

INT240 Research Methods in the Social Sciences

Syllabus

Spring 2009

Instructor: Dr. Percival Santos

Time: TBA

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Number of credits: 3

Course Description:

This course introduces students to the range of methods with which social scientists work as they attempt to systematically understand social phenomena. It provides firsthand experience with the specific procedures through which social science knowledge is developed. It emphasizes the interaction between theory and research and makes explicit links with relevant ideas in the history and philosophy of science that have substantially illuminated the theory and methodology of contemporary social science. Thus emphasis will be on general procedures and epistemological issues as well as on concrete techniques. Students will be expected to work in groups and carry out a small scale research project or work with data already available from survey, historical and census materials. Teaching will take the form of a mixed lecture, workshop and seminar format that is project driven rather than content driven. This means that students are expected to select a topic and a method early on in the course and work on it throughout the term. There is a predetermined corpus of issues and theories that will be taught on the course, however the sequence and order in which any particular issue will be covered in each week will depend on the immediate relevance these will have on the particular stage of the project that the groups happen to be working on.

Course Objectives:

Upon completion of this course students will be able to (1) conduct a small scale research project that is theoretically and methodologically informed (2) understand the general principles and methods involved in doing social research (3) appreciate the broad theories and issues that are used to justify existing methods and techniques of social research.

Assessment:

Student achievement of the stated course objectives will be measured in the form of (1) one class presentation (2) student participation (3) and a 10,000 word research project to be done by a group of 3 students.

Content:

Method: Defining the issue, reviewing the literature, choosing a research design, various data gathering techniques, data analysis, report writing

Methodology: inductivism, deductivism, confirmation and falsification of hypotheses, Lakatos' research programme, Kuhnian paradigms, interpretivism, holism and Feyerabend's 'against method'

Class Schedule

Week 1

The nature of empirical social research

Subtopics: empirical evidence, assumptions, qualitative and quantitative research

Week 2

Planning a research project

Subtopics: picking a study topic, conducting a literature review, choosing a research question, writing a research proposal,

Week 3

Research design

Subtopics: experimental design, cross-sectional design, longitudinal design, case study design, comparative design

Week 4-5

Quantitative research methods

Subtopics: measurement, operationism, reliability, validity, replicability, causality, sampling, testing

Week 6-7

Qualitative research methods

Subtopics: ethnography, participant observation, interviews, focus groups

Week 8-9

The role of theory and methodology

Subtopics: deductive and inductive theory, objectivism, constructionism, falsification confirmation and falsification of hypotheses, Lakatos' research programme, Kuhnian paradigms, interpretivism, holism and Feyerabend's 'against method'

Week 10-11

Analyzing the quantitative data

Subtopics: univariate analysis, bivariate analysis, multivariate analysis, statistical significance, correlation, causation

Week 12-13

Analyzing the qualitative data

Subtopics: grounded theory, analytic induction, thematic analysis, narrative analysis, secondary analysis of qualitative data

Week 14-15

Writing up social research

Subtopics: style and tone, cause and effect, background assumptions, literature review, definition of problem, hypotheses

Week 16

Class presentation

(Students talk about their projects, findings, conclusions, etc.)