

Research Methods in the Humanities and Social Sciences

Course code: SOC 290

Term and year: Spring 2021

Day and time: Wednesday 18:30-21.15

Instructor: Dr Gerald Power

Instructor contact: gerald.power@aauni.edu

Consultation hours: Wednesday, 17:30–18:30, at the Faculty Lounge (subject to COVID situation; otherwise appointments can be arranged by email).

Credits US/ECTS	3/6	Level	Intermediate
Length	15 weeks	Pre-requisite	COM 102, POS 102, IRS 200
Contact hours	42 hours	Course type	BA

1. Course Description

In this course we address the central processes and challenges associated with research in the humanities and social sciences. There is a set of lectures dedicated to basic starting points, core skills and a variety of concepts, approaches and methods. Unfortunately, these discussions are not exhaustive, but it is hoped that progress made in class will enable the student to find it easier to identify and implement other skills, concepts and approaches that will be of greater relevance to their own research interests and requirements.

Each lecture is followed by a seminar session which demands that the student completes a reading assignment in order to consolidate the points covered in the lecture. The various assessment tasks are designed to guide the student through the process of mastering some of the most fundamental stages of high-quality research work, including framing a research question, presenting a literature review and developing a research proposal.

2. Student Learning Outcomes

Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:

- Comprehend and have a clear understanding of various approaches to research in the humanities and social sciences.
- Understand and demonstrate the link between research question, research methods and sources.
- Develop a methodologically-sound research design.
- Conduct basic academic research and analytical writing with the usage of proper citations, appropriate to undergraduate level.

3. Reading Material

Required Materials (Extracts on NEO LMS)

- Babbie, Earl. *The Practice of Social Research*. 13th edn. Int'l edn. Boston: Cengage, 2013.
- Bardach, Eugene and E.M. Patashnik. *A Practical Guide for Policy Analysis: The Eightfold Path to More Effective Problem Solving*. 5th edn. Los Angeles: SAGE, 2016.
- Bryman, Alan. *Social Research Methods*. 4th edn. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Creswell, John. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches*. Los Angeles: SAGE, 2014.
- Klotz, Audie and Deepa Prakash (eds). *Qualitative Methods in International Relations: A Pluralist Guide*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.
- Ragin, Charles. *The Comparative Method: Moving Beyond Qualitative and Quantitative Strategies*. Oakland: University of California Press, 1987.
- Tosh, John and Seán Lang, *The Pursuit of History: Aims, Methods and New Directions in the Study of Modern History*. 4th edn. London: Pearson, 2016.

Recommended Materials (on Library Desk Reserve)

- Bryman, Alan. *Social Research Methods*. 4th edn. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- George, A.L. and Andrew Bennet, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*. Boston: MIT Press, 2005.
- Halperin, Sandra and Oliver Heath. *Political Research: Methods and Practices*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019.

4. Teaching methodology

The course adopts a two-pronged approach to the study of our subject. Approximately half of each class is dedicated to an instructor-led lecture exploring a particular aspect of research in the humanities and social sciences. This discussion may be punctuated by question sessions and practical exercises in groups or as individuals. The second half of each class is devoted to a seminar-style discussion of the reading assignment set for that session. Attentive reading of the weekly reading assignments is crucial to reaching an understanding of the issues involved and will be closely monitored.

The course will also devote time to introducing and preparing the various practical assignments (see below) which are intended, collectively, to offer each student the opportunity to demonstrate their competence in the execution of fundamental skills and knowledge of approaches and concepts relevant to their own research interests. Classes 12 and 13 will take the form of workshops whereby each student will present an oral research proposal. The critical discussion that follows is intended to alert the student to possible flaws or points to expand on when submitting their final projects (again, see below for full details of the various assignments).

5. Course Schedule

Date	Class Agenda
Session 1 10 Feb. 2021	Topic: Introduction to Research Description: A discussion of the essential aspects of the course content and procedures. What is good research? Reading: none Assignments/deadlines: None.
Session 2	Topic: The Research Question

17 Feb. 2021	<p>Description: What makes a good research question? How we 'read our way' to a good RQ; the problem of 'reinventing the wheel' in our research.</p> <p>Reading: Bryman, ch. 1.</p> <p>Assignments/deadlines: None.</p>
Session 3 24 Feb. 2021	<p>Topic: Quantitative Research</p> <p>Description: The epistemological and ontological background. The major features and applications of the quantitative approach. Mixed Methods research.</p> <p>Reading: Bryman, ch. 4.</p> <p>Assignments/deadlines: None.</p>
Session 4 3 March 2021	<p>Topic: Qualitative Research</p> <p>Description: The epistemological and ontological background. The major features and applications of the qualitative approach.</p> <p>Reading: Bryman, ch. 7.</p> <p>Assignments/deadlines: 1) First Assignment, 'Description of Research Area and Research Question' due by email.</p> <p>Feedback given to students on their participation and overall progress, in class or online.</p>
Session 5 10 March 2021	<p>Topic: The Role of Theory</p> <p>Description: Why is theory important to successful research? Disentangling assumptions, concepts and theories. The linkages between theory and the literature review.</p> <p>Reading: Bryman, ch. 17.</p> <p>Assignments/deadlines: None.</p>
Session 6 17 March 2021	<p>Topic: Research Design</p> <p>Description: Progressing from interest in your topic to a strategy for project completion. Conceptualization and operationalization.</p> <p>Reading: Babbie, ch. 3.</p> <p>Assignments/deadlines: None.</p>
Session 7 24 March 2021	<p>Topic: Historical Analysis</p> <p>Description: Why is history an atypical branch of the social sciences? Historical principles and methodology explored?</p> <p>Reading: Bryman, ch. 3.</p> <p>Assignments/deadlines: None.</p>
Session 8 31 March 2021	<p>Topic: Getting the data</p> <p>Description: Different kinds of data. Good practice for data collection.</p> <p>Reading: Tosh & Lang, ch. 4.</p> <p>Assignments/deadlines: Submission of 2nd Assignment: Literature Review: due by email.</p>
	<p>Mid-Term Break</p>
Session 9 14 April 2021	<p>Topic: The Case Study</p> <p>Description: What makes a good case study?</p>

	<p>Coding.</p> <p>Reading: Bardach & Patashnik, part II.</p> <p>Assignments/deadlines: 1) Second Assignment, 'Literature Review', due in print and via NEO LMS.</p>
<p>Session 10 21 April 2021</p>	<p>Topic: Comparative Research</p> <p>Description: When should we consider comparative research?</p> <p>Reading: Klotz & Prakash (eds), ch. 4.</p> <p>Assignments/deadlines: None.</p>
<p>Session 11 28 April 2021</p>	<p>Topic: Writing the Research Proposal</p> <p>Description: The criteria of a solid research proposal. Suggestions for structuring the proposal.</p> <p>Reading: Ragin, <i>Comparative Method</i>, ch. 1.</p> <p>Assignments/deadlines:</p>
<p>Session 12 5 May 2021</p>	<p>Topic: Research Proposal Workshop I</p> <p>Description: Each student will offer a ten-minute oral research proposal. The research proposal will briefly introduce the research area, define the research question, present the theoretical framework/literature, describe the methods to be employed and summarize the contribution the proposed research will make. PowerPoint is advised, though not so many slides as to make the presentation too long or complex. Each presentation will be followed by questions and feedback. Online students will create a video presentation using, e.g., Loom, and will upload it to NEO LMS.</p> <p>Reading: Creswell, ch. 4.</p> <p>Assignments/deadlines: Research Proposal Presentation.</p>
<p>Session 13 12 May 2021</p>	<p>Topic: Research Proposal Workshop II</p> <p>Description: As in previous session</p> <p>Reading: None</p> <p>Assignments/deadlines: Research Proposal Presentation.</p>
<p>Session 14 19 May 2021</p>	<p>Topic: Final Course Project</p> <p>Description: Students will submit their final course project, the research proposal (see below for basic guide to contents and format).</p> <p>Reading: None.</p> <p>Assignments/deadlines: Submit third and final project, 'Research Proposal' both in printed (campus students only) and electronic form via NEO LMS.</p>

6. Course Requirements and Assessment (with estimated workloads)

Assignment	Workload (hours)	Weight in Final Grade	Evaluated Course Specific Learning Outcomes	Evaluated Institutional Learning Outcomes*
Class Participation	42	10%	Comprehend and have a clear understanding of various approaches to research in the social sciences.	1, 2
1st Assignment:	20	20%	Describe research area and research question.	2, 3

2nd Assignment	20	25%	Show an awareness of the place of literature in the framing of a research project	2
Presentation	20	15%	Ability to understand and explain to peers the fundamentals of the research project	2, 3
3rd Assignment	48	30%	Develop a methodologically sound research design. Conduct basic academic research and analytical writing with the usage of proper citations, appropriate to undergraduate level.	1, 3
TOTAL	150	100%		

*1 = Critical Thinking; 2 = Effective Communication; 3 = Effective and Responsible Action

7. Detailed description of the assignments

Assignment 1: Class Participation

Class participation based on thorough study of the assigned reading material is essential to success in this course. To monitor levels of preparation, each student will be required to give at least one five-minute presentation (without prior warning) on that week's reading assignment. The student's performance in this task will be factored into their overall mark for this component.

Assessment breakdown

Assessed area	Percentage
Awareness of key issues and preparation level	60%
Cogency and fluency in communication information	40%

Assignment 2: 1st Assignment: Description of Research Area and Research Question'

In Class 4 each student will submit their 'Description of Research Area and Research Question'.

This ought to consist of (i) a description of the research area in a broad sense (approx. 200 words); (ii) a description of the specific topic to be studied, and a discussion of the chosen research question (approx. 200-300 words).

The assignment is to be sent to the instructor by email by midnight 3 March 2021.

Late assignments will not be accepted.

Assessment breakdown

Assessed area	Percentage
Ability to describe research area	30
Ability to describe research question	30
Demonstrating familiarity with concepts and practices introduced in the course	40

Assignment 3: 2nd Assignment: Literature Review

In Class 8 each student will submit a 'Literature Review' assignment.

The assignment will consist of (i) the elements already submitted in the first assignment, revised if possible and where necessary according to the instructor's feedback; (ii) a discussion of the relevant literature (600-700 words). This ought to describe the major contributions to your topic area: the ideas, theories, perspectives, approaches, findings, methodologies, source-use and so on that can help you make progress in your own research. In putting together this review, try to be as critical as you can in your thinking. Rather than simply working through ten different authors one by one, try to show how they relate to each other; try, perhaps, to group some authors together if they work using the same concepts or if they engage in debate on a particular issue. Try to acknowledge the contributions by these experts, but also be alive to limitations of their work (which may be relevant to you in framing how your research can offer some kind of improvement or fresh contribution). How will your research relate to this scholarship? Perhaps your research will fill a gap, or will explore or test a theory or approach in a new context?

There should also be (iii) a literature map (see Creswell, ch. 2, for hints and inspiration).

The assignment is due at the beginning of class in printed format and also in electronic format via NEO LMS.

Assessment breakdown

Assessed area	Percentage
Ability to develop and improve statements on research area and research question	20
Ability to formulate an effective literature review	40
Demonstrating familiarity with concepts and practices introduced in the course	40

Assignment 4: Presentation

According to a schedule prepared by the instructor, each student will present a 10-15-minute oral research proposal (complemented by a visual aid, such as PowerPoint) in either Class 12 or 13.

The research proposal will briefly introduce the research area, define the research question, present the theoretical framework/literature, describe the methods to be employed and summarize the contribution the proposed research will make. PowerPoint is advised, though not so many slides as to make the presentation too long or complex.

Each presentation will be followed by questions and feedback.

Assessment breakdown

Assessed area	Percentage
Presentation skills (ability to communicate clearly and to respond to questions and comments)	25
Ability to effectively address the relevant points highlighted in the assignment description	50
Use of visual aids	25

Assignment 5: 3rd Assignment: The Research Proposal

In Class 14 each student will submit their 'Research Proposal'.

This ought to consist of (i) the elements already submitted in the first and second assignments, suitably revised and improved according the instructor’s feedback and the student’s own growth and development as the course progresses; (ii) a section on **conceptualization** (probably best incorporated into the research question section); (iii) discussion of your methodology, data sources, procedures (1,000 words). Ensure that you incorporate your **operationalization** of the topic here. (iv) A discussion of the possible limitations of your research design (200-400 words); (v) a final conclusion clearly establishing the rationale and potential of the project (250 words); (vi) a bibliography, listing all the sources you have used.

The assignment is due by midnight as a Turnitin assignment via NEO LMS.

Late assignments will not be accepted.

Assessment breakdown

Assessed area	Percentage
Ability to develop and improve statements on research area, research question and literature review	20
Ability to formulate an effective section on methodology and sources	40
Demonstrating familiarity with concepts and practices introduced in the course	40

8. General Requirements and School Policies

General requirements

All coursework is governed by AAU’s academic rules. Students are expected to be familiar with the academic rules in the Academic Codex and Student Handbook and to maintain the highest standards of honesty and academic integrity in their work.

Electronic communication and submission

The university and instructors shall only use students’ university email address for communication, with additional communication via NEO LMS or Microsoft Teams. Students sending e-mail to an instructor shall clearly state the course code and the topic in the subject heading, for example, “COM101-1 Mid-term Exam. Question”. All electronic submissions are through NEO LMS. No substantial pieces of writing (especially take-home exams and essays) can be submitted outside of NEO LMS.

Attendance

Attendance, i.e., presence in class in real-time, is expected and encouraged. However, the requirement that students miss not more than 35% of real-time classes is temporarily suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Absence excuse and make-up options

Should a student be absent from classes for relevant reasons (illness, serious family matters), s/he can submit to the Dean of Students an Absence Excuse Request Form supplemented with documents providing reasons for the absence. These must be submitted within one week of the absence. If possible, it is recommended the instructor be informed of the absence in advance. Should a student be absent during the add/drop period due to a change in registration this will be an excused absence if s/he submits an Absence Excuse Request Form along with the finalized add/drop form.

Students whose absence has been excused by the Dean of Students are entitled to make up assignments and exams provided their nature allows. Assignments missed due to unexcused absences which cannot be made up, may result in a decreased or failing grade as specified in the syllabus.

Students are responsible for contacting their instructor within one week of the date the absence was excused to arrange for make-up options.

Late work: No late submissions will be accepted – please follow the deadlines.

Electronic devices

Electronic devices (e.g. phones, tablets, laptops) may be used only for class-related activities (taking notes, looking up related information, etc.). Any other use will result in the student being marked absent and/or being expelled from the class. No electronic devices may be used during tests or exams unless required by the exam format and the instructor.

Eating is not allowed during classes.

Cheating and disruptive behavior

If a student engages in disruptive conduct unsuitable for a classroom environment, the instructor may require the student to withdraw from the room for the duration of the class and shall report the behavior to the Dean.

Students engaging in behavior which is suggestive of cheating will, at a minimum, be warned. In the case of continued misconduct, the exam or assignment will be failed and the student will be expelled from the exam or class.

Plagiarism and Academic Tutoring Center

Plagiarism is “the unauthorized use or close imitation of the language and thoughts of another author and the representation of them as one’s own original work.” (Random House Unabridged Dictionary, 2nd Edition, Random House, New York, 1993)

Turnitin’s White Paper ‘The Plagiarism Spectrum’ (available at <http://go.turnitin.com/paper/plagiarism-spectrum>) identifies 10 types of plagiarism ordered from most to least severe:

1. CLONE: An act of submitting another’s work, word-for-word, as one’s own.
2. CTRL-C: A written piece that contains significant portions of text from a single source without alterations.
3. FIND-REPLACE: The act of changing key words and phrases but retaining the essential content of the source in a paper.
4. REMIX: An act of paraphrasing from other sources and making the content fit together seamlessly.
5. RECYCLE: The act of borrowing generously from one’s own previous work without citation; To self-plagiarize.
6. HYBRID: The act of combining perfectly cited sources with copied passages—without citation—in one paper.
7. MASHUP: A paper that represents a mix of copied material from several different sources without proper citation.
8. 404 ERROR: A written piece that includes citations to non-existent or inaccurate information about sources
9. AGGREGATOR: The “Aggregator” includes proper citation, but the paper contains almost no original work.
10. RE-TWEET: This paper includes proper citation, but relies too closely on the text’s original wording and/or structure.

At minimum, plagiarism from types 1 through 8 will result in a failing grade for the assignment and shall be reported to the Dean. The Dean may initiate a disciplinary

procedure pursuant to the Academic Codex. Allegations of bought papers and intentional or consistent plagiarism always entail disciplinary hearing and may result in expulsion from AAU.

If unsure about technical aspects of writing, students are encouraged to consult with the tutors of the AAU Academic Tutoring Center. For more information and/or to book a tutor, please contact the ATC at: <http://atc.simplybook.me/sheduler/manage/event/1/>.

Course accessibility and inclusion

Students with disabilities are asked to contact the Dean of Students as soon as possible to discuss reasonable accommodations. Academic accommodations are not retroactive. Students who will be absent from course activities due to religious holidays may seek reasonable accommodations by contacting the Dean of Students in writing within the first two weeks of the term. All requests must include specific dates for which the student requests accommodations.

9. Grading Scale

Letter Grade	Percentage*	Description
A	95-100	Excellent performance. The student has shown originality and displayed an exceptional grasp of the material and a deep analytical understanding of the subject.
A-	90-94	
B+	87-89	Good performance. The student has mastered the material, understands the subject well and has shown some originality of thought and/or considerable effort.
B	83-86	
B-	80-82	
C+	77-79	Fair performance. The student has acquired an acceptable understanding of the material and essential subject matter of the course, but has not succeeded in translating this understanding into consistently creative or original work.
C	73-76	
C-	70-72	
D+	65-69	Poor. The student has shown some understanding of the material and subject matter covered during the course. The student's work, however, has not shown enough effort or understanding to allow for a passing grade in School Required Courses. It does qualify as a passing mark for the General College Courses and Electives.
D	60-64	
F	0-59	Fail. The student has not succeeded in mastering the subject matter covered in the course.

* Decimals should be rounded to the nearest whole number.

Prepared by: Gerald Power

Date: January 2021

Approved by: Andrew Giarelli

Date: Jan. 21, 2021