

# PIA8125: RESEARCH METHODS AND ETHICS FOR THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

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## Effective Term

Semester A 2025/26

## Part I Course Overview

### Course Title

Research Methods and Ethics for the Social Sciences

### Subject Code

PIA - Public and International Affairs

### Course Number

8125

### 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

R8 - Research Degree

### Medium of Instruction

English

### Medium of Assessment

English

### Equivalent Courses

AIS8125 Research Methods and Ethics for the Social Sciences

## Part II Course Details

### Abstract

This course will survey a diverse range of approaches and methods to conduct systematic political and social inquiry. It offers a basic set of tools social scientists use to answer the questions driving their work through the use of information (or “data,” whatever its kind) found in the real world. It will also offer training in ethical research. The course covers qualitative and quantitative approaches. Over the course of the semester, we will discuss the logic of causal inference (what it means to ask or answer “causal” questions), survey some of the main methodological approaches social scientists generally employ to establish causation, consider the nature of literature searches, as well as emphasize the rather restrictive assumptions that must hold for the resulting inferences to be minimally “valid.”

### Course Intended Learning Outcomes (CILOs)

CILOs		Weighting (if app.)	DEC-A1	DEC-A2	DEC-A3
1	Explain the philosophy of science and some of the limitations of “positivism” - the dominant approach to empirical research in the social sciences		x	x	
2	Anticipate the problems and constraints social scientists often encounter in conducting ethical research		x	x	
3	Select appropriate qualitative and quantitative methods and approaches in conducting research on various topics in the social sciences		x	x	
4	Undertake research and analysis				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	Seminars	1, 2, 3	
2	Research Proposal	2, 3	
3	Research Project	3, 4	

**Assessment Tasks / Activities (ATs)**

ATs	CILO No.	Weighting (%)	Remarks ("- for nil entry)	Allow Use of GenAI?	
1	Seminar participation	1, 2, 3	25	-	No
2	Research Proposal	2, 3	25	-	No
3	Research Project Report	3, 4	50	-	No

**Continuous Assessment (%)**

100

**Assessment Rubrics (AR)****Assessment Task**

Research Proposal (25%)

**Criterion**

Theoretical basis for writing, Incorporation of case study materials, Engagement with key readings and secondary literature, spelling and grammar, Analysis of topic.

**Excellent**

Demonstrates high level of analytical thinking. Clearly stated objectives with a logical pathway for developing their work. The student is able to utilise advanced arguments in critically explaining case study materials and extrapolate these materials into new areas. No spelling or grammatical mistakes. Excellent range of source materials.

**Good**

Demonstrates good level of analytical thinking. Reasonably well stated objectives with a logical pathway for developing their work. The student is able to utilise advanced arguments in critically explaining case study materials and extrapolate these materials into new areas. No spelling or grammatical mistakes. Good use of source materials.

**Fair**

Demonstrates poor level of analytical thinking, mostly descriptive. Objectives are developed but lack precision with a pathway for developing their work. The student is able to utilise advanced arguments in a limited way in explaining case study materials and has a restricted ability to extrapolate these materials into new areas. Some spelling or grammatical mistakes. Restricted and/or inappropriate references.

**Marginal**

Demonstrates very limited or no analytical thinking, largely descriptive. Objectives are not clearly stated and the pathway is adequately prepared. The student is unable to utilise advanced arguments in explaining case study materials and has a restricted ability to extrapolate these materials into new areas. Spelling or grammatical mistakes. Highly restricted or inappropriate references.

**Failure**

Demonstrates no analytical thinking, entirely descriptive. Neither objectives nor an articulated pathway in developing their work. The student is unable to utilise advanced arguments in explaining case study materials. Spelling or grammatical mistakes. Highly restricted and inappropriate references.

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**Assessment Task**

Participation (25%)

**Criterion**

Engages in group discussions, able to answer questions, an incorporation of theory and case studies. Does not miss any classes.

**Excellent**

The student has not missed any classes and has regularly contributed to discussions at a high level.

**Good**

The student has missed 1-2 classes without explanation and/or has regularly contributed to discussions but only at a discursive level.

**Fair**

The student has missed 2-3 classes without justified explanation and has infrequently contributed to discussions at a discursive level.

**Marginal**

The student has missed three classes without justified explanation, but has generally contributed to discussions. Or the student has not missed more than three classes without justified explanation, but has failed to contribute to discussions.

### **Failure**

The student has missed more than three classes without justified explanation, generally failed to contribute to discussions.

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### **Assessment Task**

Research Project report (50%)

### **Criterion**

Theoretical basis for writing, Incorporation of case study materials, Engagement with key readings and secondary literature, spelling and grammar, Analysis of topic

### **Excellent**

Demonstrates high level of analytical thinking. Evidence of ability to fully comprehend and critique materials. The student is able to utilise theoretical concepts in critically explaining case study materials and extrapolate these materials into new areas. No spelling or grammatical mistakes. Excellent range of source materials.

### **Good**

Demonstrates good level of analytical thinking. Evidence of ability to fully comprehend and critique materials. The student is able to utilise theoretical concepts in critically explaining case study materials and extrapolate these materials into new areas. No spelling or grammatical mistakes. Good use of source materials.

### **Fair**

Demonstrates poor level of analytical thinking, mostly descriptive. Evidence of ability to partially comprehend and critique materials. The student is able to utilise theoretical concepts in a limited way in explaining case study materials and has a restricted ability to extrapolate these materials into new areas. Some spelling or grammatical mistakes. Restricted and/or inappropriate references.

### **Marginal**

Demonstrates very limited or no analytical thinking, largely descriptive. Limited ability to comprehend and critique materials. The student is unable to utilise theoretical concepts in explaining case study materials and has a restricted ability to extrapolate these materials into new areas. Spelling or grammatical mistakes. Highly restricted or inappropriate references.

### **Failure**

Demonstrates no analytical thinking, entirely descriptive. Limited ability to comprehend and critique materials. The student is unable to utilise theoretical concepts in explaining case study materials. Spelling or grammatical mistakes. Highly restricted and inappropriate references.

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## **Part III Other Information**

### **Keyword Syllabus**

Keyword Syllabus: Philosophy of science, positivism and its alternatives, quantitative methods, causation and explanation, hypothesis, regression analysis and its limits, research design, sampling, statistical significance, qualitative methods, logic of inference in qualitative research, interpretative approach, case studies and theoretical development, ethics, report writing and publications, literature search.

### **Reading List**

### **Compulsory Readings**

	Title
1	Abbott, Andrew. 1988. "Transcending General Linear Reality." <i>Sociological Theory</i> 6:169-186.
2	Adcock, Robert, and David Collier. 2001. "Measurement Validity: A Shared Standard for Qualitative and Quantitative Research." <i>American Political Science Review</i> 95:529-46.
3	Brady, Henry E. and David Collier. 2004. <i>Rethinking Social Inquiry</i> . London: Rowman & Littlefield.
4	Elster, Jon. 1999. <i>Alchemies of the Mind</i> . Cambridge University Press (Ch. 1).
5	Friedman, Milton. 1968. "The Methodology of Positive Economics." In M. Brodbeck (ed), <i>Readings in the Philosophy of the Social Sciences</i> . New York: Macmillan.
6	Geertz, Clifford. 1973. <i>The Interpretation of Cultures</i> . New York, NY: Basic Books.
7	George, Alexander L. and Andrew Bennett. 2005. <i>Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences</i> . MIT Press
8	Gerring, John. 2001. <i>Social Science Methodology: A Criterial Framework</i> . Cambridge University Press
9	Hall, Peter. 2003. "Aligning Ontology and Methodology in Comparative Politics." In James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer (eds.), <i>Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences</i> . Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
10	Holland, Paul W. 1986. "Statistics and Causal Inference." <i>JASA</i> 81: 945-960.
11	King, Gary, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba. 1994. <i>Designing Social Inquiry</i> . Princeton University Press
12	Kuhn, Thomas. 1970. <i>The Structure of Scientific Revolutions</i> . University of Chicago Press.
13	Lakatos, Imre. 1970. "Falsification and Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes." In I. Lakatos and Musgrave (eds), <i>Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge</i> . Cambridge University Press.
14	Lane, Ruth. 1996. "Positivism, Scientific Realism and Political Science." <i>Journal of Theoretical Politics</i> 8: 361-382.
15	Lieberson, Stanley. 1991. "Small N's and Big Conclusions." <i>Social Forces</i> 70: 307-320.
16	Ragin, Charles C. 1987. <i>The Comparative Method: Moving Beyond Qualitative and Quantitative Strategies</i> . University of California Press (Ch. 1).
17	Sekhon, Jasjeet S. 2004. "Quality Meets Quantity: Case Studies, Conditional Probability, and Counterfactuals." <i>Perspectives on Politics</i> 2: 281-293.