

STJ302F/BLF315F: Course Syllabus Masters theses: Research plans and design

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This is a course on social-scientific research and research design and is intended for MA-level students in the Faculty of Political Science. At the end of the semester, students should have an understanding of how to design and write an independent research project such as an MPA- or MA- thesis. Students should know central concepts in the philosophy of science and understand different research designs. Students will create their own research designs and the course will cover the structure and organization of research papers. The course is based around a series of assignments.

GENERAL INFORMATION

When and where: This course is full online and includes a mix of recorded mini-lectures, assignments on Canvas, and optional discussion sessions on Zoom. The course has a slot on the calendar on **Mondays from 8:00 to 10:00**. The optional discussion sessions are scheduled to take place during this time as follows:

- The Icelandic-language discussion section will take place on Mondays from 9:00 to 10:00, starting on August 29.
- The first English-language session will take place on Monday, August 29 from 8:00 to 8:55. We will use part of the time to decide whether to keep that time slot or find a better one. ***Thus, it is important that all English-speaking students aim to attend this first session!***

Instructor: Svanhildur Þorvaldsdóttir, Assistant Professor (sthorvalds@hi.is). Office hours by appointment. Short questions over email will generally be answered within 24 hours, except on the weekends. When the question is relevant to multiple students, the answer may be posted for all students to see. Students are encouraged to use the discussion board on Canvas for general course-related questions.

Credits: 6 ECTS

Disability and counseling: For disability needs and counseling contact the Universities Student counseling and career centre at radgjof@hi.is.

Changes to syllabus: Instructor reserves the right to make minor changes to this syllabus. All changes will be announced with ample notice.

MA thesis: It is helpful, but not necessary, if students have chosen a thesis topic before taking this course.

COURSE GOALS

At the end of the course students should:

- Know and be able to describe which methods to use when working on research projects and how to structure such projects.
- Have basic knowledge of research ethics and be able to evaluate their own research and that of others based on this knowledge
- Have designed a research plan, and be able to apply basic knowledge in research methods of own choice
- Be able to evaluate and interpret the presentation of research methods
- Be familiar with how to apply references based on different reference systems
- Be able to put forward written text in a concise and well-structured way with a clear research question and correct reference system

MAIN READINGS

- Sigríður Halldórsdóttir. (2021). *Rannsóknir: Handbók í aðferðafræði*. Háskólinn á Akureyri.
 - In Icelandic only. English students may be provided with supplementary materials in English.
 - Available at the university library and through Bóksala stúdenta.
- Diana Ridley (2012) (2ed). *The literature review: A step-by-step guide for students*. Sage. Bóksala stúdenta
 - This book is available for reading at the university library and is for sale at Bóksala stúdenta.
- Powner, Leanne. (2015). *Empirical Research and Writing: A Political Science Student's Practical Guide*.
 - This book is available via electronic access through the university library and the e-book is for sale at Bóksala stúdenta. The book store has also been asked to order physical copies for sale.
- Wang, Gabe T og Keumjae Park (2016). *Student Research and report writing: From topic selection to the complete paper*. Wiley Blackwell.
 - This book is available via electronic access through the university library. The book is also for sale at Bóksala stúdenta.
- Other reading materials are available on the course website.

Note: Either Powner or Wang and Park is recommended for purchase. Both books cover similar material, often in slightly different ways, so only one is needed, while the other can be accessed at the library.

TEACHING ARRANGEMENTS

This course has a threefold structure. A) Discussion of the formal arrangements for writing a MA thesis at the Faculty of Political Science. B) Discussion of practical methods for thesis writing C) Introduction of several important research methods.

Note: The introduction of research methods (C) is targeting students with little or no background in social sciences, hence ASK students should normally not need this. Thus, this material may only be provided in Icelandic although students are, of course, welcome to ask questions during discussion sessions.

- Course is structured around lectures and discussion sessions (13 sessions)
- Lectures are recorded and are available under Panopto on Canvas. The first part will be available from the start of the course and the rest will follow as the course progresses.
- During discussion sessions, students will have an opportunity to ask questions and dig deeper into course materials. Discussions are **not recorded** and participation is optional.
- The work of the course aims at helping students to work on their own research plan. Students must work independently on their own projects.
- All assignment material is available in English and Icelandic.

ASSESSMENT

Assessment is based on the following projects:

- First assignment (30%). Critical review of two master theses in students' research area, must be delivered on template provided on Canavs. **Due 19 September.** No more than 2500-3000 words.
- Second assignment (5%). All students must answer a short survey explaining their research idea. Peer assignment groups are based on the answers. **Due 10 October.**
- Third assignment (20%). All students must deliver draft of research plan and a research question into the peer assessment group. Teacher will give feedback and grade the research question. If students fail to deliver the assignment to fellow students, they forfeit the right to turn in the peer assessment. **Due 17 October.**
- Fourth assignment (25%). All students must turn in their peer assessment to their fellow students in their peer assessment group and to the teacher **Due 7 November.**
- Fifth assignment (20%) All students must turn in finished research plan. **Due 5 December.**

All assignments are to be delivered **on time**. It will be assumed that if students do not answer the survey by 10 October that they do not intend to finish the course.

Course plan

Session 1: From idea to thesis (29 August)

Readings:

- Wang and Park, chapters 1&2.
- Blaikie chapter 1.

For discussion session:

- Akutagawa, R. (1952). In a grove. In *Rashomon and other stories*. Liverlight Publishing Corporation, New York, NY.

Supplementary materials:

- Blaikie chapter 8.

Session 2: Research questions and goals (5 September)

Readings:

- Powner chapter 1 *or* Wang and Park, chapter 5.
- Blaikie, chapter 3.
- Kellstedt, P. M. and Whitten, G. D. (2013). *The Fundamentals of Political Science Research*. Cambridge University Press. Chapter 3 (pp 51–68).

For discussion session:

- Ragin og Amoroso (2011). *Constructing Social Research*. Sage. Chapter 4.

Session 3: Theories, development and use (12 September)

Readings:

- Powner, chapter 2
- Kellstedt & Whitten, chapters 2 & 3

Session 4: Literature reviews and citation systems (19 September)

Readings:

- Powner, chapter 3
- Wang and Park, chapter 4
- Ridley, chapter 7

Supplementary materials

- Ridley (highly recommended for reading ahead of writing MA-thesis)
- Randolph 2009

Session 5: Research design and methods (26 September)

Readings:

- Powner, chapter 4
- Wang og Park, chapter 6
- Kellstedt, P. M. and Whitten, G. D. (2013). *The Fundamentals of Political Science Research*. Cambridge University Press, chapter 5.
- Powner, chapter 10 (from 234—beginning of section „Practicing Peer Review“—to the end)

Supplementary materials

- Bryman, 2012, chapter 3
- Sigríður Halldórsdóttir, Rannsóknir, kaflar 11, 13 og 25.

Week 6: Case studies and comparative research (3 October)

Readings:

- Panke, D. (2018). *Research Design & Method Selection: Making Good Choices in the Social Sciences*. Sage, chapter 5.
- Geddes, B. (1990). „How the Cases You Choose Affect the Answers You Get: Selection Bias in Comparative Politics.“ *Political Analysis*, 2:131–150.
- Gerring, 2004

Supplementary materials

- Bennett & Elman 2007, 170-195
- Toshkov, 2016. chapter 10 (single-case study designs)
- Flyvbjerg, 2004.
- Levy, 2008
- Toshkov, 26 chapter 9 (Comparative designs).

Session 7: Interviews and qualitative content analysis (Gyða M Pétursdóttir gydap@hi.is) (10 October) **ICELANDIC ONLY**

Readings:

- Wang and Park. chapters 6 and 10.
- Lilleker, 2003.
- Magnusson og Marecek, 2015. Chapters 8 and 9.

Supplementary materials:

- Hermanowicz, 2002
- Odendahl and Shaw, 2002

Session 8: Discourse analysis. (Gyða M Pétursdóttir gydap@hi.is) (17 October)

****ICELANDIC ONLY****

Readings:

- Ingólfur Ásgeir Jóhannesson, 2006.
- Kristín Björnsdóttir (Rannsóknir, kafli 14).

Supplementary materials:

- Carabine, 2001
- Þorgerður Einarsdóttir AND Gyða Margrét Pétursdóttir, 2009
- Van Dijk, 2006

Session 9: Action research and evaluation studies, content analysis (24 October)

Readings (Note: materials may change):

- Kristín Þórarinsdóttir og Rúnar Sigþórsson (Rannsóknir, kafli 18).
- Sigurlína Davíðsdóttir (Kafli 34).
- Berg 2009.
- Kee 2004.
- Wang & Park, chapter 10.
- Mayring, 2000.

Supplementary materials:

- Beate Littig, 2009
- Jeffrey M. Berry. 2002
- Gabriele Abels and Maria Behrens, 2009
- Joel D. Aberbach; Bert A. Rockman 2002

Session 10: Gathering and analyzing quantitative data (31 October)

Readings:

- Powner, chapter 7
- Ragnheiður Harpa Arnardóttir, 2021 (Rannsóknir, kafli 23)
- Kellstedt & Whitten, chapter 6

Supplementary materials:

- Wang & Park, chapter 9
- Panke, chapter 8

Session 11: Gathering your own data: Surveys and mixed methods (7 November)

Readings:

- Grétar Þór Eypórsson. 2021. (Rannsóknir, kafli 28).
- Anna Ólafsdóttir og Sigfríður Inga Karlsdóttir. 2021. (Rannsóknir, kafli 35).

Supplementary materials:

- Charles Teddlie and Abbas Tashakkori
- Onwuegbuzie and Leech

Session 12: Writing MA-theses (14 November)

Readings:

- Wang and Park, chapters 11
- Powner, chapters 9 and 10 (to 234, where „Practicing Peer Review begins)
- Ridley, chapters 8-10

Session 13: Research proposals (21 November)

Readings:

- Wang and Park, chapter 7.
- Viðmið í handbók meistaranema
- Manual for Graduate students