

THE INSTITUTE OF ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL STUDIES

DIRECTED RESEARCH AND METHODOLOGY

Fall 2012

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Syllabus:

This course is designed to provide students with the necessary skills to plan, research and write up a successful research project. The course has two interrelated aims: first, to give a general overview of the nature of social and political science research and, second, to furnish students with the practical tools needed to conduct their own research in the field. The course starts by addressing the nature of the scientific method and its applicability to the social sciences. This is followed by a consideration of the roles of methodology and theory in the research process. Once these broader concerns have been addressed, the course will introduce students to the essential building blocks of empirical social science research: hypotheses, concepts and variables. Towards the later stages, students will be encouraged to develop their own research design or plan showing how they intend to study a particular empirical question. Guidance will also be given for the writing and presentation of the research paper. At all stages students will be encouraged to reflect upon how their own research can successfully combine the theoretical and empirical aspects required by political science research.

Structure:

This course will primarily consist of guided seminar discussions of assigned readings. It is vital that students do *all* the required readings as (i) some of the concepts we discuss are difficult and will require you to work on them before seminars; and (ii) the course, reflecting the research process itself, is progressive and cumulative.

Core courses:

1. Directed Research and Methodology
and
2. One of the following courses: Contemporary Britain
Law and Society
Media, Society and Contemporary Culture

Readings:

Many of the assigned readings will be taken from the following text-book, the course's primary teaching resource:

Janet Buttolph Johnson and H.T. Reynolds, *Political Science Research Methods*, 7th ed., (Sage 2012).

For each seminar you are required to read and make notes on at least one, sometime two, required readings, usually book chapters or journal articles. **These are designated by an asterisk and highlighted.** Other useful additional sources are also included for each week. These, which include online articles, audio soundtracks and videos, are intended to clarify the subject matter under discussion and should be consulted wherever possible. The tutor will also introduce other relevant readings as the course progresses.

Timetable

Week 1 17/09/12 **Introductory Session: Planning a Research Project**

Week 2 24/09/12 **Science and the Scientific Method**

Sets the background for studying society and politics scientifically. This seminar (i) addresses the nature of Science; (ii) explores the elements of the scientific method; (iii) introduces the philosophical tradition of Empiricism.

*Schafersman, Steven D., 'An Introduction to Science, Scientific Thinking and the Scientific Method' <http://www.geo.sunysb.edu/esp/files/scientific-method.html>

Bhattacharjee, Anol, *Social Science Research: Principles, Methods, and Practices* (2012) Open Access Textbooks. http://scholarcommons.usf.edu/oa_textbooks/3, pp. 1-6.

Feynman, Richard, 'On Scientific Method', <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EYPapE-3FRw>

Week 3 01/10/12 **The Idea of Political Science**

This seminar will (i) explore how the scientific method has been applied in the social and political sciences; (ii) introduce the doctrine of Positivism; (3) consider the differences between normative and empirical theory in political research; (4) discuss criticisms of the applicability of the scientific method to human social and political life.

*Johnson & Reynolds, 'The Empirical Approach to Political Science' in *Political Science Research Methods*, pp. 36-54.

Kolakowski, Leszek, 'An Over-all View of Positivism', in Kolakowski, *The Alienation of Reason* (Doubleday 1968), pp. 1-10.

Baronov, David, 'Embryonic Positivism' in Baronov, *Conceptual Foundations of Social Research Methods* (Paradigm Publishers, 2004), pp. 11-34.

Crotty, Michael 'Positivism: The March of Science, in *The Foundations of Social Research*, (Sage, 1998), pp. 1-15.

Week 4 08/10/12 **Methods and Theory in Political Research**

The subjects for this seminar are: (i) the role of methods and methodology in research; (ii) the relationship between methodology, epistemology and ontology; (iii) the nature and role of theory in the research process.

*Michael Crotty, 'The Research Process', in *The Foundations of Social Research*, (Sage, 1998), pp. 1-15.

*Bhattacharjee, 'Theories in Scientific Research', ch. 4, in *Social Science Research: Principles, Methods, and Practices*. p, 25-34

Week 5 15/10/12 **Hypotheses, Concepts and Variables**

This seminar introduces students to the essential building blocks of empirical research.

*Johnson & Reynolds, 'The Building Blocks of Social Science Research, in *Political Science Research Methods*, pp. 102-126.

Prasad, Rao & Rehani, *Developing Hypotheses and Research Questions*
<http://www.public.asu.edu/~kroel/www500/hypothesis.pdf>

Johnson & Reynolds, 'Beginning the Research Process, in *Political Science Research Methods*, pp. 102-126.

Bhattacharjee, 'Thinking Like a Researcher', in Bhattacharjee, *Social Science Research: Principles, Methods, and Practices*.

Week 6 22/08/2012 **Mid-Term Student Research Reports**

In this seminar students will present a mid-term report on their progress on their individual projects. These must integrate the practical elements of research methods learnt thus far.

Week 7 29/10-2012 **Interpretivist Approaches to Politics**

Although this course prioritises empirical research methods, this seminar will introduce students to the 'interpretative' approach, which underpins qualitative research.

* Willis, Jerry W., 'History and Foundations of Interpretative Research', in Willis, *Foundations of Qualitative Research: Interpretative and Critical Approaches* (Sage, 2007), pp. 95-146.

Geertz, Clifford, 'Thick Description: Towards and Interpretative Theory of Culture in Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (Basic Books 1973), pp. 3-32.

Taylor, Charles 'Interpretation and the Sciences of Man,' in Taylor, *Philosophy and the Human Sciences* (CUP, 1995), pp. 15-67.

Week 8 12/11/2012 **Research Design**

Students will learn the importance of Research Design or drawing up a plan showing how an empirical question will be studied: the theory to be tested, the appropriate units

of analysis and data collection etc. Emphasis will be placed on the need to establish a causal relationship between the phenomena studied.

*Johnson & Reynolds, 'Research Design', *Political Science Research Methods*, pp. 165-178.

'Structure of a Research Article,' <http://www.nwmissouri.edu/library/courses/hes/resart.htm>

Week 9 19/11/2012 **Writing-Up and Presenting a Research Project**

Students will be shown how to plan, structure and write-up their research project. Particular attention will be paid to proper referencing practices.

*Josh Pasek, *Writing the Empirical Social Science Research Paper: A Guide for the Perplexed* at <http://www.apa.org/education/undergrad/empirical-social-science.pdf>

Week 10 19/11/2012 **Individual Meeting of Students with Tutor**

Students will have one-to-one meetings with the tutor to discuss the final stages of planning and writing their individual research projects.

Week 11 26/11/2012 **Final Student Presentations on Individual Research Projects**

Assessments:

A) To be submitted at the end of week 6:

A one page Abstract outlining the individual research project

B) To be submitted at the end of week 12:

The Individual Directed Research Project of about 5000 words.