

Graduate School for Social Research

2024 - 2025

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

<https://socialinquiry.wordpress.com/>

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*, *European Sociological Review*, and *Qualitative Sociology*, among others.

To this end, the course comprises **two independent**, albeit complimentary, components, which follow one another during the 2024-2025 academic year. Part I of the ERSS course, to take place in Autumn 2024, teaches students the practicalities of moving from research design to research implementation. Part II, offered in Spring 2025, focuses on writing social science publications and grant proposals. Successful completion of the course workloads for Part I and Part II yields a total of 10 ECTS points/credits (5 ECTS points/course component).

The entire course is conducted from an interdisciplinary perspective and imparts knowledge, skills and social competences at Level 8 of the Polish Qualifications Framework (https://kwalifikacje.gov.pl/images/downloads/materia%C5%82y_do_serwisu_ZSK/tabele_PRK/PRK_tab5.pdf). Below are the detailed descriptions for **ERSS Part I, *Research Design and Implementation in Social Sciences*** (30 hours, Semester I) and **ERSS Part II, *Writing in Social Sciences*** (30 Hours, Semester II), including timeline and requirements specific to each of the course's components.

ERSS Part I: Research Design and Implementation in Social Sciences

(30 hours, Semester I)

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Place: Room 232, Staszic Palace, 72 Nowy Świat, 00-330 Warsaw, Poland. Classes meet face-to-face unless the situation warrants otherwise.

Time: Tuesdays, 10:30-12:30

Office Hours: By appointment for office or online meetings.

Course Website: <https://socialinquiry.wordpress.com/>

Description of ERSS Part I

Part I of the course *Empirical Research in the Social Sciences, ERSS*, 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, data that explicitly link concepts and hypotheses, and methods suitable to answer the posed research questions.

Through a combination of lecture and 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, survey and non-survey data) 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.

Objectives

ERSS Part I aims to provide students the key knowledge, skills and social competences for developing both academic and non-academic research products that are empirically grounded and meaningful for the scientific community and/or for society in general (e.g., policy relevant). Understanding how to critically assess published empirical studies with respect to the clarity and consistency of their research design, measurement adequacy, soundness of causal statements, and the degree of correspondence between research problem – research questions/hypotheses – data – methods – conclusions, are important aspects of these skills and competences.

At the end of ERSS Part I, you should be prepared to move from designing a study, whether article, dissertation proposal, or funding proposal, to implementing it. More specifically, you should know how to:

- Pose research questions relevant both to you and social science more broadly. Among others, these questions shall pass the “so what?” condition, and be methodologically feasible;
- Understand the importance of the link between theory and methods;
- Identify theory-informed arguments within and across social science disciplines, to generate empirically testable hypotheses, or research questions that can be answered based on empirical data;
- Assess the overall strengths and weaknesses of different types of data and data collection approaches;
- Identify possibilities of qualitative and/or quantitative data most suitable for addressing your research questions/hypotheses;
- Evaluate overall benefits and challenges of different social science research methods;
- Discuss possibilities and limitations of conclusions derived from different data and methods;
- Understand and follow the ethical requirements of social science research.

In addition to imparting these specialized knowledge and skills, ERSS Part I fosters scientific independence, critical thinking and communication skills. By the end of the semester, you should be able to present your research design and arguments in clear, logical fashion.

Course Requirements

1. Classroom participation and attendance (15% of grade)

Everyone is expected to participate regularly and to come to class prepared to meaningfully discuss the readings. Punctual attendance is required. If you have a legitimate reason why you might be late on a regular basis, please notify us at the beginning of the course, or as soon as the condition appears. Excessive absences, tardiness, or leaving early will adversely affect your grade for classroom participation.

Class discussions centered on key issues of research design are an important element of this course. The discussion format mimics in miniature what professional sociologists do – actively engage in theoretical debates with colleagues. We expect discussion to be professional and polite – but engaged. Do not shy away from points. Push for your arguments. Do not accept two logically inconsistent points as “equally valid perspectives.” Seek to integrate alternative perspectives and understand the basic assumptions that drive different conclusions. We will push back on your arguments, and we trust you will do the same for each other. For this format to work, you must be active participants.

The presentation of the Outline of your research proposal (see Step 3 below) counts toward your grade for classroom participation.

2. Critical Reading Reactions (25% of grade)

To help focus class discussions and encourage you to think critically about social science research design and implementation, you will write six short reading reactions (ca. 300-500 words), based on either empirical articles or textbook chapters assigned in this course. We will circulate the schedule with due dates for the reading reactions in the first week of this course.

When reacting to an empirical article, please discuss how well the author(s) link (a) research question(s) and hypotheses to (b) the chosen empirical data, and (c) the selected methods of analyses. When reacting to a book chapter, please provide a summary of the chapter’s key points. At the end of the reading reactions to both empirical papers and book chapters, include questions that you have about the readings (e.g., what you may not have understood with regards to the overall research design and its implementation, including analyses), questions about the nature of social science, or a short critique of an article’s methodology. These reactions are not about how you ‘feel’ about the readings (whether you liked them or not), but should be analytical in nature.

In preparing your reading reactions, you are encouraged to discuss the readings with your colleagues, and look up unclear concepts and terms. We will use your reactions as part of class discussion. Please come prepared to discuss what you wrote.

3. Group Assignment - Field Research (20% of grade)

To experience how the process of research design and implementation can feel, you will engage in a group exercise where you will use observation as your data collection method. Since the method is the “servant” (Firebaugh 2008), together with members of your group you will first formulate a research question whose answer calls for analyzing data collected via field observation. Specific requirements of the Group Assignment, including for writing up the results of your exercise, will be handed out in class.

4. Research Design for an Empirical Article (40% of grade)

The final project for this course consists of writing the research design for an empirical article. You have the opportunity to further develop this article during ERSS Part II (Semester 2).

The research design for ERSS Part I will take the form of a research proposal (around 2,500 words, 12-point font, double-spaced). We will discuss the appropriate components of the proposal in class, and provide a detailed handout of the requirements. Each student must write up their own paper individually and turn in their own work.

Completing the Research Proposal involves three steps, each due at different time points during Semester I (see Time Outline in Syllabus):

Step 1: Prepare a 300-500 words **General Statement about your Research Proposal’s Topic** that should include (a) Knowledge gap and Research problem; (b) Research question(s), and whether answering these questions presupposes description, theory-testing, or both; if you plan causal research, hypotheses are encouraged, but not mandatory; (c) The argument as to why your research question passes the ‘so what’ condition; (d) What data you

consider most appropriate for addressing the research question(s); (e) If you intend to collect data, what sampling technique you regard as most appropriate for your study.

The General Statement can take the form of a flowing narrative, or of bullet-points (with or without additional statements developing a given point).

Step 2: Prepare the **Outline of your Research Proposal** (about 800 words) that incorporates the instructor-provided feedback to your General statement (Step 1). The Outline should briefly discuss each of the following elements: (a) Knowledge gap and research problem; (b) Research question(s); (c) Main theoretical framework(s) that inform your research (enumeration, not detailed description of theory); (d) If your research involves causal analysis, provide the research hypotheses and briefly indicate how they link to the theoretical framework(s) you chose; (e) What data and methods you regard as necessary to examine the research questions/ hypotheses; (f) What limitations are these data and methods likely to have, given what you set out to investigate.

The Outline can take the form of a flowing narrative, or of bullet-points whose main ideas you briefly develop via accompanying phrases under each point.

Step 3: In-class presentation of the Research Proposal Outline. You are expected to present your Proposal Outline during one of the last two course sessions. We will share details about the format of the presentation in class. To facilitate discussion, you need to electronically share your Outline, and, if applicable, additional materials, with the class (instructors and colleagues) at least one day prior to your presentation.

Please prepare a 500-word response to the feedback to the Proposal Outline (Step 2) received from the course instructors, and submit it via email to us at least two days before your scheduled in-class presentation. React to the feedback we provided point-by-point, explaining your decisions. In particular, if you decide not to implement instructors' suggestions, please explain why so. You may use the time of the in-class discussion of your proposal (after your presentation) as the occasion to discuss feedback on your proposal that you received from your peers.

Write the full **Proposal of the Research Design** (around 2500 words) according to the requirements distributed in class. The proposal is due electronically on Monday, February 10, 2025.

Grading

Grades will be based: 15% on Class participation, 25% on Reading reactions; 20% on Field Methods Assignment; and 40% on the Research Proposal. Total possible points = 100 (corresponding to 100%).

Students receiving more than 90% of possible points receive at least a **5-**, more than 80%, at least a **4-**, more than 70% at least a **3-**, and more than 60% at least a **2**. The corresponding **ECTS grades** are:

A 94-100 5	B+ 87-89 4+	C+ 77-79 3+	D+ 65-69 2+	F 59-0 1
A- 90-93 5-	B 84-86 4	C 74-76 3	D 60-64 2	
	B- 80-83 4-	C- 70-73 3-		

Readings

Readings for ERSS Part I are available from the instructors, via a course-specific G-drive. Readings are shared for academic instruction only, and are not to be distributed further. Please consult the Timetable for reading materials assigned to each class period.

Resources:

- Bryman, A., 2012. *Social Research Methods*. OUP Oxford.
- Creswell, J. W. 2009. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Method Approaches*, 3rd edition. Los Angeles: Sage.
- Firebaugh, G. 2008. *Seven Rules for Social Research*, Princeton University Press.
- Hargittai, E. (ed.) 2009. *Research Confidential: Solutions to Problems Most Social Scientists Pretend They Never Have*. University of Michigan Press.
- Humphrey, C. and Lee, B. H. (eds.) 2004. *The Real-Life Guide to Accounting Research: A Behind-the-scenes View of Using Qualitative Research Methods*. Elsevier.
- King, G. R., Keohane, O. and Verba, S. 1994. *Designing Social Inquiry*, Princeton University Press.
- Minichiello, V., Aroni, R. and Hays, T. N. 2008. *In-depth Interviewing: Principles, Techniques, Analysis*, 3rd edition. Pearson/Prentice Hall.
- Singleton, R. A. Jr. and Straits, B. C. 1999. *Approaches to Social Research*, 3rd edition. Oxford University Press, USA.
- Cross-Cultural Survey Guidelines* <https://ccsg.isr.umich.edu/chapters/>

Policies on Attendance, Late Materials, and Make-Up

Attendance is mandatory, and counts toward your Classroom participation and attendance grade. Please notify the instructors in advance if you are unable to attend a given class session.

As a rule, this course meets in person. Under exceptional circumstances, such as documented participation in a short-term study/research visit or as a presenter at a scientific conference, and after priorly discussing your situation with the instructors, it may be possible to attend up to three of the fifteen class sessions online.

During class, smart phones and other electronic devices with noise-capacity must be turned off. We will make exceptions to this rule if you explain why you need them turned on during class. Please inform us of this reason before class begins.

Please remember to be courteous and polite to one another during heated discussions. We will be with each other for several months and we all need a comfortable classroom environment to learn and discuss issues.

All assignments are to be turned in electronically, via email to the instructors by the specified deadlines. We will accept late materials at our discretion and *only if* notified 24 hours prior to the deadline. Except for documented reasons (e.g., doctor's note), late assignments will incur a 10% penalty per day. For emailed assignments: it is your responsibility to be sure that we received your work.

Preliminary Course Outline: ERSS Part I, 2024-2025	
1. Tuesday, October 8 10:30 – 12:30	<p>Introduction to Research Design</p> <p>Creswell, John W. 2009. Ch. 1 “The Selection of a Research Design” <i>Hargittai</i> (Ed) Introduction (Ch1) by Hargittai “Doing Empirical Social Research”</p> <p><u>Additional readings (optional):</u> Becker, Gary. 1993. “How I Learned What a Crock Was” <i>Journal of Contemporary Ethnography</i> 22: 28-35. <i>This article illustrates how research topics are generated</i> Singleton Royce A. Jr. and Bruce C. Straits, Ch 2 “Nature of Science”</p>
2. Tuesday, October 15 10:30 – 12:30	<p>Foundations of Research Design, Part I: Theory and Concepts</p> <p>Gerring, John. 1999. “What Makes a Concept Good? A Criterial Framework for Understanding Concept Formation in the Social Sciences.” <i>Polity</i> 31(3): 357-393.</p>
3. Tuesday, October 22 10:30 – 12:30 READING REACTION 1	<p>Foundations of Research Design, Part II: Knowledge Gaps and Contributions</p> <p>Watch “Leadership Lab: The Craft of Writing Effectively,” by Larry McEnerney, Director of the University of Chicago's Writing Program: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vtIzMaLkCaM</p>
4. Tuesday, October 29 10:30 – 12:30	<p>Foundations of Research Design, Part III: Research Questions and Hypotheses</p> <p>Grix, Jonathan. "Introducing students to the generic terminology of social research." <i>Politics</i> 22, no. 3 (2002): 175-186.</p> <p><i>Optional:</i> Nicolaisen, Jeppe, and Tove Faber Frandsen. "Zero impact: A large-scale study of uncitedness." <i>Scientometrics</i> 119, no. 2 (2019): 1227-1254.</p>
5. Tuesday, November 5 10:30 – 12:30	<p>Research design: What gets published in Top Journals</p> <p>In-class exercise in which we examine articles from the top journals in sociology.</p> <p>Marsh, David, Selen A Ercan, and Paul Furlong. 2017. (Ch 11.) A Skin Not a Sweater : Ontology and Epistemology in Political Science. In V. Lowndes, D. Marsh & G. Stoker (Eds), <i>Theory and methods in political science</i>. Palgrave Macmillan, UK</p>
6. Tuesday, November 19 10:30 – 12:30 READING REACTION 2	<p>Units of observation. Sampling types.</p> <p>Singleton Royce and Bruce C. Straits, Ch. 5 “Sampling” Gërkhani, Klarita, Nevena Kulic, and Fabienne Liechti. 2023. Double Standards? Co-Authorship and Gender Bias in Early-Stage Academic Evaluations. <i>European Sociological Review</i>, 39 (2), 194–209.</p>
7. Tuesday, November 26 10:30 – 12:30 READING REACTION 3	<p>Case selection. Sampling bias.</p> <p>Vasileiou K., Barnett J., Thorpe S., and Young T. 2018. Characterising and Justifying Sample Size Sufficiency in Interview-Based Studies: Systematic Analysis of Qualitative Health Research over a 15-Year Period. <i>BMC Medical Research Methodology</i> 18 (1).</p>

<p>STEP 1</p>	<p>Herring, C. 2019. Complaint-Oriented Policing: Regulating Homelessness in Public Space. <i>American Sociological Review</i>, 0003122419872671.</p> <p>Step 1, General Statement about Research Proposal, due</p>
<p>8. Tuesday, December 3 10:30 – 12:30</p> <p>READING REACTION 4</p>	<p>Operationalizing Concepts: Reliability & Validity of Indicators</p> <p>Singleton and Straits. Chapter 4. “Measurement”</p> <p>Der Meer, T., & Reeskens, T. 2021. Welfare Chauvinism in the Face of Ethnic Diversity: A Vignette Experiment across Diverse and Homogenous Neighbourhoods on the Perceived Deservingness of Native and Foreign-Born Welfare Claimants. <i>European Sociological Review</i>, 37(1), 89–103.</p>
<p>9. Tuesday, December 10 10:30 – 12:30</p> <p>READING REACTION 5</p>	<p>Survey Research: Question, questionnaire and survey types</p> <p>Singleton and Straits. Chapter 9. Survey Instrumentation.</p> <p>Krosnick, Jon, Stanley Pressner, 2010. Question and questionnaire design. <i>Handbook of survey research</i>, 263-314.</p> <p>Schneider, D.; Harknett, K. 2019. “Consequences of Routine Work-Schedule Instability for Worker Health and Well-Being”. <i>American Sociological Review</i>, 84(1), 82–114.</p>
<p>10. Tuesday, December 17 10:30 – 12:30</p>	<p>Discussion of Research Fieldwork Projects</p> <p>Singleton Royce A..Jr. and Bruce C. Straits, Ch. 10 “Fieldwork”</p> <p>Tian, X. 2018. Escaping the Interpersonal Power Game: Online Shopping in China. <i>Qualitative Sociology</i>, 41(4), 545–568.</p>
<p>11. Tuesday, January 7 10:30 – 12:30</p> <p>STEP 2</p>	<p>Experiments in the Social Sciences</p> <p>Foschi, Martha. 2014. “Hypotheses, Operationalizations, and Manipulation Checks.” In Webster, Murray Jr. and Jane Sell (Eds.) <i>Laboratory Experiments in the Social Sciences</i> (Second Edition). Amsterdam: Elsevier/Academic Press.</p> <p>González, M. J., Cortina, C., & Rodríguez, J. 2019. The Role of Gender Stereotypes in Hiring: A Field Experiment. <i>European Sociological Review</i>, 35(2), 187-204.</p> <p>Step 2, Outline of Research Proposal due</p>
<p>12. Tuesday, January 14 10:30 – 12:30</p> <p>FIELDWORK REPORT</p>	<p>Mixed Methods</p> <p>Creswell, John W. 2009. Ch. 10 “Mixed Methods Procedures” in <i>Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Method Approaches</i>, 3rd edition. Los Angeles: Sage.</p> <p>Baranowska-Rataj, A., Matysiak, A.; Mynarska, M. 2014. “Does Lone Motherhood Decrease Women’s Happiness? Evidence from Qualitative and Quantitative Research”. <i>Journal of Happiness Studies</i>, 15(6), 1457–1477.</p> <p>Fieldwork Report due</p>

<p>13. Tuesday, January 21 10:30-12:30</p> <p>READING REACTION 6</p>	<p>Research ethics</p> <p>Salganik, Matthew J. 2018. Ch.6 Ethics. In <i>Bit by Bit: Social Research in the Digital Age</i>, pp. 281 – 331</p> <p>Lewis, K., Kaufman, J., Gonzalez, M., Wimmer, A; Christakis, N. 2008. Tastes, ties, and time: A new social network dataset using Facebook.com. <i>Social Networks</i>, 30(4), 330–342.</p>
<p>14 & 15. Tuesday, January 28 10:30 – 12:00 12:30 – 14:00</p> <p>RESPONSE TO REVIEWS</p>	<p>Student Presentations of Research Proposals</p>

Research Proposal: Full proposal due on Monday, February 10, 2025

ERSS Part 1 Assignments

Class	Date	Topic	Assignment	Word count
4	October 21	Knowledge Gaps	Reading reaction 1 (due Oct 28)	300-500 words
6	November 19	Sampling	Reading reaction 2 (due Nov 18)	300-500 words
7	November 26	Case selection/bias	Reading reaction 3 (due Nov 25) and	300-500 words
			Step 1. Your research proposal	300-500 words
8	December 3	Reliability & Validity of Indicators	Reading reaction 4 (due Dec 2)	300-500 words
9	December 10	Surveys	Reading reaction 5	
11	January 7		Step 2. Your research proposal	about 800 words
12	January 14		Fieldwork report (one per group)	max. 2 pages
13	January 21	Ethics	Reading reaction 6 (due January 20 – sent to guest lecturer)	300-500 words
14	February 4	Presentations	Response to reviews	300-500 words
		Final paper	Due: February 10	2 500 words