

## **SOP771101: Research Methods**

<b>Duration:</b>	Michaelmas Term and Hilary Term
<b>ECTS:</b>	10 credits
<b>Lecturers:</b>	Michaelmas Term: Professor Daniel Faas ( <a href="mailto:faasd@tcd.ie">faasd@tcd.ie</a> ), Dr. Nicole Kapelle ( <a href="mailto:nicole.kapelle@tcd.ie">nicole.kapelle@tcd.ie</a> ) Hilary Term: Dr Larissa Meier ( <a href="mailto:meierl@tcd.ie">meierl@tcd.ie</a> )

### **Module Description**

This module provides an overview of research methods in the social sciences. Students will learn how to conduct an independent piece of research (dissertation) within the social sciences. Adopting an applied approach, the module will teach how to formulate research questions and how to tackle them competently by drawing on principles of social research methodology and practically employing methods of investigation like sampling, data collection and analysis. Highlighting the centrality of research design, the module will cover both qualitative and quantitative research strategies and related methods. Furthermore, the module will discuss crucial aspects of research ethics and practical aspects of planning, organising, and crafting a professional research report.

Qualitative and quantitative research – while sharing important communalities in terms of research design – can differ in how theory and data are related, how data is being collected, how data is analysed, and how empirical evidence is constructed. While qualitative methods usually deal with exploring and summarizing rich textual data retrieved, for instance, from in-depth and semi-structured interviews, quantitative research is usually characterized by measuring concepts and testing theories through statistical analysis of numerical data obtained, for instance, from standardised interviewing in surveys. A good command of both qualitative and quantitative approaches is key to conducting research effectively and understanding the work of others. The module will also refer to mixed-method strategies to discuss how qualitative and quantitative research strategies can form a powerful alliance in social research.

The module spans both Michaelmas and Hilary Term, each of them comprising 11 weeks.

In Michaelmas Term, students will get an introduction to the principal methodologies of qualitative or quantitative research.

Based on that, in Hilary Term, the module is designed to support students in developing their dissertation research projects, with a particular focus on formulating a clear research question and designing a coherent research strategy. The core aim is to guide students through the early stages of their individual projects, helping them to move from a broad idea to a well-defined and feasible research proposal.

Students in Hilary Term will present both an initial research idea and a more developed proposal in class, fostering a collaborative learning environment where peer feedback and group discussion enhance individual progress. Students are asked to choose a researchable topic relatively early during the seminar and to develop it into a convincing dissertation project thorough the class. To support this process, the module offers short readings and targeted inputs on key topics such as how to locate oneself in a literature, grounded research, the logic of comparative research, the selection of respondents, taking field notes, interviewing, coding, and analyzing data. Depending on students' methodological preferences, tailored applied introductions will be provided.

In addition, the module engages with important questions of research ethics, including the responsibilities of researchers working in diverse contexts, and critically examines the intersections of science with issues of ethnicity, racism, and inequality. By the end of the course, students will have a strong foundation for their dissertation research and a deeper understanding of the broader implications of academic inquiry.

Classes in Hilary Term will be organized largely as a research workshop where the research ideas and challenges of all participants are discussed and reflected upon. The method of peer evaluation, which allows students to offer feedback to one another will be used in order to encourage collective learning and engagement. The readings provided may have to be adjusted according to participants' specific interests and needs.

### **Learning outcomes**

On successful completion of the module you should be able to:

- Explain the key theoretical and conceptual issues in methodology in the social sciences;
- Deploy the main qualitative and quantitative methodological techniques used in sociology;
- Link methodological techniques to a research design;
- Formulate a clear, focused, and researchable question for their dissertation project.
- Design a coherent and feasible research plan aligned with their research question.
- Reflect on ethical challenges in research and understand the role of power, inequality, and positionality in knowledge production.
- Present and develop their research ideas through peer feedback and collaborative discussion.

## Assessment

- Michaelmas Term: Coursework (40%)
- Hilary Term: Coursework (60%)
  - Short handout on research idea and final research proposal – 25%
  - Student presentation on dissertation project – 15%
  - Participation in class – 10%

The coursework in Michaelmas Term is a preliminary outline of your proposed research focus and discussion of its significance to you as well as a literature review. Length: 1,500 words. Date due: TBC. Based on this, students will be allocated to a dissertation supervisor.

## Indicative Reading List

### Michaelmas term

- Becker, Howard S. 2020. *Writing for Social Scientists, Third Edition: How to Start and Finish Your Thesis, Book, or Article.* edited by P. Richards and a N. Preface. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Booth, Wayne C., Gregory G. Colomb, Joseph M. Williams, Joseph Bizup, and William T. FitzGerald. 2016. *The Craft of Research, Fourth Edition.* Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Bryman, A., (2016) *Social Research Methods*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

### Hilary term

The readings for each class will be made available on Blackboard. Along these students are strongly to buy and read at least one of the main readings listed below. Both textbooks offer excellent and accessible introductions to conducting and analyzing qualitative research.

- Lareau, Annette. 2021. *Listening to People: A Practical Guide to Interviewing, Participant Observation, Data Analysis, and Writing It All Up.* Chicago Guides to Writing, Editing, and Publishing. Chicago ; London: The University of Chicago Press.
- Luker, Kristin. 2008. *Salsa Dancing into the Social Sciences: Research in an Age of Info-Glut.* Cambridge: MA: Harvard University Press.

### Additional readings (Michaelmas and Hilary terms):

- Collier, David, and Henry E. Brady. 2010. *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards.* University of California: eScholarship.

- Goertz, Gary, and James Mahoney. 2012. *A Tale of Two Cultures: Qualitative and Quantitative Research in the Social Sciences*. Princeton: University Press
- Gunaratnam, Y. (2003) *Researching 'Race' and Ethnicity: Methods, Knowledge and Power*. London: Sage.
- Kumar, R. (2014) *Research Methodology. A step-by-step guide for beginners*. London: Sage.
- Miles, Matthew B. and A. Michael Huberman. 1994. *Qualitative Data Analysis*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- O'Leary, Z. (2004) *The essential guide to doing research*. London: Sage.
- Seale, C. (2012) *Researching Society and Culture*. London: Sage.
- Timmermans, Stefan, and Iddo Tavory. 2022. *Data Analysis in Qualitative Research: Theorizing with Abductive Analysis*. Chicago (Ill.): the University of Chicago press.
- Weiss, Robert S. 1994. *Learning from Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview Studies*. New York: The Free Press.