social sciences	10		x	x
4	Design a study (*research proposal*) to solve open research questions in the social sciences and test original, innovative research hypotheses or propositions.	50	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 real-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.

Learning and Teaching Activities (LTAs)

LTAs		Brief Description	CILO No.	Hours/week (if applicable)
1	1	Lectures on various methodological approaches in social inquiry: students will engage with concepts, tools and methods presented by the instructor	1, 2, 3, 4	
2	2	Classroom exercises presentations and debates: students will actively discuss and join debates in the classroom	1, 2, 3, 4	
3	3	Weekly required readings: students will actively engage with the reading materials	2, 4	
4	4	Writing assignments, including literature review, methodology plan and research proposal: students will use relevant material and skills to write tailored assignments.	1, 2, 3, 4	

Assessment Tasks / Activities (ATs)

ATs	CILO No.	Weighting (%)	Remarks ("- " for nil entry)	Allow Use of GenAI?	
1	Attendance, class participation and skills exercises	1, 2, 3	10	-	Yes
2	Presentation in class (individual)	1, 2, 3, 4	20	-	No
3	Written assignment - Literature review	2, 4	10	Week 6	No
4	Written assignment - Methodology plan	1, 4	10	Week 10	No
5	Written assignment - Research proposal	1, 2, 3, 4	50	Week 14	No

Continuous Assessment (%)

100

Additional Information for ATs

Attendance and active participation in class discussion is expected. Discussions are based on weekly required readings as well as on oral presentations of individual research projects. Several skills exercises will be carried out, and evaluated,

weekly; they can include mock exercises, data search, literature reviews, focus groups, interviews and questionnaire preparation. Students will start thinking about a research problem of their choice (related to International Studies for MAIS students and Development Studies for MSSDS students) early on in Semester A, discuss it with the course instructor, present their draft project in class, and write and submit a full research proposal at the end of the semester.

Assessment Rubrics (AR)

Assessment Task

Classroom participation, debates and skills exercises (for students admitted before Semester A 2022/23 and in Semester A 2024/25 & thereafter)

Criterion

Frequency and quality of contributions in discussions, exercises and homework

Excellent

(A+, A, A-) Excellent contributions to discussions, exercises and homework

Good

(B+, B, B-) Good contributions to discussions, exercises and homework

Fair

(C+, C, C-) Fair contributions to discussions, exercises and homework

Marginal

(D) Poor contributions to discussions, exercises and homework; traces of plagiarism

Failure

(F) Failure to contribute in discussions, exercises and homework; substantial amount of plagiarism or cheating.

Assessment Task

Class presentation (for students admitted before Semester A 2022/23 and in Semester A 2024/25 & thereafter)

Criterion

Innovativeness, quality, and style of in-class presentation.

Excellent

(A+, A, A-) Excellent analysis of existing research, discussion of innovative ideas with regard to theory/methods, impressive delivery and supporting materials

Good

(B+, B, B-) Effective analysis of existing research, discussion of persuasive but not truly innovative ideas with regard to theory/method, impressive delivery and supporting materials

Fair

(C+, C, C-) Fair but superficial analysis of existing research, lack of original ideas with regard to theory/method. Clear presentation delivery and supporting materials.

Marginal

(D) Incomplete, shallow analysis of existing research. Poor presentation delivery and supporting materials. Elements of plagiarism

Failure

(F) Failure to complete the assignment. Elements of cheating.

Assessment Task

Written assignments (literature review, methodology plan, and final research project) (for students admitted before Semester A 2022/23 and in Semester A 2024/25 & thereafter)

Criterion

Ability to write a proposal for a hypothetical research project (ideally a master's thesis) designed to test an innovative explanatory theory

Excellent

(A+, A, A-) Outstanding with regard to research question, review and critique of the relevant literature, specification of theory or hypothesis, methods and research design.

Good

(B+, B, B-) 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.

Fair

(C+, C, C-) Minimally acceptable in its application of course materials, but lack of any original ideas with regard to research questions, review and critique of the relevant literature, specification of theory or hypothesis, methods and research design.

Marginal

(D) 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. Elements of plagiarism

Failure

(F) Failure to complete the assignment, or major portions thereof; substantial amount of cheating or plagiarism.

Assessment Task

Classroom participation, debates and skills exercises (for students admitted from Semester A 2022/23 to Summer Term 2024)

Criterion

Frequency and quality of contributions in class discussions and exercises.

Excellent

(A+, A, A-) Continuous contributions to classroom discussions and interventions that show a high level of analysis.

Good

(B+, B) Fair contributions to classroom discussions and interventions that reveal some attempts at analysis.

Marginal

(B-, C+, C) Infrequent contributions to classroom discussions and contributions that show little analytical insights.

Failure

(F) No contribution to classroom discussions and repeated absence.

Assessment Task

Class presentation (for students admitted from Semester A 2022/23 to Summer Term 2024)

Criterion

Quality of argument, structure of class presentation; cohesiveness of overall presentation if teamwork; oral delivery; visual aids; evidence of critical research

Excellent

(A+, A, A-) Excellently structured, supporting an analytical argument backed by excellent research and answering set topic or question, clear speech, excellent use of PowerPoint decks or similar tools.

Good

(B+, B) A good coherent structure at least partially supporting an analytical argument, backed by some research, providing some answers to a set topic or question, adequate speech and use of PowerPoint decks.

Marginal

(B-, C+, C) Flawed structure, yet to some extent supporting an analytical argument backed by little research providing shortcomings or inadequate answers to a set topic or question, poor speech quality or use of PowerPoint decks.

Failure

(F) No recognizable structure without any analytical argument backed by no discernible research, providing no answers to a set topic or question, inappropriate speech and use of PowerPoint decks; plagiarism.

Assessment Task

Written assignments (literature review, methodology plan, and final research project) (for students admitted from Semester A 2022/23 to Summer Term 2024)

Criterion

Ability to write a proposal for a hypothetical research project (ideally a master's thesis) designed to test an innovative explanatory theory; quality and structure of paper; evidence of critical thinking and significant desk/library research.

Excellent

(A+, A, A-) Outstanding with regard to research question or puzzle review and critique of the relevant literature, specification of theory or hypothesis, methods and research design; excellent quality of writing.

Good

(B+, B) Generally effective but not especially original or innovative with regard to research question, fair review and critique of the relevant literature, suitable specification of theory or hypothesis, methods and research design; satisfactory quality of writing.

Marginal

(B-, C+, C) Major misunderstanding or misuse of course materials, no original ideas with regard to research question, limited or irrelevant review and critique of the literature, lack of theory or hypothesis, poor methods and research design; low quality of writing and elements of plagiarism.

Failure

(F) Failure to complete the assignment, or major portions thereof; substantial amount of cheating or plagiarism.

Part III Other Information

Keyword Syllabus

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

Reading List

Compulsory Readings

Title	
1	Ragin, Charles C. and Lisa M. Amoroso, 2011. <i>Constructing Social Research</i> (2nd ed.), Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, [Chapter 1 "What Is (and Is Not) Social Research", pp. 5-32].
2	Bryman, Alan, 2012. <i>Social Research Methods</i> (4th ed.), Oxford: Oxford University Press [Chapter 6 "Ethics and Politics in Social Research", pp. 129-154].
3	Booth, Wayne C., Gregory G. Colomb and Joseph M. Williams, 2003. <i>The Craft of Research</i> (2nd ed.), Chicago: University of Chicago Press, [Chapter 1 "Research, Researchers, and Readers", pp. 1-34].
4	King, Gary, Robert Keohane and Sidney Verba, 1994. <i>Designing Social Inquiry</i> , Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, Chapter 1 "The Science in Social Science", pp. 3-12.

Additional Readings

Title	
1	Booth, Wayne C., Gregory G. Colomb and Joseph M. Williams, 2003. <i>The Craft of Research</i> (2nd ed.), Chicago: University of Chicago Press
2	Brady, Henry E. and David Collier, eds. 2010. <i>Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards</i> (2nd ed.), Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
3	Bryman, Alan, 2012. <i>Social Research Methods</i> (4th ed.), Oxford: Oxford University Press.
4	Cooley, Linda and Jo Lewkowicz, 2003. <i>Dissertation Writing in Practice: Turning Ideas into Text</i> , Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press.
5	Della Porta, Donatella and Michael Keating, eds., 2008. <i>Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences</i> , Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
6	Emerson, Robert M., Rachel I. Fretz and Linda L. Shaw, 1995. <i>Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes</i> , Chicago IL: University of Chicago Press.
7	Gerring, John, 2007. <i>Case Study Research: Principles and Practices</i> . Cambridge: CUP.
8	Israel, Mark and Iain Hay, 2006. <i>Research Ethics for Social Scientists: Between Ethical Conduct and Regulatory Compliance</i> , London: Sage Publications.
9	King, Gary, Robert Keohane & Sidney Verba, 1994. <i>Designing Social Inquiry</i> , Princeton: Princeton University Press.
10	Mahoney, James, Erin Kimball and Kendra Koivu, 2009. "The Logic of Historical Explanation in the Social Sciences", <i>Comparative Political Studies</i> 42(1): 114 - 146.
11	Mahoney, James and Gary Goertz, 2006. "A Tale of Two Cultures: Contrasting Quantitative and Qualitative Research", <i>Political Analysis</i> 14(3): 227-249.
12	Ragin, Charles C. & Lisa M. Amoroso, 2011. <i>Constructing Social Research</i> (2nd ed.), Thousand Oaks: Sage.
13	Ritchie, Jane and Jane Lewis (eds.), 2003. <i>Qualitative Research Practice: A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers</i> , London: Sage Publication.
14	Weiss, R., 1994. <i>Learning from Strangers: Art & Method of Qualitative Interview Studies</i> , New York: Free Press.
15	Willis, J. W., 2007. <i>Foundations of Qualitative Research: Interpretive & Critical Approaches</i> , Thousand Oaks: Sage.