SP220 Methods for Social and Political Science

**Teaching team:** Dr Mike Hynes, Dr Bernadine Brady

**Course description:**

The overall aim of this course is to enable participants to understand what sociological and political data are, how to critically interpret them and how to use them effectively in their own work. The course starts off by discussing what sociological and political research is about. We then demonstrate how to use a selection of qualitative and quantitative research methods. Qualitative methods to be explored include participant observation, interviewing, documentary methods and focus groups. Participants will examine issues surrounding the analysis of research and research ethics.  The quantitative section of the course will cover the fundamentals of survey research, including issues of operationalisation, questionnaire design, sampling and basic statistical analysis methods. In addition, we will discuss statistical literacy skills that enable citizens to read and understand statistical evidence presented in the media and official publications.

**Course Structure:**

* 24 hour lecture course
* Weekly general seminars

**Marks structure:**

* Participation and essay in general seminar (30%)
* End of Course 2-hour Exam (written & MCQ) (70%)

**Course Objectives:**

To introduce students to:

* Key objectives of empirical research in the social sciences
* Major qualitative and quantitative research methods used by social and political scientists
* Methodological debates and their implications for doing research
* Different approaches to data collection and analysis
* Approaches to representing and writing research

**Learning outcomes:**

After successful completion of the course students will be able to:

* Reflect critically on the advantages and drawbacks of different approaches to empirical social science research
* Distinguish between key methods of data collection and analysis used by social scientists
* Identify key steps in the research process
* Appreciate the merits and disadvantages of qualitative, quantitative and mixed-method studies
* Understand basic statistical language and concepts

**Key Texts:**

* Bryman, A. (2016) *Social Research Methods,* 5th edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press. **(300.72 BRY) Please Note: The 2012 or earlier editions of this text can also be used.**
* Ritchie, J. Lewis, J., McNaughton Nichols, C., Ormston, R. (2014) *Qualitative Research Practice: A guide for social science students & researchers.*  London:  SAGE.

Note that you are required to **take a critical attitude to all readings.** Lectures will help here.

**Timetable, lecture titles and recommended reading**

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|  | **Monday, 2-3 pm, O’Flaherty Theatre, Concourse** | **Tuesday, 12-1 pm, O’Flaherty Theatre, Concourse** |
| **Week 1** | Lecture 1a:  **Introduction: What you can and can’t do with quantitative methods.**  Bryman, chs. 1 and 7; Wilkinson and Pickett (2010), ch. 2 (available on Blackboard and in 2BA General Seminar reader). | Lecture 1b:  **Introduction to qualitative research:**  **Principles and approaches**  Ritchie et al, Ch. 1  Bryman, ch. 17 |
| **Week 2** | Lecture 2a:  **From theory to empirical research:** **Concepts and their measurement**  Bryman, ch. 7; Fahy and Rau, chs. 1, pp. 3-14 (Rau and Fahy) and 5 (Khoo) – available on Blackboard | Lecture 2b:  **Designing and implementing a qualitative research study**  Ritchie et al, 3, 5  Bryman, Ch. 18 |
| **Week 3** | Lecture 3a**:**  **Formulating research questions and designing a project**  Bryman, ch. 3 | Lecture 3b:  **Interviews**  Ritchie et al, Ch. 7  Bryman, Ch. 20 |
| **Week 4** | Lecture 4a:  **Sampling**  Bryman, ch. 8; also compare to ch. 18 (sampling in qualitative research) | Lecture 4b:  **Ethical and political issues in social research**  Ritchie et al, Ch. 4  Bryman, ch. 6 |
| **Week 5** | Lecture 5a**:**  **Collecting data I**  Asking questions  Bryman, chs. 9-11 | Lecture 5b:  **Participant observation and ethnography**  Ritchie et al, Ch. 9  Bryman, Ch. 19 |
| **Week 6** | Lecture 6a:  **Collecting data II**  How to design and administer a survey questionnaire  Bryman, chs. 10 and 11; Fahy and Rau, ch. 2 (Barr and Prillwitz, av. on Blackboard) | Lecture 6b:  **Focus Groups**  Ritchie et al, Ch. 8  Bryman, Ch. 21 |
| **Week 7** | Lecture 7a:  **Coding, describing and visualising data**  Bryman, pp. 247-249 (material on coding in ch. 11) and ch. 15, esp. pp. 335-345 | Lecture 7b:  **Using the Internet in social research**  Bryman, Ch. 28, (4th edition) |
| **Week 8** | Lecture 8a: **Testing your questions:**  **An introduction to hypothesis testing and some comments on cause and effect relationships**  Salkin (2011), ch. 7 (available on Blackboard) | Lecture 8b:  **Analysing qualitative data**  Ritchie et al, Ch. 10, 11  Bryman, Ch. 24 |
| **Week 9** | Lecture 9a:  **Detecting relationships I: Tables**  Bryman, ch. 15, esp. pp. 337 and 341. | Lecture 9b: **Documentary methods**  Bryman, Ch. 23 |
| **Week 10** | Lecture 10a:  **Detecting relationships II:**  **Correlation, regression and multivariate analysis** Bryman, ch. 15, esp. pp. 339ff. | Lecture 10b:  **An overview of differing approaches to qualitative inquiry**  Creswell (2013), Ch. 4 |
| **Week 11** | Lecture 11a  **Using existing large-scale data and official statistics**  Bryman, ch. 14; also May (1997/2011), ch. 4 (available on Blackboard) | Lecture 11b: **Mixed methods research**  Bryman ch. 27 |
| **Week 12** | Lecture 12a: **Quantitative research: summary and revision** | Lecture 12b:  **Qualitative research: summary and revision** |

NB: Please note that other relevant readings will be added on Blackboard as the semester progresses.

## **Additional library readings include:**

Alasuutari, P., Bickman, L., Brannen, J. (eds)(2008) *The SAGE Handbook of Social Research Methods.* London: Sage. **(online access via library)**

Byrne, A. and Lentin, R. (eds)(2000) *Researching Women: Feminist Research Methodologies in the Social Sciences in Irelan.* Dublin: IPA. **(305.42072 RES)**

Creswell, J. (2013) *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among five approaches*. London: Sage. **(300.72 CRE)**

Denzin, N.K. and Lincoln, Y.S. (eds)(2011) *Handbook of Qualitative Research,* 4th edition*.* Thousand Oaks: Sage. **(300.72 HAN)**

Devine, F. and Heath, S. (1999) *Sociological Research Methods in Context.* Basingstoke: Palgrave. **(301.072 DEV)**

Fahy, F. and Rau, H. (eds)(2013) *Methods of Sustainability Research in the Social Sciences.* London: Sage. **(338.927072 MET)**

Fielding, J. and Gilbert, N. (2009) *Understanding Social Statistics*, 2nd edition. London: Sage. **(300.727 FIE)**

Hammersley, M. and Atkinson, P. (1995) *Ethnography: Principles in Practice,* 2nd edition. London: Routledge. **(305.8001 HAM)**

Hughes, J. and Ackroyd, S. (1992) *Data Collection in Context*. London: Longman. **(300.72 ACK)**

May, T. (2011) *Social Research: Issues, Methods and Process,* 4th edition*.* Buckingham: OUP. **(online access via library; paper copies also available)**

Mills, J., Birks, M. (2014) *Qualitative methodology: A practical guide*. London: Sage.

Outhwaite, W. and Turner, S. (eds)(2007) *The Sage Handbook of Social Science Methodology*. London and New York: Sage. **(online access via library)**

Silverman, D. (2004) *Qualitative Research: Theory, Method and Practice,* 2nd ed. London: Sage. **(001.4 QUA)**

Salkind, N. (2011) *Statistics for people who (think they) hate statistics,* 4th edition. London: Sage.

Smith, M.J. (1998) *Social Science in Question*. London: Sage in association with the Open University. **(300 SMI)**

Strauss, A. and Corbin, J. (2008) *Basics of Qualitative Research,* 3rd ed. London: Sage. **(300.72 COR)**

Wilkinson, R. and Pickett, K. (2010) *The Spirit Level: Why Equality Is Better For Everyone.* London: Penguin. **(305 WIL)**

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* <http://www.ted.com/talks/richard_wilkinson.html> (Richard Wilkinson charts data that proves societies that are more equal are healthier, happier societies).
* <http://www.ted.com/talks/hans_rosling_shows_the_best_stats_you_ve_ever_seen.html> (Hans Rosling shows “the best stats you have ever seen” and comments on issues of poverty and inequality, especially in the ‘developing world’)
* <http://www.socialresearchmethods.net/kb/index.php> - William Trochim’s (2006) *Research Methods Knowledge Base* offers an invaluable tool for learning about (quantitative) social research, including basic statistical concepts and diverse research designs
* <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bHzM9RlO6j0> (Alan Bryman comments on latest developments in social research)
* <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CzkmPLMUv9o&feature=related> (David Morgan talks about advantages and drawbacks of focus groups in social research)
* <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OdVu2CfbgQM&feature=related> (Kathleen Collins talks about research methods and how to plan and carry out a research project).