

# PHD PROGRAM IN POLITICAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

## ACADEMIC YEAR 2021-2022

### Research Tools

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#### 1. Introduction

This course aims at providing basic tools for PhD students to write their thesis projects and to carry out good research in the social and political sciences. It is carried over two terms (fall and winter terms of PhD students' first year in the program). In the autumn term, there will be regular by-weekly *discussion sessions*. The regular sessions will combine methodological guidelines on how to best approach different aspects of a research project with a hands-on approach aimed at providing useful feedback to students while writing their research proposals. These proposals will be defended at the end of the academic year. In addition to the regular discussion sessions, the autumn session will schedule weekly presentations by invited guests on subjects of interest to the students, followed by a colloquium. The autumn session will end with several seminars in which students will make one-hour presentations/discussions of full drafts of their proposals to their colleagues and the convener of the course. In the second, winter term, the students will present/discuss in a new set of seminars to their peers and to a discussant chosen by their supervisor(s) an updated draft of their proposals. Depending on funding availability, the convener will schedule one or two intensive, one-week, methodological courses on specific techniques of analyses, which will be opened to all PhD students, not just students in their first year.

#### 2. Contents

The 12 regular 3-hour sessions scheduled for the autumn term will aim at introducing basic issues that most research proposals must take into account: (1) Research questions, aims, and objectives; (2) Backgrounds and expected contributions; (3) Theories and hypotheses; (4) Levels of generality and analyses; (5) Concepts, typologies, and variables; (6) Research designs (confirmatory); (7) Research designs (descriptive); (8) Research designs (exploratory); (9) Data; (10) Techniques of analyses (quantitative); (11) Techniques of analyses (qualitative); and (12) Ethical issues. In all sessions, the course will distinguish between three approaches to research in the social sciences based on different "logics" – deductive, inductive, and abductive. The students will learn that each approach leads to different questions, objectives, designs, data, and techniques of analyses, and that proposal should be as coherent as possible in this respect, although they might easily (and ideally) combine all of them.

The guest's presentations and colloquia will deal with issues of practical significance for students' research plans, such as how to carry out socially responsible, ethically sound and methodologically robust social science research. Guests will be asked to reflect about their own personal work so as to provide clear guidance about the dilemmas they faced and the decisions they made during their research.

The seminars will revolve around students' research proposals and will provide help on how to improve them.

The intensive, one-week methodological course to be scheduled in the winter term conditional on funding availability, will focus on a specific aspect of how to carry out sound research in the social and political sciences (on theory building, a technique of analysis, etc.).

### 3. Competences to be achieved in the subject

- General competences (Instrumental, Interpersonal and Systemic)
  1. **Instrumental Competences**
    - Capacity to apply deductive, inductive and abductive logic in processes of theory building
    - Ability to operationalize ideas and concepts employed in theories
    - Ability to identify different research solutions for different research problems
    - Planning and development of research designs
  2. **Interpersonal Competences**
    - Critical and self-critical ability
    - Team work
    - Ability to work in a interdisciplinary team
  3. **Systemic Competences**
    - Research abilities
    - Ability to work autonomously
    - Ability to generate new ideas (creativity)
    - Design and management of research designs
- Specific competences
  1. Knowledge of some of the main types of theories in the social and political sciences
  2. Knowledge of main types of research designs
  3. Understanding of main threats to validity in each research design
  4. Ability to solve problems of endogeneity and environmental and selection effects
  5. Capacity to transform concepts into variables and indicators

### 4. Methodology

The 12 taught sessions scheduled for the autumn term will be organized in the following manner. In the first hour, students will make brief oral presentations on how they think they could adapt to their proposals the learnings derived from the topics presented in the previous session by the lecturer. To make the discussion more effective, students' presentations should be based on a short (1-2 page) written document to be sent one day in advance to the convener. In the second part of each session, the convener will lecture on the content to be discussed in the first part of the following session. Regarding the seminars scheduled for the end of the autumn and winter terms, each student shall make a 15-minute presentation of a full draft of her/his research proposal (4000 to 6000-words long), after which there will be a 60-minute discussion. In the second, winter session of the seminar, there will be two discussants, both selected by the student's supervisor(s): an expert scholar on the topic of the student's proposal, and a PhD student from previous cohorts familiar with the topic or methodology. Finally, all guests' talks will last for 2-hours – one hour for the speaker's presentation and one hour for a follow-up discussion.

### 5. Assessment

The course will be assessed on a pass/non-pass basis. Failure to pass the course will have a negative impact on the tribunal's formal evaluation of student's proposals in the third term. To pass the course students will need to:

- Hand in 24 hours before each regular session a 1-2 page (single-spaced) written reflection on how they will implement the aspect to be discussed in class in their own research proposals. Failure to hand in two of the twelve due written assignment will result in a Fail in the class.
- Hand in 2 full drafts of the research proposal in the autumn (1) and winter (1) seminars organized in each term. The draft for the autumn proposal should be 4000 words long.



The draft for the winter term proposal shall be 6000 words long. Failure to hand in any of the two drafts will result in a Fail in the class.

- Orally defend the two drafts in the corresponding seminars scheduled for this purpose during the autumn and winter terms. Presentations shall last 15 minutes and be accompanied by power-point slides
- Attend at least 2/3 of all regular classes, seminars, and guest speaker's presentations, unless the PG director explicitly grants permission for non-attendance due to exceptional personal circumstances.

## **6. Readings**

Readings will be posted online on the Aula Global platform.

## **7. Contingency Plan. COVID-19**

UPF may be required to restrict access to the building at some time in the future. If as a result of such action students are unable to participate in the courses as planned during the training period, valid alternative arrangements will be made to ensure that they can take the courses. This plan envisages measures for delivering classes remotely.

All students and lecturers who are unable to attend the school because they have tested positive for COVID-19 or because they are in preventive quarantine will be treated as being on "excused absence", and they will be given the chance to complete their assessment under all circumstances.

Tools and resources have been enabled for teachers and students, and services to support teaching have been organized to provide remote support. The conversion of in-classroom to online teaching is possible thanks to the ICT strategy driven by the University to take all applications and infrastructure to the cloud (cloud computing). "La Factoria", located in the main Library, will respond to the students' queries or doubts regarding the operation of the UPF virtual learning platform (Aula Global).