



Course and Examination Fact Sheet: Autumn Semester 2025

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

ECTS credits: 6

Overview examination/s

(binding regulations see below)

decentral - Written work, Digital, Individual work individual grade (75%)

Examination time: Term time

decentral - Active participation, Analog, Individual work individual grade (25%)

Examination time: Term time

Attached courses

Timetable -- Language -- Lecturer

[10,400,1.00 Philosophical and Methodological Foundations of Social Science Analysis](#) -- English -- [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.

Learning objectives

Participants will:

- examine and discuss on which "deeper" (and sometimes hidden) assumptions their work as well as the work of their peers is based;
- learn about and jointly discuss the methodological implications these assumptions have for their research;
- reflect upon and critically examine the strengths and weaknesses of different philosophical positions and critically reflect upon the foundations of social scientific work;
- further develop their competence to evaluate research, both within and across disciplines.

Course content

What distinguishes "science" from "non-science"? What, more specifically, does it mean to do "social science"? And on which philosophical and methodological foundations do different approaches in / to the social sciences rest?

Researchers are expected to satisfy quality standards derived from the philosophy of science. At the same time, they are embedded in the practice of their profession. The aim of the seminar is to confront the normative positions on doing science, including their philosophical basis and methodological implications, as they are being 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 have an improved understanding of the philosophical assumptions their work (and the work of their peers) is based and of the methodological implications these assumptions have for their research.



Course structure and indications of the learning and teaching design

The course is taught in six weekly 4-hour sessions during the second half of the term (i.e., from mid-November until right before Christmas). The course is graded as pass/fail. Students may miss one of the six sessions, but not more.

In previous years, each session consisted of three parts. For the first part, we read and discuss a classical text in the philosophy of science. In a second part, we introduce and discuss a classical "-ism" in the philosophy (and methodology) of social science. The third part either deals with a classical topic in the philosophy (and methodology) of social science and/or gives participants an opportunity to reflect upon their own projects / research programme / discipline through the lens of what we have discussed in a given week.

Last year's syllabus included the following topics:

1. Introduction / The Philosophy of Social Science
2. Karl R. Popper's critical rationalism / Positivism / Theories, Laws & Explanations
3. Kuhn's critique of Popper / Critical Realism / Causal Mechanisms
4. Imre Lakatos / Interpretive Approaches / Fieldwork
5. Paul K. Feyerabend / Values in the Social Sciences
6. Donna Haraway / Feminist philosophy of science / Lessons learned

This year's course will be based on a similar course design, but prospective students are welcome to propose additional topics they would like to discuss in the course.

Course literature

The list of introductory books and compendiums of classical readings in the philosophy of the social sciences is long. In the course, we draw on Alexander Rosenberg, *Philosophy of Social Science*, 5th edition, Westview Press and on Ted Benton and Ian Craib, *Philosophy of Social Science*, 2nd edition, Macmillan. Other works include Nancy Cartwright and Eleonora Montuschi, *Philosophy of Social Science*, Oxford University Press; Gerard Delanty and Piet Styrdom, *Philosophies of Social Science*, McGraw Hill; Lee McIntyre and Alex Rosenberg, eds, *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Social Science*, Routledge; Michael Martin and Lee McIntyre, eds, *Readings in the Philosophy of Social Science*, MIT Press).

In the field of International Relations, Martin Hollis and Steve Smith's *Explaining and Understanding International Relations* (Clarendon Press, 1991) is a widely cited work on the difference between positivist and interpretive approaches to studying world politics. 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 mentioned in response to my survey of student needs before the term. I will make most core readings available on Canvas / StudyNet by 30 September 2025 - the final list will be discussed with students in the first two weeks of the course.

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

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Examination information

Examination sub part/s

1. Examination sub part (1/2)



Examination modalities

Examination type	Written work
Responsible for organisation	decentral
Examination form	Written work
Examination mode	Digital
Time of examination	Term time
Examination execution	Asynchronous
Examination location	Off Campus
Grading type	Individual work individual grade
Weighting	75%
Duration	--

Examination languages

Question language: English
Answer language: English

Remark

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Examination-aid rule

Free aids provision

Basically, students are free to choose aids. Any restrictions are defined by the faculty members in charge of the examination under supplementary aids.

Supplementary aids

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2. Examination sub part (2/2)

Examination modalities

Examination type	Active participation
Responsible for organisation	decentral
Examination form	Oral examination
Examination mode	Analog
Time of examination	Term time
Examination execution	Synchronous
Examination location	On Campus
Grading type	Individual work individual grade
Weighting	25%
Duration	--

Examination languages

Question language: English
Answer language: English

Remark

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Examination-aid rule

Free aids provision

Basically, students are free to choose aids. Any restrictions are defined by the faculty members in charge of the examination under supplementary aids.

Supplementary aids

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Examination content

Active participation: Students attend class and actively participate in the discussion. Active participation also includes two introductory inputs per student. One of these will focus on an approach we discuss, the other one on a specific topic we highlight. The inputs will be based on the key readings plus maybe 1-2 additional texts selected by the students.

Note: Active participation requires that you do not miss more than one of the six sessions. Students who cannot attend a session are asked to read the materials carefully, summarize key insights, and discuss how they relate to their own PhD project.

Term papers:

(1) Before the first sessions, students write a short paper - 2-3 pages - in which they reflect upon the 'philosophical foundations' of their own PhD project. What are the most basic assumptions on which your work rests? How might can these assumptions be justified (and given what you know, do all scholars in your discipline or in other disciplines you are aware of share these assumptions)? - And based on your reflection: What are issues you would hope to learn more about in a course like this? The final version of the paper will be due on November 04, 2025. We will use these papers in the first session to introduce your projects and sort the kinds of questions we have.

(2) At the end of the term, course participants write a somewhat longer paper in which they reflect on their initial paper and relate their own scholarly work to (some aspect of) the philosophical traditions we discuss in the seminar, or in which they answer a more specific question drawn from the area of the philosophy and methodology of the social sciences. The final version of the paper (of 3'000 to 5'000 words) will be due on January 9, 2026 or a mutually agreed later date. The paper will be discussed with the instructor on a mutually agreed date in late January / early February.

Examination relevant literature

Candidates should master the literature suggested in the syllabus. In particular for their term papers, they should 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 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 43 (Freitag, 24. October 2025) 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, 21 August 2025);
- Examination information (supplementary aids, examination contents, examination literature) for decentralised examinations: in CW 42 (Monday, 13. October 2025);
- Examination information (supplementary aids, examination contents, examination literature) for centrally organised mid-term examinations: in CW 43 (Freitag, 24. October 2025);
- Examination information (regulations on aids, examination contents, examination literature) for centrally organised examinations: two weeks before ending with de-registration period in CW 45 (Monday, 03. November 2025).