

**Graduate School for Social Research
2019-2010**

Empirical Research in the Social Sciences: Design, Implementation and Write-up

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Instructors:

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Course Description:

This course focuses on the logic of theory-driven and empirically-based social science research and the process underlying scientific production. We emphasize the practical steps that enable scholars to design their research project, formulate testable hypotheses, and select the data and analysis techniques most suitable for answering the project's research question(s). Equally important, the course teaches you how to read published academic studies to critically assess their merits and limitations, and how to write up research projects to meet the requirements and expectations of major English-language social science publication outlets, especially those of peer-reviewed journals like the *American Sociological Review*, *American Political Science Review*, *American Journal of Sociology*, *Social Forces*, and *European Sociological Review*.

To this end, the course comprises two independent, albeit complimentary, components, which follow one another during the 2019-2020 academic year. The entire course is conducted from an interdisciplinary perspective.

Part I, *Research Design and Implementation in Social Science* (30 hours, Semester I) deals with the multiple, often simultaneous and reiterative, steps of developing and carrying out theory-informed, empirical projects. Good research requires a well-formulated and testable problem, alternative explanations, and data that explicitly link concepts and hypotheses. Through a combination of lecture and in-class discussion, we cover the role of theory for developing research questions and hypotheses, and for interpreting results; we discuss how to pose research questions that pass the "So what?" test, and how research questions and theory inform the formulation of research hypotheses; we assess different types of data (e.g. primary and secondary data, qualitative and quantitative) and research methods in terms of their usefulness for answering given research question(s) and addressing specified hypotheses. Part I also provides an overview of the main methodological problems that different types of data and analyses carry.

Part II, *Reading and Writing in Social Science* (30 Hours, Semester II) trains students in how to read and write English language empirical research articles in the social sciences that conform to international standards. At the heart of academic social science are theory-informed empirical research articles and constructive criticism on the pre-publication writing of colleagues. By article, we mean that which is found in the top journals of sociology, e.g. generalist journals such as *American Sociological Review* (Impact Factor, IF, 5.06), *Social Forces* (IF 2.11), and *European Sociological Review* (IF 1.76), and specialty journals such as *Qualitative Sociology* (IF 1.23). These articles have ca. 8000-9000 words and tend to follow a similar structure: Title, abstract, acknowledgements, introduction, theory and hypotheses, data and methods, results, conclusion, and references. Other sections depend on the methods and content of the empirical analyses, such as "setting" (for qualitative articles) and appendices. Students will need to understand both the structure of empirical research articles and the kind of content that should be included within each part of the structure. They will write based on their own research, drawing from Part I of the course. They will also learn how to revise both their own writing and the writing of their colleagues.