

Research design

PhD course organized by PESO (Politics, Economy and the Organization of Society) – the Social Science Graduate School at Södertörn University.

Credits: 7.5

Time period: 29 September – 29 October 2022

Course instructors:

Johan Eriksson (Political Science, Course Head), johan.eriksson@sh.se

Malin Gawell (Business Administration), malin.gawell@sh.se

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Dominika Vergara Polanska (Sociology & Social Work), dominika.vergara.polanska@sh.se

Purpose

Participants are trained in critical reflection and development of research problems, research design, and research ethics within the Social Sciences. The course helps doctoral students in sharpening and refining their research questions, strengthening the overall focus and composition of their dissertation, in making strategic choices explicit, and in identifying the strengths and limitations of the chosen design. Participants will be familiarized with diverse types of research problems, different strategies in developing a research design, and how ethical issues play out and can be managed in a social science research project. Emphasis is on how the formulation of research problem is made in connection to the choice and combination of theory, methodology and empirical research.

Course structure

The course consists of five lectures and five seminars. The course covers four main topics: research problems, research design (in general), case study design, and research ethics. For each topic, a lecture will be given, followed by a seminar. For each of the subject seminars, participants are expected to select two doctoral dissertations and analyze how the topic of the seminar is addressed in the selected dissertations (research problems, design, etc.). Participants may choose the same two dissertations for all seminars – given that those dissertations actually

address all relevant topics (case study design and research ethics might be the exceptions, since these are not always addressed in doctoral dissertations). The course ends with a longer seminar in which participants present and discuss a final paper.

Schedule

Thursday 29 September, 10:00-12:00 Introductory lecture – Johan

Introduction to the course subject, course structure, readings, and requirements. In addition, participants present themselves and their dissertation topics, including an initial attempt to formulate a preliminary research problem and a preliminary choice of research design. Each participant is expected to present a single-page Power Point slide with their preliminary research problem, and a few bullet-points on the preliminary research design.

Thursday 29 September, 13:00-15:00 Lecture on research problems – Malin

What kind of research problems are there? What are the criteria of a scientifically sound research problem? How are research problems presented in scientific texts – explicitly and implicitly?

Tuesday 4 October, 10:00-12:00 Seminar on research problems – Malin

Each participant selects and reads two doctoral dissertations from their own (or other relevant) discipline. An individually written paper (600-800 words) comparing the research problems in selected dissertations is to be submitted to the designated inbox on the Canvas course web by noon Thursday 3 October. Participants are expected to read and comment on two of the other participants' papers.

Tuesday 4 October, 13:00-15:00: Lecture on research design – Johan

What is research design about? What are the basic choices to be made in terms of research design? What basic types of research design have appeared in the social sciences? What are the strengths and limitations of diverse research designs?

Readings: Becker; Bukve; Rosenau & Durfee.

Monday 10 October, 10:00-12:00: Seminar on research design – Johan

Each participant selects and reads two doctoral dissertations from their own (or other relevant) discipline. An individually written paper (600-800 words) comparing the overall research designs of selected dissertations is to be submitted to the designated inbox on the Canvas course web no later than Friday 7 October at 15:00. Participants are expected to read and comment orally on two of the other participants' papers.

Monday 10 October, 13:00-15:00: Lecture on case study design – Dominika

What is a case study? When are case studies appropriate to use? What basic types of case studies are applied in the social sciences? What are the strengths and limitations of case studies?

Friday 14 October, 10:00-12:00: Seminar on case study design – Dominika

Each participant selects and reads two doctoral dissertations from their own (or other relevant) discipline. An individually written paper (600-800 words) comparing the case study designs of selected dissertations is to be submitted to the designated inbox on the Canvas course web by noon Thursday 13 October. Participants are expected to read and comment orally on two of the other participants' papers.

Friday 14 October, 13:00-15:00: Lecture on research ethics – Eva

What does research ethics entail? What are the main types of ethical issues in social science research? What are the rules, regulations and institutionalized mechanisms for research ethics? How can ethical issues be effectively managed?

Friday 21 October, 10:00-12:00: Seminar on research ethics - Eva

Each participant selects and reads two doctoral dissertations from their own (or other relevant) discipline. An individually written paper (600-800 words) comparing the discussion and management of research ethics within the selected dissertations is to be submitted to the designated inbox on the Canvas course web by noon Thursday 20 October. Participants are expected to read and comment orally on two of the other participants' papers.

Friday 28 October, 10:00-15:00: Seminar on participants' research plans – All instructors

This seminar is devoted to presentation and discussion of the participants (revised) research plans (approx. 3000 words), with the aim of improving the quality of the candidate's research problem, research design and management of potential ethical issues. Papers are to be submitted to the designated inbox on the Canvas course web by noon Tuesday 25 October. Participants will defend their own paper and act as discussant for another participant's paper, but we expect everyone to be able to engage in discussion of all papers.

Requirements

Participation in seminars is mandatory, while participation in lectures is optional but highly recommended. Specifically, participants are required to:

- attend all seminars (see specific requirements for each seminar);
- prepare a paper for each seminar, circulate your paper in advance of each seminar, and actively participate by discussing the presented papers;
- papers should make use of and refer to the course readings, and other relevant scientific literature.

If you miss a seminar, you will have to submit not only your own paper but also a written review (600-800 words) of two of the other participants' papers. If you miss the final seminar, you will have to submit an extended review of the thesis proposals of two other participants (2000 words in total), in addition to submitting your own thesis proposal.

Grades: Pass (G) or Fail (U). In order to Pass the course, you must successfully complete the five seminar assignments, each one with a Pass grade. Grading is based on the participant's ability to demonstrate in writing (1) the strengths and disadvantages of different types of research problems and research designs; (2) the criteria and procedures for correctly and effectively managing ethical issues in social science research projects; and (3) the choice and formulation of a research problem, research design (and potentially ethical considerations) in her/his own PhD dissertation. Papers must be legibly written, well-structured, convincingly argued, and include a proper academic reference system (preferably the Harvard system).

Recommended readings

The list below contains a number of recommended readings covering the topics of this course. Participants are expected to use additional readings of their own choice, which they find useful for their individual assignments and PhD projects. Since some books can be hard to get hold of, we have suggested a number of similar readings. It should also be noted that in this course, you are not being tested on the books and articles per se, but rather on how you are able to make use of knowledge and advice available in the academic literature on research problems, research design, and research ethics. Our lectures, however, are mainly based on the readings listed below.

* PDF available on Canvas course web.

Writing literature reviews

We have below added two articles on how to write a literature review, even though we do not have any lecture or seminar specifically focusing on that topic. They are relevant however both for the understanding of research problems, and research design. On the one hand, formulating a research problem requires an understanding of past research, for which a literature review is useful. On the other hand, writing a literature review is essentially what is done when reviewing past research – an essential part of any doctoral dissertation. Structuring this in an effective way is also a matter of design.

*Booth, A. (2012) “Taking a systematic approach to your literature review”, Sage publications.

*Knopf, Jeffrey W. (2006) Doing a literature review, *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 39(1): 127-132.

Research problems

*Gustafsson, K. and L. Hagström (2017) “What is the Point? Teaching Graduate Students How to Construct Political Science Research Puzzles”, *European Political Science*, 1-15 (open access).

*Sandberg, J. and M. Alvesson (2010) “Ways of constructing research questions: gap-spotting or problematization?” *Organization*, 18(1): 23-44.

*Zinnes, D. A. (1980) “Three Puzzles in Search of a Researcher: Presidential Address”, *International Studies Quarterly* 24(3): 315–342.

Research design

Blaikie, N. (2009) *Designing Social Research*. London: Polity Press.

Bukve, Oddbjørn (2019) *Designing Social Science Research*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Brady, H. E. and D. Collier (2004) *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards*. Lanham, MD, Rowman & Littlefield.

*Rosenau, J. N. and M. Durfee (2000) *Thinking Theory Thoroughly: Coherent Approaches to an Incoherent World*. Boulder, Oxford: Westview Press, Ch. 9 (pp. 224-238).

Shwartz-Shea, Peregrine & Dwora Yanow (2012) *Interpretative Research Design: Concepts and Processes*. Routledge.

<https://books.google.se/books?hl=sv&lr=&id=84N2Vul4zQYC&oi=fnd&pg=PR5&dq=resea>

[rch+design+social+sciences&ots=85CJslW3ZB&sig=hLLyFo8U9v1AB7a20rlPDHzodIg&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q=research%20design%20social%20sciences&f=false](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/312511111) 5

Wahyuni, Dina (2012) “The Research Design Maze: Understanding Paradigms, Cases, Methods and Methodologies”, *Journal of Applied Management Accounting Research*, 10(1): 69-80.

<https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3>

Case study design

Yin, R. (2014). *Case Study Research. Design and Methods*. Thousand Oaks/London/New Delhi: Sage. [This is the book Dominika will mainly refer to in her lecture]

George, A. & (2005) *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*. MIT Press.

See also this link for additional readings on case studies:

<https://libguides.lub.lu.se/c.php?g=296919&p=1982729>

Research ethics

Israel, M. and I. Hay (2006) *Research Ethics for Social Science: Between Ethical Conduct and Regulatory Compliance* (London: Sage). Available:

<https://epdf.tips/research-ethics-for-social-scientists.html>

Samuel, Gabrielle (2020) “Ethical Issues in Social Media Research”, *Journal of Empirical Research on Human Research Ethics*, 15(1-2): 3-11.

https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/29346005/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2103082

See also these links:

<https://medarbetarwebben.sh.se/sidor/forska/stod-till-forskare/forskningsetiska-fragor.html>

<https://medarbetarwebben.sh.se/english/startpage/research/support-for-researchers/legal-and-ethical-issues.html>

<https://medarbetarwebben.sh.se/sidor/forska/doktorand/utbildningen.html>

<https://medarbetarwebben.sh.se/english/startpage/research/doctoral-studies/education.html>

A few more readings might be added during the course. Suggestions from participants are also most welcome.

Participants will also read self-selected doctoral dissertations.