

Research design

PhD course organized by PESO (Politics, Economy and the Organization of Society) – the Social Science Graduate School at Södertörn University.

Credits: 7.5

Time period: 23 September – 30 October 2024

Course instructors:

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Purpose

Participants are trained in critical reflection and development of research problems, research design, and research ethics within the Social Sciences. The course helps doctoral students in sharpening and refining their research questions, strengthening the overall focus and composition of their dissertation, in making strategic choices explicit, and in identifying the strengths and limitations of the chosen design. Participants will be familiarized with diverse types of research problems, different strategies in developing a research design, and how ethical issues play out and can be managed in a social science research project. Emphasis is on how the formulation of research problem is made in connection to the choice and combination of theory, methodology and empirical research.

Course structure

The course consists of lectures and seminars. The course starts with an introductory lecture. The course then covers four main topics: research problems, research design (in general), case study design, and research ethics. For each topic, a lecture will be given, followed by a seminar.

For each of the subject seminars, participants are expected to select two doctoral dissertations and analyze how the topic of the seminar is addressed in the selected dissertations (research problems, design, etc.). Participants may choose the same

dissertations for all seminars – given that those dissertations actually address all relevant topics (case study design and research ethics might be the exceptions, since these are not always addressed in doctoral dissertations).

The course ends with a longer seminar in which participants present and discuss a final paper.

Assignments

Before each seminar, participants will prepare an individually written paper (600-800 words) comparing aspects of research designs of selected dissertation and in relation to course literature on the given theme. This paper will be shared ahead of seminars and discussed in class.

Participants will also continuously reflect on their own research project in relation to the themes addressed in the course. The aim of this exercise is to reflect and incorporate insights to further develop the research design for planned studies for an upcoming thesis proposal (according to the General Study Plan of the subject in question).

A draft of the final assignment will be presented and discussed at the final seminar. Participants then have a few more days to finalize the assignment.

Schedule

Introductory lecture – All teachers

Monday 23 September, 10:00-12:00, room F11

Introduction to the course subject, course structure, readings, and requirements. In addition, participants present themselves and their dissertation topics, including an initial attempt to formulate a preliminary research problem and a preliminary choice of research design. Each participant is expected to present a single-page Power Point slide with their preliminary research problem, and a few bullet-points on the preliminary research design.

Lecture on research problems – Malin

Monday 23 September, 13:00-15:00, room MA517

What kind of research problems are there? What are the criteria of a scientifically sound research problem? How are research problems presented in scientific texts – explicitly and implicitly?

Seminar on research problems – Malin

Friday 27 September, 10:00-12:00, room MA796

Each participant selects and reads two doctoral dissertations from their own (or other relevant) discipline. An individually written paper (600-800 words) comparing the research problems in selected dissertations is to be submitted to the designated inbox on the Canvas course web by 9 o'clock Thursday 26 October. Participants are expected to read and comment on two of the other participants' papers.

Lecture on research design – Johan

Friday 27 September, 13:00-15:00, room MA796

What is research design about? What are the basic choices to be made in terms of research design? What basic types of research design have appeared in the social sciences? What are the strengths and limitations of diverse research designs?

Seminar on research design – Johan

Friday 4 October, 10:00-12:00, room MA796

Each participant selects and reads two doctoral dissertations from their own (or other relevant) discipline. An individually written paper (600-800 words) comparing the overall research designs of selected dissertations is to be submitted to the designated inbox on the Canvas course web by 9 o'clock Thursday 3 October. Participants are expected to read and comment orally on two of the other participants' papers.

Lecture on case study design – Dominika

Friday 4 October, 13:00-15:00, room MA796

What is a case study? When are case studies appropriate to use? What basic types of case studies are applied in the social sciences? What are the strengths and limitations of case studies?

Seminar on case study design – Dominika

Friday 11 October, 10:00-12:00, room MA796

Each participant selects and reads two doctoral dissertations from their own (or other relevant) discipline. An individually written paper (600-800 words) comparing the case study designs of selected dissertations is to be submitted to the designated inbox on the Canvas course web by 9 o'clock on Thursday 10 October. Participants are expected to read and comment orally on two of the other participants' papers.

Lecture on research ethics – Eva

Friday 11 October, 13:00-15:00, room MA796

What does research ethics entail? What are the main types of ethical issues in social science research? What are the rules, regulations and institutionalized mechanisms for research ethics? How can ethical issues be effectively managed?

Seminar on research ethics – Eva

Friday 18 October, 10:00-12:00, room ME610

Each participant selects and reads two doctoral dissertations from their own (or other relevant) discipline. An individually written paper (600-800 words) comparing the discussion and management of research ethics within the selected dissertations is to be submitted to the designated inbox on the Canvas course web by 9 o'clock Thursday 17 October. Participants are expected to read and comment orally on two of the other participants' papers.

Seminar on participants' research plans – All teachers

Friday 25 October, 10:00-16:00, room TBC

This seminar is devoted to presentation and discussion of the participants (revised) research plans (approx. 3000 words), with the aim of improving the quality of the candidate's research problem, research design and management of potential ethical issues. Papers are to be submitted to the designated inbox on the Canvas course web by 9 o'clock Thursday 24 October. Participants will defend their own paper and act as discussant for another participant's paper, but we expect everyone to be able to engage in discussion of all papers.

Final assignments are to be submitted to the designated inbox on the Canvas course web by **Wednesday 30 October by midnight**.

Requirements

Participation in seminars is mandatory, while participation in lectures is optional but highly recommended. Specifically, participants are required to:

- attend all seminars (see specific requirements for each seminar);
- prepare a paper for each seminar, circulate your paper in advance of each seminar, and actively participate by discussing the presented papers;
- papers should make use of and refer to the course readings, and other relevant scientific literature.
- final assignment related to your own doctoral project.

If you miss a seminar, you will have to submit not only your own paper but also a written review (600-800 words) of two of the other participants' papers. If you miss the final seminar, you will have to submit an extended review of the thesis proposals of two other participants (2000 words in total), in addition to submitting your own thesis proposal.

Grades: Pass (G) or Fail (U). In order to Pass the course, you must successfully complete the seminar assignments, each one with a Pass grade. Grading is based on the participant's ability to demonstrate in writing (1) the strengths and disadvantages of different types of research problems and research designs; (2) the criteria and procedures for correctly and effectively managing ethical issues in social science research projects; and (3) the choice and formulation of a research problem, research design (and potentially ethical considerations) in her/his own PhD dissertation. Papers must be legibly written, well-structured, convincingly argued, and include a proper and consistent academic reference system.

Literature: See separate list