

Research Methodology (Master Year 1 / Fall)

Master International Affairs, Strategic Policy Analysis and the Global Economy / Faculty of Social Sciences, Economics and Law

Introduction

How can we produce rigorous and convincing analysis of complex international issues? This course introduces students to the foundations and role of methodological approaches, research strategies and analytical tools used in the study and practice of international affairs. Students will examine how methodological choices shape research topics, questions, conclusions and vice versa. The course presents a range of qualitative methods used in international affairs such as case studies analysis, comparative analysis, interviews, discourse analysis and process tracing. Students will also become familiar with important tools designed to assist them in formulating a research question, developing hypotheses, identifying variables, selecting cases, evaluating sources and assessing the reliability of evidence.

Objectives

By the end of this course students will be able to:

- Explain the role of methodology in the field of International Affairs;
- Design a coherent research strategy by developing relevant research questions, hypothesis and identifying variables;
- Select, justify and apply appropriate qualitative methods such as comparative analysis, interviews, discourse analysis and process tracing within case studies;
- Critically evaluate sources and evidence by assessing their relevance, credibility, reliability, representativeness, limitations and potential biases;

Program

Methods of Instruction

The course adopts an interactive and practice-oriented approach that combines lectures, discussions, methodological demonstrations, along with applied analytical exercises. Theoretical concepts and research methods will be introduced through concrete examples drawn from contemporary international affairs, enabling students to understand both how particular methods work and when their use is appropriate.

Students are expected to participate actively in class discussions, raise questions and reflect critically. All course content is located on the ICP Moodle (formation.icp.fr).

Assessment and Final Grade

The course will be assessed through two individual, in-class assignments.

Mid-Term Exam (40%)

The mid-term exam will consist of a multiple choice and short question, short answer exam on all topics covered up until October.

Final Exam (60%)

Duration

1 semester

Teaching languages

- English

Conditions of submission

If you need more information about this course, kindly send an email to: incomingdri@icp.fr

The Final-Term Exam will consist of a methodological exercise based on a research topic or short case provided in class.

Evaluation feedback:

All students may consult their course evaluations with their professor after corrections have been completed. Faculty administrators will organize a meeting with the professor for the consultation of exam corrections.

Re-Sit Exam

Students required to attend the Re-Sit Exam will be informed by the administration.

The re-sit exam will consist of a 2-hour written exam. The exam will cover all topics discussed throughout the course, including class lectures and assigned readings.

Course Policies

Attendance:

Course attendance is mandatory and attendance will be noted at the beginning of each course. Course notes will not be distributed in any form. Be sure to acquire all information from a colleague when absent.

Punctuality:

Please arrive on time to class. If you arrive late, it is your responsibility to ensure that you have been marked as present for the course.

Plagiarism:

Please make sure to source your work! Plagiarism can be accidental.

Plagiarism will be dealt with according to the standards of the ICP, this includes the use of AI.

Course Topics

Topic Introduction

Why Use Methodology?

Conducting & Building Analysis

Academic & Policy Analysis

Objectivity & Interpretation

Facts, Interpretations & Judgements

Topic Using Sources

Why Sources Matter

Primary v. Secondary

Claims & Sources

Evaluating sources

Media literacy

Source risks & advantages

Using Footnotes & Bibliography

When to cite your work?

Using footnotes

Research & Sources

Topic Structuring Your Work

Understanding structure & Objectives

Introduction: Structure, Objectives, Context, "Problemization",

Research Questions, Methodology

Formulating a Relevant Research Question

Body of Work & Conclusion

Outlines & Transitions

Topic Case Study Analysis & Comparative Studies & Theory

Case Study Analysis

What is a case?

Objectives & limitations

Selecting & delimiting cases & Single-case designs

Comparative analysis

Why compare?

Selecting comparative factors

Theory & Evidence

What is theory?

Abstraction vs. Application

Using cases to apply & improve theory



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Topic Mid-Term Exam

Topic Establishing Causality

Correlation vs. causation

Identifying & evaluating causal claims

Process tracing

Identifying causal mechanisms

Sequencing events and establishing timelines

Alternative explanations

Counterfactual Analysis

Usefulness & Limitations

Counterfactual Steps

Evaluating counterfactual arguments

Topic Interviews

Why use them?

Structured vs. Semi-structured & Unstructured

Designing interview questions

Conducting & Recording & Transcribing

Analyzing evidence & making use of it all

Ethics & Limitations

Qualitative Discourse Analysis

Language, construction & meaning

Context, narratives, representation

Subjectivity

Formulating Hypotheses

Characteristics of strong hypotheses

Variables – Independent, Dependent & Intermediary

Topic ***Final Exam***

Optional Bibliography

Michel Beaud, L'art de la thèse. Comment préparer et rédiger un mémoire de master, une thèse de doctorat ou tout autre travail universitaire à l'ère du Net, La Découverte, 2006.

André Cabanis, et al., Methodologie de la recherche en droit international, geopolitique et relations internationales, Agence Univesitaire de la Francophonie, 2010.

Didier Courbet, Comment rédiger un projet de recherche (thèse de doctorat, mémoire de master...) ?, Institut de Recherche en Sciences de l'Information et de la Communication IRSIC/IMSIC, Version 3, Aix-Marseille Université, juin 2017.

Jean-Pierre Fragnière, Comment réussir un mémoire, 5e edition, Dunod, 2016.

Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, Case Studies and Theoretical Development in the Social Sciences, The MIT Press, 2005.

Richard Ned Lebow, Constructing Cause in International Relations, Cambridge University Press, 2014.

Thomas Lindemann, La Guerre: Théories, Causes, Règlements, Armand Colin, 2010.

James Mahoney, "Process Tracing and Historical Explanation", Security Studies, Vol. 24, No. 2, p. 200-218.

Nina Tannenwald, "Process Tracing and Security Studies", Security Studies, Vol. 24, No. 2, p. 219-227.

Oisín Tansey, "Process Tracing and Elite Interviewing: A Case for Non-Probability", PS: Political Science and Politics, Vol. 40, No. 4, p. 765-772.

Stephen Van Evra, Guide to methods for students of political science, Cornell University Press, 1997.

Robert K. Yin, Case Study Research. Design and Methodology, 4th edition, Applied Social Research Methods Series, Volume 5, Sage, 2009.



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