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Office Hours: by appointment
Day/Time Tue 2 – 5 pm
Class location Adamian 242

Prerequisites: Students are expected to be familiar with the following work:
  There will be a qualifying entry examination at the first meeting.

Description: The aim of this course is to enable students to reflect critically on the concepts and practices of research in the social sciences. We will explore various ways of thinking about the nature of research in the social sciences and will investigate the value and problems of potential research methods.

Objectives: Students should be able to identify a variety of problems that arise in the context of scientific investigations in the social domain. They should be familiar with the relevant strands of literature and be able to evaluate them critically. This background should help students to make informed choices with regard to their research topics and methods.

Readings: Apart from the prerequisite readings (see above), most material is collected in
  Supplementary material will be made available as photocopies or desk copies in the library.
Method: This is a seminar course in which students will be responsible for leading the discussion. Each week one or more students will present a summary of the week’s readings and will, with the advice and assistance of the instructor, initiate a discussion of the relevant issues. The presenter of the week should distribute, to the instructor and the class, a two-page summary of key points in the readings. This summary should be submitted at the beginning of the week in which the presentation is due. The presentation ought to be accompanied by a summary of a search of references to the week’s author in the business literature.

This exercise will be complemented by three substantial term papers and a final exam.

Evaluation: Three term papers, eight/twelve/twenty pages (consecutively), 20% of final grade each. The overall result of these three grades has to be a pass. Final examination, 20% of final grade. Class presentations and participation, 20% of final grade.

Papers: The topic of the papers is to be determined by the student in discussion with the instructor. The idea is to pursue one subject throughout the semester, so that the three papers reflect an ongoing intellectual development. This process is meant to simulate the actual procedure of writing a research paper, with all the various stages this involves (from formulating the question through researching the literature to defending a well-developed thesis). The topic of the paper should pick up on the student’s own research interests and relate it to one of the issues discussed in this course. In most cases, this will mean an investigation into the conceptual (philosophical) underpinnings of a topic in applied social science, such as strategy or accounting. To get a first overview of the issues discussed in this course, see the course summary.

Topics (N.B.: Works whose source is not mentioned can be found in Martin/McIntyre):

Week of 7 September: Entry examination and introduction

I THE SOCIAL DOMAIN AND THE CONCEPT OF A SOCIAL SCIENCE

Weeks of 14/21 September: ONTOLOGY OF THE SOCIAL WORLD


Week of 28 September: OBJECTIVITY AND VALUES


2. Charles Taylor, Neutrality in Political Science

3. Ernest Nagel, The Value-Oriented Bias of Social Inquiry

Weeks of 5/12 Oct

REDUCTIONISM, INDIVIDUALISM, HOLISM

1. Emile Durkheim, *Social Facts*

2. J. W. N. Watkins, *Historical Explanation in the Social Sciences*

3. Steven Lukes, *Methodological Individualism Reconsidered*

4. Harold Kincaid, *Reduction, Explanation, and Individualism*

5. Alan J. Nelson, *Social Science and the Mental*

**Paper #1 due on 6 October**

II METHODS OF INQUIRY IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

Weeks of 19/26 Oct

EXPLANATION, PREDICTION, AND LAWS


2. F. A. Hayek, *The Theory of Complex Phenomena*


5. Harold Kincaid, *Defending Laws in the Social Sciences*

Week of 2 November

INTERPRETATION AND MEANING

1. R. G. Collingwood, *Human Nature and Human History*

2. Charles Taylor, *Interpretation and the Sciences of Man*
3. Clifford Geertz, *Thick Description: Toward and Interpretive Theory of Culture*

4. Dagfinn Føllesdal, *Hermeneutics and the Hypothetico-Deductive Method*

**Paper #2 due on 3 November**

*Week of 9 November*

- Student Project Presentations

*Week of 16 November*

**FUNCTIONAL EXPLANATION**


2. Jon Elster, *Functional Explanation: In Social Science*

3. Harold Kincaid, *Assessing Functional Explanations in the Social Sciences*

*Week of 23 November*

**CAUSAL REASONING**


4. Donald Davidson, *Actions, Reasons, and Causes*

**Paper #3 due on 24 November**
Week of 30 November  RATIONALITY

1. Steven Lukes, *Some Problems about Rationality*

2. Dagfinn Føllesdal, *The Status of Rationality Assumptions in Interpretation and in the Explanation of Action*


Week of 7 December  Review

Week of 14 December  Final Exam