Faculty of Economic, Social and Political Sciences

SPOL2106   Approaches to research in political science

[15h] 5 credits

Teacher(s):   Françoise Piérard, Benoît Rihoux
Language: French
Level: Second cycle

Aims

At the end of the course, students will have better skills in completing all stages of their degree dissertations from initial explorations to the point at which the dissertations are lodged.
Specific skills to be developed to this end include: the ability to make intelligent use of new information technology in political science research; good time-management (e.g. timetabling and meeting deadlines); acquiring independence at the various stages of producing individual work; the ability to work in groups and to exchange information with other students working on related subjects; demonstration (through individual work) of the ability to present research outcomes in a rigorous manner (as regards both form and substance); development of critical skills, creativity and personal contributions; and use of the political science tools presented during theoretical courses.

Main themes

The aim of the course is to present students with a modus operandi for tackling political science research, and in such a way that they are able to put it into practice through the completion of individual work. During this process, the teaching staff will monitor students on an individual and small-group basis. The work will be designed as training in completion of the dissertation.

Content and teaching methods

The stages of the research process will initially be presented in a logical sequence in sessions in the main hall: formulation of a starting-point and of a working hypothesis, exploratory research, detailed research of information (particularly with the help of NICT), information processing, managing bibliographical data, writing the research up, and completion.
Students will then be divided into sub-groups based on the categories of subjects suggested for individual work. They will receive individual and/or small-group supervision at different stages: this will include the possibility of qualitative assessment of an early version of the final work.
Two comments:
1. Hours of study (see "*" above) The course is in a seminar-course format: ± 15 hours in the main hall, and then follow-up in groups and with individual work; the format will then be more like 15-30-0, and then 45 hours in total, if the work-time investment demanded of students is taken into account. Question: Should there be a higher ECTS value?
2. Supervision (see "**" below): A better and more profitable scenario for both students and Assistants, which will involve enlarging the teaching staff (e.g. three Assistants - one per "tenure" of the SPRI Unit), with each staff member being able to propose research-related subjects (PhD research in the case of the Assistants). This will lead to better linkage between research and teaching.

Other information (prerequisite, evaluation (assessment methods), course materials recommended readings, ...)

Pre-requirements: This course forms part of an extension to the two SESP courses: "Historical criticism and documentary research" (SESP 1114) (particularly the "documentary research" section for students who have done the course and practical work with Professor M Dorban) and "Methodology and approaches to social science research" (SESP 1242).
Assessment: Individual work
Support: Practical information and a series of links to be followed each week will be available on the course website managed by Icam-pus (http://www.icampus.ucl.ac.be/spol2106/) in addithttp://www.icampus.ucl.ac.be/spol2106/) in adion to the paper syllabus. Besides the specialist bibliographies, this website will contain a range of useful resources (e.g. timetable, forum, forms and useful links) that will be discussed during different sessions. During some of the sessions, teachers will use this website as an "online" resource. Students, too, will have to complete certain tasks via the website. This support will be improved as part of an FDP project (website: interactive guide to research in political science).
Supervision: Two teachers and one Assistant (**). Work topics will be shared out among the teaching staff on the basis of each member's research skills.

Other credits in programs

POL21/AP	Première licence en sciences politiques (Affaires publiques)	(5 credits)	Mandatory
POL21/RI	Première licence en sciences politiques (Relations internationales)	(5 credits)	Mandatory