

PIA2012: SOCIAL RESEARCH METHODS

Effective Term

Semester A 2025/26

Part I Course Overview

Course Title

Social Research Methods

Subject Code

PIA - Public and International Affairs

Course Number

2012

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

AIS2012 Social Research Methods

AIS2035 Social Research I

AIS3122 Social Research Methods

PIA2603 Social Science Research Methods

POL2603 Social Science Research Methods

SA2602 Data Processing and Analysis

SA2603 Social Science Research Methods

Exclusive Courses

Nil

Part II Course Details

Abstract

This course will introduce students to basic principles of research design and causal inference in social science, as well as to a range of qualitative and quantitative methods commonly used in social science research. The course starts with an exploration of general issues in social inquiry and research design, and it then transitions to discussing more specific areas and selected research methods that constitute the toolkit of social scientists. For each of them, we focus on underlying principles, practical applications, strengths and weaknesses, and ethical challenges. Tutorials focus more closely on quantitative data analysis and introduce students to basic principles and practices in inferential statistics. They provide necessary foundations to students who wish to take more advanced courses, such as PIA3607. Assessment is based on class participation, quizzes and written exams. There will be a variety of activities to help students better understand the research process and how to apply research methods to address consequential social research questions.

Course Intended Learning Outcomes (CILOs)

	CILOs	Weighting (if app.)	DEC-A1	DEC-A2	DEC-A3
1	Understand the main theoretical, practical and ethical challenges in conducting social science research;	15	x	x	
2	Identify and critique the various phases of designing and implementing social science research, such as choosing research questions, reviewing relevant literatures, developing hypotheses, collecting data.	30	x	x	
3	Identify and explore strengths and weaknesses of various research methods and assess their suitability to address specific research questions in social science;	30	x	x	x
4	Learn about basic tools for the analysis of quantitative data, such as descriptive statistics, basic probability theory, normal distributions, and hypothesis testing	25	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	The instructor will present concepts and theories related to social science research	1, 2, 3, 4	

2	Class Participation	Students are expected to attend all lectures and tutorials, prepare for class by reading required materials and participate actively to class discussion when possible	1, 2, 3, 4	
3	In-Class Midterm Test	Students will answer a series of open-ended questions designed to ascertain their knowledge of the material covered in lectures and their ability to apply that knowledge	1, 2, 3, 4	
4	In-Class Final Test	Students will answer a series of open-ended questions designed to ascertain their knowledge of the material covered in lectures and their ability to apply that knowledge	1, 2, 3, 4	
5	Quizzes	Students will take two quizzes consisting of multiple-choice questions to ascertain their understanding of the material covered.	1, 2, 3	

Assessment Tasks / Activities (ATs)

	ATs	CILO No.	Weighting (%)	Remarks ("-" for nil entry)	Allow Use of GenAI?
1	Class Participation	1, 2, 3, 4	15	To assess engagement with the course	Yes
2	Quizzes	1, 2, 3	20	To assess knowledge of research design and specific methods	No
3	In-Class Midterm Test	1, 2, 3, 4	35	To assess acquired knowledge and ability to apply it to social research questions	No
4	In-Class Final Test	1, 2, 3, 4	30	To assess the assimilation of the statistical techniques introduced during the course.	No

Continuous Assessment (%)

100

Examination (%)

0

Assessment Rubrics (AR)

Assessment Task

1. Class participation

Criterion

Students are expected to attend all lectures and tutorials, and to participate actively, especially in tutorials.

Excellent (A+, A, A-)

Demonstrates excellent level of engagement with lecture and reading material. Participation in tutorials is above average.

Good (B+, B, B-)

Demonstrates good level of engagement with lecture and reading material. Participation in tutorials is about average.

Fair (C+, C, C-)

Demonstrates satisfactory level of engagement with lecture and reading material. Participation in tutorials is below average.

Marginal (D)

Demonstrates poor level of engagement with lecture and reading material. Participation in tutorials is well below average.

Failure (F)

Indicates that through poor learning or lack of effort, the student has failed to maintain even minimal attendance and participation levels.

Assessment Task

2. Midterm and final in-class test

Criterion

Need to master the topics covered in class, and a capacity to critically reflect on them and apply knowledge.

Excellent (A+, A, A-)

Excellent knowledge of the topics covered in class and capacity to critically integrate lecture and reading material into the essay question.

Good (B+, B, B-)

Good knowledge of the topics covered in class and capacity to critically integrate lecture and reading material into the essay question.

Fair (C+, C, C-)

Limited knowledge of the topics covered in class and capacity to critically integrate lecture and reading material into the essay question.

Marginal (D)

Poor knowledge of the topics covered in class and capacity to critically integrate lecture and reading material into the essay question.

Failure (F)

Little or no knowledge of the topics covered in class and capacity to critically reflect on them.

Assessment Task

3. Quizzes

Criterion

Students need to possess solid factual knowledge of practices and methods in social research

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.

Part III Other Information

Keyword Syllabus

Purposes of research; Research process; Production of knowledge; Theory and empirics; Literature review; Research ethics; Research design; Causal inference; Conceptualization; Measurement; Qualitative methods; Interviews; Comparative method; Case study analysis; Quantitative methods; Statistics; Text analysis; Ethnography; Sampling; Surveys; Experiments.

Reading List

Compulsory Readings

	Title
1	Kellstedt, Paul M., Guy D. Whitten, and Steven A. Tuch. 2023. <i>The Fundamentals of Social Research</i> . Cambridge University Press.
2	Babbie, Earl (2020) <i>The Practice of Social Research</i> (15th Edition). Boston: Cengage.

Additional Readings

	Title
1	Johnson, B. J., Reynolds, H. T. & Mycoff, J. D. (2020) <i>Political Science Research Methods</i> . London, Sage.
2	Creswell, J. W. & Creswell, J. D. (2018) <i>Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches</i> . London, Sage.
3	Buchanan, David A. and Alan Bryman. 2007. "Contextualizing methods choice in organizational research." <i>Organizational Research Methods</i> 10: 483 - 501.
4	Vohs, Kathleen. 2013. "Its Not 'Mess' . Its Creativity." <i>New York Times</i> .
5	Garrow, Eve E. 2011. "Receipt of Government Revenue among Nonprofit Human Service Organizations." <i>Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory</i> 21: 445-471.
6	Kuhn, Thomas, <i>The Structure of Scientific Revolutions</i> , chapters 2, 3, 4, and 6;

7	King, Gary, Pan, Jennifer & Roberts, E. Margaret. "Reverse – engineering censorship in China: Randomized Experimentation and Participant Observation." <i>Science</i> 345:6199 (2014).
8	Pager, Devah. 2003. "The Mark of a Criminal Record," <i>American Journal of Sociology</i> 108(5): 937-975.
9	Mahoney, James and Gary Goertz. 2006. "A Tale of Two Cultures: Contrasting Quantitative and Qualitative Research." <i>Political Analysis</i> 14(3): 227 - 249.
10	Hedstrom, Peter and Petri Ylikoski. 2010. "Causal Mechanisms in the Social Sciences." <i>Annual Review of Sociology</i> 36: 49–67.
11	Adcock, Robert and David Collier. 2001. "Measurement Validity: A Shared Standard for Qualitative and Quantitative Research." <i>American Political Science Review</i> 95(3): 529-546.
12	Watters, J.K. and Biernacki, P., "Targeted Sampling: Options for the Study of Hidden Populations." <i>Social Problems</i> 36:4 (1989): 416 – 430.
13	Singleton, R. A. and B. C. Straits (2010) <i>Approaches to Social Research</i> , 5th edition, Oxford University Press.
14	Booth, W.C., G.G. Colomb and J. M. Williams (2008) <i>The Craft of Research</i> , 3rd edition. University of Chicago Press.
15	King Gary, Keohane O. Robert, & Verba Sidney, (1994). <i>Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research</i> . Princeton: Princeton University Press.