



Course and Examination Fact Sheet: Autumn Semester 2020

7,356: Strategies of Social Science Inquiry

ECTS credits: 6

Overview examination/s

(binding regulations see below)

Decentral - examination paper written at home (individual) (50%)

Examination time: term time

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Examination time: term time

Attached courses

Timetable -- Language -- Lecturer

[7,356,1.00 Strategies of Social Science Inquiry](#) -- Englisch -- [Freyburg Tina](#)

[7,356,2.01 Strategies of Social Science Inquiry: Exercises, Group 1](#) -- Englisch -- [Garbe Lisa Marie](#)

[7,356,2.02 Strategies of Social Science Inquiry: Exercises, Group 2](#) -- Englisch -- [Garbe Lisa Marie](#)

Course information

Course prerequisites

There are no specific course prerequisites. However, students are expected to be interested in the systematic analysis of social science questions. Ideally, students are familiar with basic qualitative and quantitative research techniques and have effectively attended the course 7354 'Data Analytics and Causal Inference' taught by Thomas Epper and Petyo Bonev in the first half of the autumn semester.

In order to hone their skills in formulating and communicating coherent arguments, students are encouraged to attend the MIA mornings workshops 7,392 'Making a Compelling Case Part I', taught by Simon Evenett.

Students with special needs are kindly asked to identify themselves to the lecturer so that together we can think over how to best accompany them according to their Needs.

Learning objectives

Since many of the claims we encounter in media and academic debates are highly contested, we need to learn how to evaluate competing claims. This course is designed to help students put research ideas into sound research plans that allow to do so. The ability to identify assumptions, weight alternatives, make informed research-design decisions, and evaluate competing evidence is crucial not only to effectively understand and evaluate published academic research but also to critically consume information, especially news media reports in politics, economics, the sciences, and other areas. The course thus seeks to enhance key analytical and critical skills that are transferable beyond academic study to a wide range of careers.

The following learning objectives should be attained after successful completion of the course:

1. Students have a profound knowledge and understanding of the connections between research design choices and (1) research questions and goals, on the one hand; and (2) the chosen techniques to analyse empirical material and produce valid and reliable research outcomes, on the other hand;
2. Students demonstrate proficiency in critically evaluating and discussing the research design choices of other projects and researchers;
3. Students show the ability to apply comprehensive knowledge of the key components of research designs when making and justifying design choices for their own project.

Course content



This course provides hands-on advice on how to make choices in designing scientific research projects in International Affairs as well as how to make those choices amongst a variety of different prominent methods of data collection and analysis. It engages with some fundamental epistemological and methodological questions from a variety of perspectives, as well as with more practical issues related to the formulation of a research question, the choice of a research approach, and the development of different steps in the research plan. Using research on the role of companies and their owners in political science, international business, law and economics we discuss how different methodological assumptions underlying research are manifested in designing research projects and in analyzing and presenting the data collected in the context of this design.

Course structure

The course takes place during the second half of the semester. It is designed to support a **flipped-classroom learning style**. It includes three key components: the online blog on Canvas, lectures, and exercise groups. For the effective completion of the course, it is necessary to engage with the content of the online blog and to actively attend both the lecture sessions and exercise group meetings.

An **online blog** on the Canvas platform introduces students to key components of any research design and challenges them with online discussion questions that they must solve individually. The online blog consists of two parts:

- *Part A:* Chapters relate to prominent research designs in the social sciences (e.g., case study designs, comparative designs, quantitative designs, and mixed-methods designs) ;
- *Part B:* Chapters engage with selected pivotal phases of the research cycle, including research questions, case selection, data generation, and causal explanation.

The blog provides condensed introductions to each chapter theme, identifies key challenges and controversies in existing scholarly research, and prepares the ground for the lecture sessions and exercise group meetings.

The exercise group meetings expand on this preliminary foundation by asking students to apply the knowledge presented to them in the online chapters when discussing and critically evaluating scholarly work (in groups and by themselves individually). We concentrate on research in a core field of International Affairs at HSG, that is: studies of the vital role of business in shaping politics, economies, and society, as well as the equally important manner in which business practices and processes are shaped by non-market, notably political and legal forces. While the first meeting provides an introduction into effective and critical reading of scholarly work, each of the subsequent meetings discusses one journal article that represents a particular research design.

Meetings are discussion-based. Participation should reflect solid preparation - having done the required readings for the meeting's topic, thought about the material and done the best to understand it. Constructive participation includes not only providing thoughtful answers to questions posed by the lecturer and the respective student expert group but also asking questions about material that one has struggled to understand. Active attendance in the exercise group meetings is essential for a successful completion of the course as they provide students with the opportunity to practice how to critically assess scholarly work.

The lecture sessions flip the class even further, when student teams are asked to develop and present their own research plans. Through this set-up, students build their confidence to deliver their thoughts and ideas in a semi-improvisation setting, that is supported by careful preparation and research. The first shorter session introducing the essence of explanatory research designs is followed by three longer block sessions:

- *Session 1* covers the identification of a puzzle or problem; construction of research questions; the selection of research goals; the fit between goals, questions and research design;
- *Session 2* concentrates on the selection of cases or sites to research and evidence to collect;
- *Session 3* deals with strategies for enhancing the trustworthiness (e.g., reliability, validity, credibility) and relevance (i.e., generalizability, practical significance, and scientific contribution) of research projects.

Building on the information presented through the online blog and the discussions in the exercise group meetings, the lecture sessions will be highly interactive in that they exclusively deal with the students' own projects and ideas. It is crucial for the lecture sessions to work that students use the time between the session blocks to work on their own research project in teams. To this end, we follow a step-by-step approach, from identifying a relevant research goal and formulating an interesting research question to discussing the potential limitations of the chosen design and its implications. That is, students are guided through the key steps in the research process from start to finish, with each block session addressing the respective next choices to be



made.

In short: The online blog allows students to learn about what decisions they need to make, what options they have, and what should inform their choices; the exercise group meetings allow students to get acquainted with good (and not so good) choices made by established scholars in the area of International Affairs and to practice how to critically evaluate the chosen designs; and the lecture sessions allow students to get their hands dirty and to make and justify their own choices when designing the set-up of their own projects.

Course literature

In order for the lecture sessions and exercise group meetings to be fruitful it is absolutely essential that students read both the respective online blog entries and accompanying material plus the selected journal article in preparation for each meeting. Only then will students be able to follow the discussions and participate actively - which they are expected to do. First and foremost, however, good preparation and active participation are needed to ensure a successful learning experience.

We will predominantly work with chapters from the following two textbooks:

- Panke, D. (2018). *Research Design and Method Selection. Making Good Choices in the Social Sciences*. Sage [available as hard copy from HSG library]
- Toshkov, D. (2016). *Research Design in Political Science*. Palgrave Macmillan [available as e-book at HSG library]

All mandatory and optional readings will be made available on Canvas.

Additional course information

Tina Freyburg is Full Professor of Comparative Politics in the School of Economics and Political Sciences at the University of St.Gallen. She serves as the academic director for the MA programme "International Affairs and Governance" and co-directs the Institute of Political Science (IPW-HSG). In her research she explores the chances and challenges that emerge for democracy in a globalized and digitalized world. Please visit her personal website for more information: www.tina-freyburg.eu

Lisa Garbe is PhD candidate at the chair of Comparative Politics. She is the teaching assistant for this class and leads the exercise group meetings. In her PhD research, she seeks to unravel the complex ownership of internet infrastructure, that is often taken for granted, and to empirically assess its consequences for internet provision and use.

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;
- There are no changes necessary to the course information.

The examination information listed below would be changed as follows:

- There are no changes necessary to the examination formats;
- Further information are communicated via Canvas.

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

Critical evaluation of article

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. FORSTMOSER, P., OGOREK 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

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Examination languages

Question language: English

Answer language: English

2. Examination sub part (2/2)

Examination time and form

Decentral - examination paper written at home (individual) (50%)

Examination time: term time

Remark

Design of research project

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.

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Supplementary aids

Examination languages

Question language: English

Answer language: English

Examination content

Students have a two-fold role as participant in the course: (1) They study and discuss existing research designs, and (2) they design research on their own. In both roles, students are asked to demonstrate critical thinking skills, which go beyond presenting information and reproducing knowledge.

There are two types of assignments, each of which relates to one of the students' roles as participants in this course:

[1] Decentral - examination paper written at home (50%)

Students as learners: Learning objectives 1 and 2 are assessed through the critical evaluation of existing scholarly work. The writing of this examination paper will be processed in two steps.

- *The first step* (30%) takes the form of an audio-recorded presentation in groups (max. 10 min.), such as voice-over-powerpoint, that concentrates on design choices using the information provided in Part A of the online blog on Canvas. To this end, students are divided into "expert groups" in the first exercise group meeting. These groups contribute expert input to the exercise group discussions on the research article that is mandatory for preparing the meeting for which they signed up. They further prepare questions to stimulate class discussion.
- *The second step* (70%) takes the form of an individually written critique of the same journal article or another journal article that was subject to exercise group discussions (max. 1'000 words). It puts an individually revised version of the group presentation (part A of the online blog) into writing and complements it with a discussion of at least two of the phases of a typical research cycle (part B of the online blog). This first examination paper must be written from the perspective of a potential ad hoc reviewer for a journal - critical, constructive and realistic, and include propositions of alternative design choices.

Students will receive qualitative feedback on their group presentation, which shall help them when working on their individual review paper.

[2] Decentral - examination paper written at home (50%)

Students as researchers: Learning objectives 1 and 3 are assessed through a second examination paper (max. 2'000 words) in which students present the design of the research project on which they have worked in their teams throughout the term.

Both examination papers (Paper 1: Critical evaluation of a journal article; Paper 2: Presentation of an original research design) need to be electronically submitted by December 31 (17:00 CET).

Examination relevant literature

Material covered is provided through Canvas.



Please note

Please note that only this fact sheet and the examination schedule published at the time of bidding are 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).