

CLA5002: RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

Effective Term

Semester A 2026/27

Part I Course Overview

Course Title

Research Design and Methods

Subject Code

CLA - College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences

Course Number

5002

Academic Unit

College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences (CH)

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

Chinese

Medium of Assessment

Chinese

Prerequisites

Nil

Precursors

Nil

Equivalent Courses

Nil

Exclusive Courses

Nil

Part II Course Details

Abstract

This course introduces key approaches to research design and methodology in the social sciences. It covers a basic introduction to the philosophy of science, the construction and testing of theories (through observation and experiments),

design and validity of research questions, conceptualization and measurement, case selection, and modes of causal inference. It also introduces students to a range of quantitative and qualitative methods, and practical aspects of data collection. Students will learn how to design, evaluate, and communicate research projects, culminating in an independent research proposal. The course is ideal for those preparing for thesis research, and it encourages students to develop and refine their own research questions throughout.

Course Intended Learning Outcomes (CILOs)

CILOs		Weighting (if app.)	DEC-A1	DEC-A2	DEC-A3
1	Evaluate existing research designs in the social sciences, identifying their underlying assumptions, methodological strengths, and implications.	25	x	x	
2	Formulate clear, researchable questions and connect them to appropriate theoretical frameworks and methodological strategies.	25	x	x	x
3	Conduct a focused literature review and assess the validity and reliability of empirical evidence, using scholarly sources to inform research design.	25		x	x
4	Design and present an original research proposal that addresses a meaningful social science question, incorporating coherent theory and methodology.	25	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	Lectures	Lectures on various methodological approaches in social inquiry: students will engage with concepts, tools and methods presented by the instructor.	1, 2, 3, 4
			3-hour seminar per week

2	Applied in-class activities and peer discussion	Hands-on exercises and structured discussions based on sample research designs or case critiques; students will debate methodological choices.	1, 2, 3, 4	
3	Weekly required Readings	Students will actively engage with the reading materials and reflect on the readings.	2, 4	
4	Written Assignments	Written assignments (response paper, and final research proposal); students will use relevant material and skills to write tailored assignments.	1, 2, 3, 4	

Additional Information for LTAs

Course Aims:

This course aims to equip students with the knowledge and skills to understand and critically evaluate the design of existing social science research and to further develop their own research projects. Specifically, students will learn to:

1. formulate clear, researchable questions and align them with appropriate research designs;
2. develop theoretically grounded and empirically testable arguments;
3. evaluate the strengths, limitations, and trade-offs of different research designs and methodological approaches;
4. assess the validity, reliability, and ethical integrity of empirical research;
5. design and present a research proposal that demonstrates methodological rigor, analytical clarity, and relevance to substantively important topics.

Assessment Tasks / Activities (ATs)

	ATs	CILO No.	Weighting (%)	Remarks	Allow Use of GenAI?
1	Attendance, class participation, and in-class exercise and quiz	1, 2, 3	20	-	No
2	Response papers	1, 2, 3	20	-	Yes
3	Midterm Test	1, 2	30	-	No
4	Research Proposal	1, 2, 3, 4	30	-	Yes

Continuous Assessment (%)

100

Additional Information for ATs

Attendance and active participation are essential components of this course. Students are expected to engage in class discussions based on the weekly readings, lectures, and peer contributions. Participation includes contributions to in-class exercises designed to develop core research skills—such as identifying research questions, evaluating research designs, critiquing scholarly work, and planning data collection strategies. These may include small group critiques, mock research design exercises, or exploratory literature reviews. It also includes several short, in-class quizzes on the assigned readings and lectures. The response paper and midterm test will assess students' understanding of key methodological concepts and their ability to apply them critically.

Throughout the semester, students will develop a research topic of their own interest, ideally aligned with their broader program or thesis plans. They will receive structured feedback at multiple stages, including during peer discussions and

written assignments. The final research proposal will serve as a culminating assignment, demonstrating the student's ability to formulate a coherent research design that integrates theory, method, and potential evidence.

Assessment Rubrics (AR)

Assessment Task

Attendance, participation, and in-class exercise

Criterion

Frequency and quality of contributions in discussions, exercises, quizzes, and classroom activities.

Excellent (A+, A, A-)

Regular and excellent contributions to and completion of discussions and exercises.

Good (B+, B, B-)

Frequent and good contributions to and completion of discussions and exercises.

Fair (C+, C, C-)

Fair contributions to and completion of discussions and exercises.

Marginal (D)

Poor contributions to and completion of discussions and exercises.

Failure (F)

Frequent absence or disengagement; failure to contribute to or complete discussions and exercises; evidence of academic misconduct.

Assessment Task

Response papers

Criterion

Critical engagement with readings and clarity of analysis.

Excellent (A+, A, A-)

Insightful, well-structured response that engages deeply with readings; demonstrates originality and strong analytical thinking.

Good (B+, B, B-)

Clear and coherent engagement with readings; solid analysis with some critical insight.

Fair (C+, C, C-)

Basic understanding of readings; descriptive rather than analytical; limited clarity or structure.

Marginal (D)

Incomplete, weak engagement or shallow analysis with content; vague or poorly argued; minimal effort.

Failure (F)

Failure to complete the assignment. Elements of cheating.

Assessment Task

Midterm Test

Criterion

Understanding and application of research design concepts.

Excellent (A+, A, A-)

Demonstrates strong command of course concepts; applies them accurately and insightfully to hypothetical or real research scenarios.

Good (B+, B, B-)

Solid grasp of key concepts and reasonable application; some minor errors or gaps in explanation.

Fair (C+, C, C-)

Basic understanding of course content; application is inconsistent or overly general.

Marginal (D)

Limited comprehension; answers are unclear, incomplete, or largely incorrect.

Failure (F)

Major gaps in understanding; answers are missing, off-topic, or show evidence of academic dishonesty.

Assessment Task

Research proposal

Criterion

Clarity, coherence, originality, and methodological rigor in research design.

Excellent (A+, A, A-)

Research question is clearly articulated, original, and well-justified; the proposal demonstrates a strong understanding of how to align theory, method, and evidence. Methods are appropriate and rigorously defended, and ethical considerations are thoughtfully addressed.

Good (B+, B, B-)

Proposal presents a clear and relevant research question, with sound logic connecting theory and method. Methods are mostly appropriate and well explained, though minor conceptual or structural gaps may remain.

Fair (C+, C, C-)

A basic research question and plan are presented, but the proposal lacks conceptual clarity or depth. Justification for method choice may be vague or incomplete, and integration with theory is weak.

Marginal (D)

Research question is poorly defined or misaligned with the chosen methods. The proposal shows limited understanding of research design principles and lacks coherence or feasibility.

Failure (F)

Proposal is conceptually incoherent, lacks a viable research question or methodology, or contains serious academic integrity issues such as plagiarism.

Part III Other Information

Keyword Syllabus

Social Research; Research Design; Research Methodology; Theory Building; Conceptualization; Measurement; Causal Inference; Qualitative and Quantitative Methods; Survey; Comparative Method; Case Study; Research Proposal.

Reading List

Compulsory Readings

Title	
1	吕杰. 2026. 《政治学研究设计与方法》. 中国人民大学出版社.
2	Imai, Kosuke. 2018. Quantitative Social Science: An Introduction. Princeton University Press. 中译本：今井 耕介. 2020. 《量化社会科学导论》，祖梓文、徐轶青 译. 上海财经大学出版社.
3	Kellstedt, Paul M., Guy D. Whitten, and Steven A. Tuch. 2023. The Fundamentals of Social Research. Cambridge University Press.
4	King, Gary, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba. 2021. Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research. Princeton University Press.
5	Gerring, John. 2012. Social Science Methodology: A Unified Framework. 2nd ed. Cambridge University Press.

Additional Readings

Title	
1	Leavy, Patricia. 2022. Research Design: Quantitative, Qualitative, Mixed Methods, Arts-Based, and Community-Based Participatory Research Approaches. The Guilford Press.
2	Imai, Kosuke. 2018. Quantitative Social Science: An Introduction. Princeton University Press.
3	Brady, Henry E. and David Collier, eds. 2010. Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards (2nd ed.), Rowman & Littlefield.
4	Box-Steffensmeier, J., Brady, H., & Collier, D. (eds). 2008. The Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology. Oxford University Press
5	Kuhn, Thomas. 1997. The Structure of Scientific Revolutions. University of Chicago Press.
6	Seawright, Jason. 2016. Multi-Method Social Science: Combining Qualitative and Quantitative Tools. Cambridge University Press.