



Course information 2018–19

SC2145 Social research methods

Social research methods is a technical subject that has its own language and this language must be used in a very precise way. This course will describe the key components of social research, allow students to develop skills and knowledge about quantitative and qualitative social research and identify criteria used to evaluate the quality of social research.

Prerequisite

If taken as part of a BSc degree, courses which must be passed before this course may be attempted:

SC1178 Contemporary sociology in a global age or
SC1021 Principles of sociology

Aims and objectives

This course is designed to:

- describe the key components of social research
- develop skills and knowledge about quantitative and qualitative social research
- identify criteria used to evaluate the quality of social research.

Essential reading

For full details please refer to the reading list

Bryman, A. *Social Research Methods*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press)

Learning outcomes

At the end of this course and having completed the essential reading and activities students should be able to:

- ✓ formulate researchable questions
- ✓ define a research strategy and design a research project to answer a research question
- ✓ discuss the practice and principles of qualitative and quantitative social research
- ✓ use skills and knowledge acquired in the course to evaluate the quality of published research by sociologists and other social scientists.

Assessment

This course is assessed by a three-hour unseen written examination.

Students should consult the appropriate *EMFSS Programme Regulations*, which are reviewed on an annual basis. The *Regulations* provide information on the availability of a course, where it can be placed on your programme's structure, and details of co-requisites and prerequisites.

Syllabus

This is a description of the material to be examined. On registration, students will receive a detailed subject guide which provides a framework for covering the topics in the syllabus and directions to the essential reading

The contexts of social research: Social research as a professional activity. The market for social research outputs. The contexts of data collection. Social research and academic sociology. Philosophy and the practice of social research. The cultural context and ethnocentrism. Developing research proposals in context.

Models and Modelling in Social Research: Ontological and epistemological status of models. Models and researchable questions. Exploratory and Confirmatory approaches to model building. Flexibility in Research Design. The use of models in quantitative and qualitative social research

Concepts in Social Research: Approaches to concept formation in Sociology. Theory and concepts. Induction and deduction. The use of concepts in qualitative and quantitative social research. Coding qualitative data. Operationalising concepts. Complex concepts: property spaces.

Qualitative Social Research: Sources of qualitative data: the interview, focus groups, participant observation and field work methods, documents. Sampling in qualitative social research: grounded theory and theoretical sampling. Analytic induction and qualitative classification analysis. Small N research and case studies: 'thick' description.

Quantitative Social Research: Sources of quantitative data: the social survey, administrative and official statistics. Secondary analysis of survey data. Designing social surveys. Quasi-experimental designs. Units and levels of analysis. Graphics and visualising data. Explanation and causal inference.

Deciphering and Evaluating Social Research Outputs: The components of a social research publication. Identifying components. Reconstructing the research project. Validity in quantitative and qualitative research.