Course and Examination Fact Sheet: Autumn Semester 2020

10,400: Philosophical and Methodological Foundations of Social Science Analysis

ECTS credits: 6

Overview examination/s
(binding regulations see below)
Decentral - examination paper written at home (individual) (50%)
Examination time: term time
Decentral - Presentation (individual) (50%)
Examination time: term time

Attached courses
Timetable -- Language -- Lecturer
10,400.1.00 Philosophical and Methodological Foundations of Social Science Analysis -- Englisch -- Dingwerth Klaus

Course information

Course prerequisites
This is a course for students enrolled in the DIA program. Students from other doctoral programs should seek the permission of the course instructor prior to enrolling in this class.

Please note: Students who plan to take this course as a regular course or as an optional course with an examination should register via the bidding system. Students who plan to take this course as an optional course and without an examination should not register via the bidding system but contact the lecturer directly. Enrollment in a course is binding: students have to attend the course and take the exam.

Learning objectives

- Participants understand on what philosophical assumptions their work as well as the work of their peers is based.
- Participants understand the methodological implications these assumptions have for their research.
- Participants understand the strengths and weaknesses of different philosophical positions and critically reflect upon the foundations of social scientific work.
- Participants are in a better position to evaluate research, both within and across disciplines.

Course content

What distinguishes "science" from "non-science" and what, more specifically, does it mean to do "social science"?

Researchers, on the one hand, are expected to satisfy quality standards derived from the philosophy of science. On the other hand, they are embedded in the practice of their profession. The aim of the seminar is to confront these normative positions on doing science, their philosophical basis, and their methodological implications, as they are being or have been upheld in the social sciences with positive positions on how we are observed actually doing scientific work. At the end of this course, participants will understand on what philosophical assumptions their work (and the work of their peers) is based and what methodological implications these assumptions have for their research.

Course structure

The course will be taught in six 4-hour parts. These take place on a weekly basis on Tuesdays from 14:15 to 18:00. We begin in week 2 (Tue, 21 September 2020) and end in week 7 (3 November 2020).
As to the substantive structure, I imagine each session to have three parts. In a first part, we will introduce and discuss a classical "-ism" in the philosophy (and methodology) of social science. A second part will be dedicated to introducing and discussing a classical topic in the philosophy (and methodology) of social science. The third part will give participants an opportunity to reflect upon their own projects - or, if they prefer, to reflect on social scientific study or research programme - from a philosophy of science perspective.

A tentative structure could e.g. be:

1. Introduction / The Demarcation Problem in the Social Sciences
2. Positivism / Some Problems of Rational Choice Theory
3. Critical Rationalism / Theories, Laws and Explanations in the Social Sciences (or Causal Inference in the Social Sciences)
4. Critical Realism / Causal Mechanism
5. Constructivism / Interpretation
6. Post-Modernism / Objectivity and Truth in the Social Sciences
7. A Feminist philosophy of science / Facts and Values in the Social Sciences

Course literature


In the field of International Relations, Martin Hollis and Steve Smith’s Explaining and Understanding International Relations (Clarendon Press, 1991) is widely cited to mark the difference between positivist and interpretive work. More recently, Patrick Thaddeus Jackson’s textbook The Conduct of Inquiry in International Relations: Philosophy of Science and its Implications for the Study of World Politics (Routledge, 2011) has also drawn attention to the philosophy of science.

As each of the major books focuses on slightly different aspects, I will seek to put together a reading list that (a) covers major aspects/debates in the field and (b) addresses some of the more specific issues participants have mentioned in response to my survey of student needs before the term. I will make the core readings available on Canvas by 12 September 2020.

Candidates should master the literature suggested on the syllabus but, in particular for their own papers, also orient themselves within a given subject area by consulting both historical and contemporary contributions to the relevant debates.

Additional course information

In the case of the President’s Board having to implement new directives due to the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic in AS2020, the course information listed above will be changed as follows:

- The course is conducted online via the platform Zoom;
- The recordings of the course will not be saved;
- The lecturer informs via Canvas on the changed implementation modalities of the course.

The examination information listed below would be changed as follows:

- While short presentations will remain a part of our class discussions, they will no longer be part of the course examination;
- Instead, the examination part "examination paper written at home (individually)" is weighted a 100%;
- The assignment as well as the deadline for the examination "examination paper written at home (individually)" will remain the same.
Examination information

Examination sub part/s

1. Examination sub part (1/2)

Examination time and form
Decentral - examination paper written at home (individual) (50%)
Examination time: term time

Remark
--

Examination-aid rule
Term papers

Term papers must be written without anyone else’s help and in accordance with the known quotation standards, and they must contain a declaration of authorship which is a published template in StudentWeb.

The documentation of sources (quotations, bibliography) has to be done throughout and consistently in accordance with the chosen citation standard such as APA or MLA.

For papers in law, the legal standard is recommended (by way of example, cf. FORSTMOSE, P., OGREK R. et SCHINDLER B., Juristisches Arbeiten: Eine Anleitung für Studierende, newest edition respectively, or according to the recommendations of the Law School).

The indications of the sources of information taken over verbatim or in paraphrase (quotations) must be integrated into texts in accordance with the precepts of the applicable quotation standard, while informative and bibliographical notes must be added as footnotes (recommendations and standards can be found, for example, in METZGER, C., Lern- und Arbeitsstrategien, newest edition respectively.

For any work written at the HSG, the indication of the page numbers is mandatory independent of the chosen citation standard. Where there are no page numbers in sources, precise references must be provided in a different way: titles of chapters or sections, section numbers, acts, scenes, verses, etc.

Supplementary aids
--

Examination languages
Question language: English
Answer language: English

2. Examination sub part (2/2)

Examination time and form
Decentral - Presentation (individual) (50%)
Examination time: term time

Remark
--

Examination-aid rule
Practical examination

No examination-aid rule is necessary for such examination types. The rules and regulations of the University of St. Gallen apply
Examination content

Participants prepare and present twice on the seminar topics (weight 50%).

Subsequently, they write a paper relating either their own scholarly work to the philosophical traditions discussed in the seminar or answering a more specific question drawn from the area of the philosophy of social science (weighted 50% of the mark).

The final version of the paper of max. 5'000 words is due December 20, 2020.

Examination relevant literature

Candidates should master the literature suggested on the syllabus but, in particular for their term papers, also orient themselves within a given subject area by consulting both historical and contemporary contributions to the relevant debates.

Please note

Please note that only this fact sheet and the examination schedule published at the time of bidding are is binding and takes precedence over other information, such as information on StudyNet (Canvas), on lecturers' websites and information in lectures etc.

Any references and links to third-party content within the fact sheet are only of a supplementary, informative nature and lie outside the area of responsibility of the University of St.Gallen.

Documents and materials are only relevant for central examinations if they are available by the end of the lecture period (CW51) at the latest. In the case of centrally organised mid-term examinations, the documents and materials up to CW 42 are relevant for testing.

Binding nature of the fact sheets:

- Course information as well as examination date (organised centrally/decentrally) and form of examination: from bidding start in CW 34 (Thursday, 20 August 2020);
- Examination information (regulations on aids, examination contents, examination literature) for decentralised examinations: in CW 42 (Monday, 12 October 2020);
- Examination information (regulations on aids, examination contents, examination literature) for centrally organised mid-term examinations: in CW 42 (Monday, 12 October 2020);
- Examination information (regulations on aids, examination contents, examination literature) for centrally organised examinations: two weeks before the end of the registration period in CW 44 (Thursday, 29 October 2020).