

PIA4060: DIRECTED RESEARCH PROJECT

Effective Term

Semester A 2025/26

Part I Course Overview

Course Title

Directed Research Project

Subject Code

PIA - Public and International Affairs

Course Number

4060

Academic Unit

Public and International Affairs (PIA)

College/School

College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences (CH)

Course Duration

Two Semesters

Credit Units

0-6

Level

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

Medium of Instruction

English

Medium of Assessment

English

Prerequisites

Four courses from: PIA2012, PIA2030, PIA2040, PIA3031, PIA3032, PIA3033, PIA3121, PIA3123, PIA3126, PIA4042 and a 3.0 CGPA

Precursors

Nil

Equivalent Courses

AIS4060 Directed Research Project

Exclusive Courses

Nil

Additional Information

Two semesters (Semester A and Semester B)

Part II Course Details

Abstract

This is a 6-credit unit course which aims at guiding students to plan, design and accomplish an individual research project ("thesis") over the course of two semesters. Under close supervision of a PIA faculty member, students will work independently on identifying a research puzzle, defining research questions or hypotheses, and collecting data to answer these questions and/or solve the puzzle. The course will enhance students' intellectual capacity in conducting ethical and independent research, critically reviewing the scholarly literature, and identifying appropriate methods for the investigation of social, political or diplomatic issues, which is a crucial knowledge-discovering process. Enrolment is limited to students with a 3.0 GPA or higher.

Course Intended Learning Outcomes (CILOs)

	CILOs	Weighting (if app.)	DEC-A1	DEC-A2	DEC-A3
1	Apply relevant skills for planning and delivering a substantial research project		x	x	
2	Produce a written research proposal (Semester A)			x	x
3	Implement a research plan using appropriate methods				x
4	Apply multi-disciplinary critical and innovative thinking to collect data and solve research problems		x	x	
5	Produce a well-structured, evidence-based final thesis (Semester B) and present research results effectively				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	Supervision	Students will engage in regular, individual consultations and dialogue with their supervisor	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	
2	Research plan and reading	Students will engage with appropriate readings and develop an ethically-grounded research plan	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	

3	Preparation of research	Students will apply skills acquired to collect data and analyze it to solve a research problem	2, 3, 4, 5	
4	Writing and presentation of research results	Students will write a fully structured thesis and present it during an oral defence	3, 4, 5	

Assessment Tasks / Activities (ATs)

ATs	CILO No.	Weighting (%)	Remarks ("- for nil entry)	Allow Use of GenAI?	
1	Written project proposal	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	30	Semester A	No
2	Project report & oral presentation	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	70	Semester B	No

Continuous Assessment (%)

100

Examination (%)

0

Assessment Rubrics (AR)**Assessment Task**

1. Written project proposal

Criterion

Demonstrate understanding of existing theories and cases; ability to design a feasible and ethical project, with appropriate research question(s), plan, methods and tools.

Excellent (A+, A, A-)

Excellent mobilisation of existing theories and cases; innovative and promising research design and question(s), original research plan, methods and tools.

Good (B+, B, B-)

Good mobilisation of existing theories and cases; a logical and feasible research plan, with appropriate question(s), methods and tools.

Fair (C+, C, C-)

Basic mobilisation of existing theories and cases; unoriginal yet valid research design, questions(s) and plan, with relevant methods and tools.

Marginal (D)

Weak, if not lack of, mobilisation of existing theories and cases; absence of original question(s); flawed research design and plan with poor or inadequate methods and tools.

Failure (F)

Failure to complete the assignment, or major portions thereof; substantial amount of cheating and/or plagiarism.

Assessment Task

2. Final project report (thesis) and oral presentation

Criterion

Demonstrate understanding of existing theories and cases; ability to develop, write up and defend an innovative 7-10,000-word thesis, with appropriate tools and quality writing.

Excellent (A+, A, A-)

Excellent mobilisation of theories and cases, innovative research question(s) formulated and answered; outstanding collection and analysis of data; excellent quality of writing; outstanding oral presentation.

Good (B+, B, B-)

Good mobilisation of theories and cases, fine research question(s) formulated and answered; appropriate collection and analysis of data; good quality of writing; fine oral presentation.

Fair (C+, C, C-)

Basic mobilisation of theories and cases, basic research question(s) formulated and answered; average collection and analysis of data; some issues with quality of writing and/or English language; basic oral presentation.

Marginal (D)

Weak mobilisation of theories and cases, no original ideas with regard to the research question(s), poor collections and analysis of data; some elements of plagiarism; poor quality of writing and/or English language; poor oral presentation

Failure (F)

Failure to complete either/both written and oral assignments; substantial amount of cheating and/or plagiarism.

Part III Other Information

Keyword Syllabus

Social science research; social inquiry; self-directed research; research proposal; research design; field research; quantitative and qualitative methods; policy relevance of results; primary and secondary data; presentation of results; dissemination of research; ethics of research.

Further information:

A Project Guide, to be distributed upon enrolment, provides the necessary guidelines on the format and presentation of both the proposal and final individual capstone project. Substantive readings depend on the topic, and are arranged or assigned, discussed, and integrated into the proposal and final project as discussed with the supervisor. Students typically read intensively for most of Semester A while planning, designing and developing the project, and read selectively for further comparison and investigation, as well data collection, analysis and final writing in Semester B. At the end of Semester A, the research *proposal* must be submitted to the supervisor (it counts for 30% of the final grade). At the end of Semester B, the submission of the final research project (or *thesis*, that counts for 70% of the final grade) goes along with an oral presentation in front of a committee comprised of two PIA faculty members.

Reading List**Compulsory Readings**

Title	
1	Kirshner, Jonathan, 1996. "Alfred Hitchcock and the Art of Research", PS: Political Science and Politics 29(3): 511-513.
2	Ragin, Charles C. and Lisa M. Amoroso, 2011. Constructing Social Research (2nd ed.), Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, [Chapter 1 "What Is (and Is Not) Social Research", pp. 5-32].

Additional Readings

Title	
1	Booth, Wayne C., Gregory G. Colomb, Joseph M. Williams, Joseph Bizup and William T. Fitzgerald, 2016. The Craft of Research (4th ed.), Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

2	Bryman, Alan, 2012. <i>Social Research Methods</i> (4th ed.), Oxford: Oxford University Press.
3	Della Porta, Donatella and Michael Keating, eds., 2008. <i>Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences</i> , Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
4	Ragin, Charles C. and Lisa M. Amoroso, 2019. <i>Constructing Social Research</i> (3rd ed.), Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.