

Vesalius College

Course description

Course title: Methods of Social Scientific Inquiry

Course code: SOC 203E (also SOC 203 and SOC 204)

Teacher responsible: Prof. Dr. Peter Theuns

Course description:

SOC203

This methods course is on the logic of social scientific research. Focus is on research design, measurement (including multi-item measures like Likert, Thurstone, and Guttman scales and with special attention to reliability and validity), sampling schemes, data-analysis (including approaches to bivariate correlation and inferential statistics or significance tests), and reporting the results. An important skill to be developed during the semester is to make critical analyses of research questions and to use that analysis to set up appropriate methods to find answers to these questions. Special attention is given to writing own questionnaires and to survey research. The textbook serves as a backbone for the course, self study completes the course.

SOC204

This is the lab-part to the course where students carry out social research projects as independent researchers would do. Students are expected to set up a comprehensive study, probably a survey or an experiment. Both quantitative and qualitative approaches are welcome. Basic requirement is a strong, systematic and reproducible methodology that must be explained and documented in detail in a term paper. Students can work in small groups or alone on their own topic, if approved by the teacher. Permanent interaction about the progress of the project is required. Evaluation is based on the term paper on the research project, an oral presentation of the results and a reflection report that critically reflects on the processes, issues and history of the project (including a peer evaluation).

Course objectives:

- Explain similarities and differences between qualitative and quantitative research
- Know types of rating scales and multiple item scales and explain their relevance in terms of valid and reliable measurement of psycho-social variables
- Give a critical analysis of a research methods and make suggestions for improvement
- Explain sampling schemes
- Explain threats to internal validity of research and suggest improvements of the research design in order to improve control
- Set up a survey and report on the findings
- Use statistical knowledge from prerequisite courses properly

Grade weighting scheme:

first paper	5%
term paper	45%
midterm exam	25%
final exam	25%

Used course material (handbooks, readers, readings, newspapers, magazines) and references:

Neuman, W.L. (2007). Basics of Social Research: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches. Boston: Pearson. ISBN: 0-205-49884-1

Updated course information: <http://homepages.vub.ac.be/~ptheuns/soc203plus204.htm>