Course Syllabus POL271G

Intermediate Research Methods

Number of ECTS credits: 6

Contact Details for Professor
Tel: +32 (0)2 614 8184
E-mail: skobzar@vub.ac.be

Course Description
This course will give an overview of several methodologies relevant for addressing some of the cutting-edge social and policy problems. Through lectures and interactive exercises, students will be able to pursue an independent research project, work in a team, learn the basic qualitative and quantitative methods. The course will be beneficial to students of International Affairs, Business, and Communications majors. The class format will allow students to practice their research methods skills by including many real-life case studies. Students will learn how to gather different kinds of evidence, prioritize and analyze it and produce high-quality reports. Students will also be trained to make effective briefings and presentations. The course is structured as to give students the opportunity to practice what they learn in lectures. This is done by including both lectures and seminar-style sessions. While it is expected that students actively participate in the lectures by asking questions and doing readings prior to the class, during the seminars, the students are required to be prepared to lead the discussion and group exercises.

Course Prerequisites (if any)
STA101E+ one 1xxSSC

Learning Objectives
By the end of the course, students are expected to achieve the following:

- In terms of knowledge-
  - Ability to reflect on theoretical knowledge when designing empirical research
A clear understanding of the basic principles of qualitative and quantitative methodologies and ability to apply them;
Ethical principals of applying conceptual tools in researching real-life concepts.

- **In terms of skills – ability to do the following:**
  - Formulate a research question and match it with an appropriate research method (quantitative or qualitative);
  - Evaluate the feasibility of the research design based on a given timeline and available resources;
  - Construct an instrument for data collection;
  - Collect and display data;
  - Handle large volume of information;
  - Communicate their analysis to different types of audiences;
  - Distinguish between different types of writing (academic, policy, news and business reports);
  - Construct logical arguments, structure coherent paragraphs and write in a concise and clear manner;
  - Follow rigorous citation and quotation guidelines;
  - Evaluate the quality of someone else’s research from different disciplines.

- **In terms of attitudes-**
  - Learning self-discipline in designing and carrying out a research project;
  - Curiosity about the world and passion for learning;
  - Working efficiently and professionally in a team to produce research results and policy analysis as well as present their work effectively;
  - Reflecting on the skills and their limitations when choosing and applying different research methods;
  - Networking and collaboration with other professionals.

**Course schedule**

**IMPORTANT: The syllabus is designed as a worksheet** for students. During each class, students make notes of additional assignments. The instructions will be explained during each lecture by the course instructor with additional hand-out distributed.

Overall, the course is structured as follows:

**Part I (weeks 1-7)** is designed to introduce you to different concepts linked to research. This section focuses on covering the basic building blocks of writing and
presenting, different tools available for gathering, storing and analysing your findings. The class also refreshes your knowledge of different types of citation.

**Part II (weeks 8-12)** includes lessons on specific research methodologies, including qualitative and quantitative.

The conclusion of the course (weeks 13-15) is designed for you to apply lessons learnt in carrying out a primary research project, the result of which will be presented and written out as a final paper.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Reading &amp; Assignments</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 1</strong></td>
<td>Course introduction</td>
<td>Learning course requirements and getting to know your classmates</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Importance of evidence in policymaking, journalism and business.</td>
<td><strong>Required Reading:</strong> Davies (2007), Ch1: pp. 1-18.</td>
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<td>Developing your research ideas.</td>
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<td><strong>Week 2</strong></td>
<td>Planning your research project, putting together your research plan.</td>
<td><strong>Required Reading:</strong> Davies (2007), Ch2: pp. 19-35; Ch 3: pp. 36-49</td>
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<td>Formulating a research question. Developing your hypothesis. Research ethics.</td>
<td><strong>Further Reading:</strong> Booth (2003), Ch1: pp. 9-15.</td>
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<td>Key principles of effective teamwork. Learning to give feedback to each other.</td>
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<td><strong>Week 3</strong></td>
<td>Doing your literature review.</td>
<td><strong>Required Reading:</strong> Booth (2003), Ch. 6 (pp. 90-106); Ch7 (pp. 114-127); O’Leary Z (2004), Ch. 6 (pp. 66-85).</td>
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<td>Analyzing large volume of information, speed reading techniques.</td>
<td><strong>Further Reading:</strong> Booth (2003), Ch. 4 (pp. 40-72).</td>
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<td>Using excel to collect, store and analyze data.</td>
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<td>Using library and internet resources for</td>
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**Further Reading:** Booth (2003), Ch. 5 (pp. 75-88). |
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Writing skills: correctness, conciseness and clarity.</td>
<td>Analyze examples of literature reviews.</td>
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<td>Making an impact: formatting advice.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Citing your sources.</td>
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| Week 5 | **Reading quiz**  
“The death by PowerPoint?” or how to use it effectively  
Different types of presentations and briefings.  
Quantitative vs qualitative research methods. Single case study and comparative case study approaches. | **Prepare for the reading quiz!** |
|        |  | **Required Reading:** Steel (2007) Ch1 (pp. 1-21); Ch2 (pp. 21-39), O’Leary (2004) Ch7 (pp. 85-99)  
**Further Reading:** O’Leary (2004) Ch 5 (pp. 56-64) |
<p>| Week 6 | MID-TERM: In-class presentations &amp; papers are due | <strong>DUE:</strong> October 1, mid-term papers are due (research question + literature review) |</p>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 7</th>
<th>MID-TERM: In-class presentations &amp; papers are due</th>
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| Week 8  | Interviews, qualitative questionnaires and focus groups. | **Required Reading:** Davies (2007), Ch10 (pp. 151-164); Ch12 (pp. 187-205).  
**Further Reading:** O'Leary (2004): Ch 11 (pp. 150-181). |
| Week 9  | Surveys and quantitative questionnaires.  
**Further Reading:** RAND (2009), Ch 5: 27-33; Ch9: 60-75; Davies (2007), Ch4: 53-68; Ch 5: pp. 70-82; Ch6: pp. 82-94; Ch7: pp. 101-111 |
| FALL Break | No class: fall break |  |
| Week 10 | Rhetorical and critical analyses. Discourse Analysis.  
**Reading quiz** | **Required Reading:** Treadwell (2014) Ch 13 pp. 233-256; Carta (2013), ‘Use of metaphors in international discourse...’, pp. 1-20.  
**Prepare for the reading quiz!** |
| Week 11 | ‘Say it with charts’: communicating your message with graphs and charts. | **Required Reading:** O'Leary (2004), Ch 12-13 (pp. 184-214).  
**Further Reading:** Booth (2003), Ch 15-16 (pp. 241-281).  
**DUE: November 12, a research proposal (research question, literature review AND proposed methodology)** |
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<tr>
<th>Week 12</th>
<th>Working in the field: conducting primary research</th>
<th>Applying research methodologies.</th>
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<td>Group mentoring sessions</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 13</td>
<td>Working in the field: conducting primary research</td>
<td>Writing up your results.</td>
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<td>Group mentoring sessions</td>
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<td>Week 14</td>
<td>Final paper and presentations</td>
<td>DUE: FINAL PAPERS!</td>
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<tr>
<td>END OF</td>
<td></td>
<td>Final presentations</td>
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<tr>
<td>CLASSES</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 15</td>
<td>Final paper and presentations</td>
<td>Final presentations</td>
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**Course Materials**

**Main Textbook (to be purchased by students):**


**Case Studies and Additional Readings (the access to the following readings will be provided by the course instructor):*


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1 Further readings will be provided by the instructor on ad-hoc basis with clear instructions during each lecture. Students can also consult a larger collection of books on research methodology, presentation and writing skills by visiting the instructor during her office hours.


**Course Assessment**

The students will be evaluated on the basis of their performance as follows:

- Reading Quizzes 25%
- In-class participation (including group work) 10%
- Midterm papers & presentations 30%
- Final papers & presentations 35%
- TOTAL 100%

**Grading Scale of Vesalius College**

Vesalius College grading policy, in line with the Flemish Educational norms, is now as stated follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter grade</th>
<th>Scale of 20</th>
<th>Scale of 100</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>17.0-20.0</td>
<td>85-100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>16.1-16.9</td>
<td>81-84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>15.3-16.0</td>
<td>77-80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>14.5-15.2</td>
<td>73-76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B-</td>
<td>13.7-14.4</td>
<td>69-72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C+</td>
<td>13.1-13.6</td>
<td>66-68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>12.3-13.0</td>
<td>62-65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C-</td>
<td>11.5-12.2</td>
<td>58-61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D+</td>
<td>10.7-11.4</td>
<td>54-57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Further description of assessment activities and Grading Criteria
The following criteria will be applied in assessing your written work:

- **Attendance, participation and group work**
  - Attendance will be recorded. Attendance and participation constitute 10% of your grade. Please notify the course instructor if you are unable to attend a lecture.
  - ‘Lecture briefing’ exercise includes a short summary (about 5-10 minutes) of the assigned reading before the instructor begins the lecture. This will be done in pairs, taking turn between different people for each lecture. In essence, you will be asked to pretend you are this week's professor, how would begin explaining this week's material?
  - The course will also have informal research method simulations. For example, this may include interview or focus group/expert workshop simulation (you will work in groups and assume different roles, for example of an interviewers/interviewees or focus group/expert workshop participants).
  - ‘Study critique’: includes analysis of the completed studies, focusing on their methodologies (studies will include academic journal articles as well as policy reports).
  - ‘Question bank’ – you are encouraged to submit three questions per week based on the assigned weekly readings. The questions will be used by the instructor to reflect on how you progress with your reading and may be used to stimulate in-class discussion and revision.

- **Reading quizzes**
  - There will be two reading quizzes that will draw on the material covered in the lectures and the assigned readings (especially the required readings). The reading quizzes will be structured as short (one-paragraph) fill-in essays. Examples of the format of the quizzes will be provided by the course instructor.

- **Mid-term and final exams**
  - The mid-term and final exams will be composed of research projects. Students will be required to submit their mid-term papers (2000 words, excluding bibliography) using Harvard citation format. The papers should include a well-defined research question and a
literature review. The papers will have to be submitted to the instructor in printed form AND as an electronic version. Late papers will be penalized! Students will be required to present their mid-term papers as a Power Point presentation. A detailed list of assessment sheet for the mid-term paper and presentation will be provided by the instructor in due course.

- Students will be required to submit a research proposal that will build on the mid-term paper and include a proposed methodology. The methodology will be used for a final research project (your final exam). The instructor will provide a handout with the list of what the research proposal shall contain.

- The final exam will include a final research paper (2500 words) that will include an outline of the adopted methodology, your findings and suggestions for future research. Students will also present their papers as Power Point presentations. Your final exam paper should build on the one written for the mid-term exam. The handouts with detailed requirements will be distributed by the instructor.

- **Extra credit**
  - Analyzing a study of your interest (could apply to your thesis topic): what are the strengths and weaknesses of the approach. The choice of the study needs to be approved by the course instructor. Further details will be outlined during the class.

### Additional Course Policies

**Students are expected to submit their assignments and arrive on time for each lecture.** Late papers and exams will be penalized (unless there is a valid excuse – for instance, a note from a doctor - that can be confirmed and agreed by the professor).

### Academic Honesty Statement

Academic dishonesty is **NOT** tolerated in this course.

Academic honesty is not only an ethical issue but also the foundation of scholarship. Cheating and plagiarism are therefore serious breaches of academic integrity.

Following the College policy, cheating and plagiarism cases will be communicated in writing to the Associate Dean for Students and submitted to the Student Conduct Committee for disciplinary action.
If you refer to someone else’s work, appropriate references and citations must be provided. Grammar, spelling and punctuation count, so use the tools necessary to correct before handing in assignments.