PIA2603: SOCIAL SCIENCE RESEARCH METHODS

Effective Term
Semester A 2025/26

Part I Course Overview

Course Title
Social Science Research Methods

Subject Code
PIA - Public and International Affairs
Course Number
2603

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
B1, B2, B3, B4 - Bachelor's Degree

Medium of Instruction
English

Medium of Assessment
English

Prerequisites
Nil

Precursors
Nil

Equivalent Courses
SA2602 Data Processing and Analysis/ SA2603 Social Science Research Methods/POL2603 Social Science Research Methods / AIS/PIA2012 Social Research Methods

Exclusive Courses
Nil

Part II Course Details

Abstract

This course presents the logic of social scientific inquiry and how it is brought into service of applied problem solving for our professional fields. Research problems and communication will be conceived in an interdisciplinary context. The course will discuss the multiple criteria often used to judge high quality, usable and persuasive research. Most importantly, this course will overview a variety of methods for conducting research.

Course Intended Learning Outcomes (CILOs)

	CILOs	Weighting (if app.)	DEC-A1	DEC-A2	DEC-A3
1	Devise and refine research questions from broad research areas as well as to find, evaluate critically and integrate the literature relevant to the chosen area(s) of research.		x	x	x
2	Identify and compare competing theories and operationalize the concepts relevant to each research areas.			x	x
3	Discuss the key aspects of social science research, including hypothesis testing, causal inference, measurement, and validity.			x	x
4	Devote particular attention to policy inferences and the design of policy-relevant research.		x	x	x
5	Identify the ethical issues in the research process.		x		x
6	Recognize the limitations of different research approaches and be able to assess the strengths and weaknesses of alternative means of conducting social science research.		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		Introduction of basic knowledge and skills in lectures	2, 3, 4, 5	2 hours/week
2		Case study, and in-class exercises in lecture	2, 3, 4, 5, 6	2 hours/week

3		Class interaction or feedback sessions in lectures	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6	2 hours/week
4		Literature discussion and practice sessions in tutorials	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	1 hour/week
5		Data analysis workshop	5, 6	5 hours in total

Assessment Tasks / Activities (ATs)

	ATs	CILO No.	Weighting (%)	Remarks ("-" for nil entry)	Allow Use of GenAI?
1	Class and Tutorial Participation and Attendance	2, 4, 6	15	Class and tutorial participation will be assessed according to the quality and contribution of discussion in lectures and tutorials. Marks will be deducted for absence (without just causes and presence of supporting documentation) in tutorials or lectures.	Yes
2	In-class quizzes	2, 3, 5, 6	20	Students will take two in-class quizzes consisting of multiple-choice questions to ascertain their understanding of the material covered.	No
3	Take-home midterm test	3, 4, 5, 6	35	Students will answer a series of open-ended questions designed to ascertain their comprehension of the material covered in lectures and their ability to apply that knowledge.	No

4	Take-home final test	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6	30	Students will answer a series of open-ended questions designed to ascertain their comprehension of the material covered in lectures and their ability to apply that knowledge.	No

Continuous Assessment (%)

100

Examination (%)

0

Assessment Rubrics (AR)

Assessment Task

Class and tutorial participation & attendance

Excellent (A+, A, A-)

Well prepared for lectures and tutorials. Engages in class discussions and demonstrates clear understanding of concepts via discussions.

Good (B+, B, B-)

Engages in class discussions and actively contributing ideas and questions.

Fair (C+, C, C-)

Engages in class discussion at times but generally more reserved to share ideas.

Marginal (D)

Unwilling to share ideas and undertakes a passive role in class discussions

Failure (F)

Non-attendance of tutorials with no prior notice.

Assessment Task

In-class quizzes

Excellent (A+, A, A-)

Excellent knowledge of the materials covered in the course.

Good (B+, B, B-)

Good knowledge of the materials covered in the course.

Fair (C+, C, C-)

Limited knowledge of the materials covered in the course.

Marginal (D)

Substantially flawed knowledge of the materials covered in the course.

Failure (F)

Insufficient knowledge of the materials covered in the course.

Assessment Task

Midterm exam and final test

Excellent (A+, A, A-)

All important concepts, cases, and learning materials are very clearly understood. Demonstration of excellent critical thinking and analysis skills. Excellent ability to apply the methods leant throughout the class in addressing a real-world conundrum.

Good (B+, B, B-)

All important concepts, cases, and learning materials are well understood. Demonstration of very good critical thinking and analysis skills. Very good ability to apply the methods leant throughout the class in addressing a real-world conundrum.

Fair (C+, C, C-)

All important concepts, cases, and learning materials are adequately understood. Demonstration of good critical thinking and analysis skills. Good ability to apply the methods leant throughout the class in addressing a real-world conundrum.

Marginal (D)

All important concepts, cases, and learning materials are marginally understood. Demonstration of some critical thinking and analysis skills. Some ability to apply the methods leant throughout the class in addressing a real-world conundrum.

Failure (F)

All important concepts, cases, and learning materials are hardly understood. Demonstration of little or no critical thinking and analysis skills. Fail to apply the methods leant throughout the class in addressing a real-world conundrum.

Part III Other Information

Keyword Syllabus

Purposes of research. Production of knowledge. The logic of social inquiry. Audience-oriented research. Causation. Paradigm and theory. Research design. Measurement. Conceptualisation and operationalisation. Sampling. Social survey. Quantitative data analysis. Qualitative research methods. Ethics of social research. Appreciation and evaluation of social research.

Reading List

Compulsory Readings

	Title
1	Singleton, R. A. and B. C. Straits (2010) Approaches to Social Research, 5th edition, Oxford University Press.
2	Booth, W.C., G.G. Colomb and J. M. Williams (2008) The Craft of Research, 3rd edition. University of Chicago Press.
3	Creswell J.W., (1994). Research Design Qualitative & Quantitative Approaches. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
4	King Gary, Keohane O. Robert, & Verba Sidney, (1994). Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Additional Readings

	Title
1	Buchanan, David A. and Alan Bryman. 2007. "Contextualizing methods choice in organizational research." Organizational Research Methods 10: 483 - 501.
2	Vohs, Kathleen. 2013. "Its Not 'Mess'. Its Creativity." New York Times.
3	Garrow, Eve E. 2011. "Receipt of Government Revenue among Nonprofit Human Service Organizations." Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory 21: 445-471.
4	Kuhn, Thomas, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, chapters 2, 3, 4, and 6;
5	King, Gary, Pan, Jennifer & Roberts, E. Margaret. "Reverse – engineering censorship in China: Randomized Experimentation and Participant Observation." Science 345:6199 (2014).
6	Pager, Devah. 2003. "The Mark of a Criminal Record," American Journal of Sociology 108(5): 937-975.
7	Mahoney, James and Gary Goertz. 2006." A Tale of Two Cultures: Contrasting Quantitative and Qualitative Research." Political Analysis 14(3): 227 - 249.
8	Hedstro#m, Peter and Petri Ylikoski. 2010. "Causal Mechanisms in the Social Sciences." Annual Review of Sociology 36: 49–67.
9	Adcock, Robert and David Collier. 2001. "Measurement Validity: A Shared Standard for Qualitative and Quantitative Research." American Political Science Review 95(3): 529-546.
10	Watters, J.K. and Biernacki, P., "Targeted Sampling: Options for the Study of Hidden Populations." Social Problems 36:4 (1989): 416 – 430.