



# Empirical Research Design & Writing in Social Science

Welcome to the course Empirical Research Design & Writing in Social Science. I have designed this syllabus to help you understand which topic and important questions we will consider in each week's class. I recommend that you use this document each week prior to undertaking the readings.

## Information

**Class:** Empirical Research Design & Writing in Social Science (ENS-2454)

**Term:** Winter Semester 2024/2025 (WiSe24/25)

**Seminar:** Wednesdays 15:00–17:00      **Room:** CP18

**Office Hours:** Virtual (Zoom), by appointment, email to arrange.

**Me:** Dr. Mike Cowburn (he/him)

**Email:** [cowburn@europa-uni.de](mailto:cowburn@europa-uni.de)

**TA:** Felix Trojan ([trojan@europa-uni.de](mailto:trojan@europa-uni.de))

**You:** Who you are isn't defined by records or bureaucracies, so if you prefer a name or a pronoun other than the one listed, please let me know.

## Course Description

Empirical research in the social sciences aims to decipher how the world works around us, where researchers try to explain how parts of the world are built and operate. This course will introduce students to the stages of the empirical research process including how to come up with a research question, collecting and analyzing data, writing a literature review and the relationship between empirical research and theory, writing up empirical findings, and putting this together in a coherent research paper. By the end of this class, students will be able to write an empirical research paper.

## Communication

For short questions, email is the best way to contact me. I endeavor to respond to all emails within twenty-four hours Monday to Friday, I will respond to most emails considerably quicker than this. If I haven't responded within twenty-four hours, please feel free to email again.



If you wish to go over material covered in class, talk about connections between class material and other ideas, and so on, I will be happy to schedule time in my virtual office hours. Please email me to arrange. These discussions are generally student-led but I can help you formulate questions and point you in the direction of additional material for your term papers based on my sense of your strengths and interests. I encourage you to take advantage of this time and I will be flexible enough to accommodate most appointments.

I also encourage students to take advantage of my office hours to ask questions or discuss issues related to the course, the discipline of political science, or academia more generally. If you have any comments about or problems with the course itself, I encourage you to share them in my office hours.

## Course Requirements

This class is worth 3 ECTS credits. All students will contribute work during the semester and receive a grade based on their in-class contributions and a research proposal.

### **In-Class Participation**

Attendance, participation, and preparedness are important to your success in this course (and, I find, in life generally). Therefore, it is expected that you come to each class prepared, having read, and thought about the course material, and ready to engage. Class time will be divided between lectures and in-class activities. The way you are going to learn best is through practice. Active involvement in activities is crucial to success in this class and serves as an easy way to boost your participation grade (and therefore your overall grade). **Class attendance is mandatory.** Moreover, when in the classroom you are expected to contribute to discussion, be active in answering questions and be able to talk about the themes and topics at hand. Both your attendance and oral contributions will therefore count towards your final grade.

### **Research Proposal**

You will write a brief (two to three page) research proposal. This proposal is an outline of an empirical research paper that you could potentially write. You do not need to write the research paper but the outline should include all of the elements of a research proposal that we will discuss throughout the semester including: research question, theory, hypotheses, an explanation of what data you would use and how you would go about collecting that data,



and possible explanations and implications of your findings. Given that we will be engaging in different parts of this process each week, I encourage you to write your research proposal throughout the semester so that you have a final proposal ready for the deadline, in the final week of class we will discuss and give peer feedback on proposals. Because this is a class on writing you will also be graded according to the quality of your written work as well as your ideas. **Proposals must be uploaded to Moodle by 09:00 on 16<sup>th</sup> January 2024.** Please use the filename “*surname\_proposal*” when uploading your proposal.

## Grading Schema

- In-class participation (oral contributions including peer feedback): **50%**
- Research proposal: **50%**

## Civility Policy

In accordance with the philosophy of an institution for higher learning, the classroom should be a place where diverse ideas can be explored with respect to promote learning and growth. We each come from a variety of backgrounds and bring with us different experiences to the classroom. Regardless of whether we share similar opinions and beliefs, I expect us to remain respectful of each other as we explore ideas. I encourage and expect you to express yourself with reason, clarity, courtesy, and compassion. This ensures that we may be comfortable learning and growing without fear of judgment, ridicule, or intimidation. I welcome each of you as worthy contributors in the classroom. **Student conduct that disrupts the learning process will not be tolerated.** Similarly, if any student feels unsafe or discriminated against during in the class, please contact me immediately. While academic discourse should be intellectually challenging, it should never be discriminatory, and **it is my responsibility to ensure everyone feels safe and able to participate in our classroom.**

In the same spirit, we should adopt inclusive language both in our discussions and written work. In line with recent style guide changes from the Associated Press, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, and others, students should capitalize “Black” when describing this racial group in their written work. “White” should also have a capital letter, in line with recommendations of the National Association of Black Journalists, except when it is an adjective (white nationalism etc.). Similarly, we should use terms that acknowledge the humanity of people we are discussing, recognizing that individuals are not defined by their conditions or circumstances; for example, “enslaved people,” not “slaves.” Gender neutral terms



should be used both in discussions and written work, so “member of Congress” not “congressman.” **Racist, sexist, homophobic, or any other offensive terms will not be tolerated in the classroom, regardless of the context in which they are used.** More generally, we should reflect upon our positionality as researchers in our contributions. If students have specific feedback on any of these points that they wish to discuss I welcome these conversations either directly or as part of our wider class discussions.

## Prior Knowledge & Resources

This is an introductory level course into empirical research design and writing in social science meaning that there are no prerequisites for participation. All levels of prior knowledge are therefore welcome in our classroom.

We will use one textbook throughout the semester which you are expected to acquire:

- Powner, Leanne C. *Empirical Research and Writing: A Political Science Student's Practical Guide*. Los Angeles: CQ Press, 2014.

Given that we will be using this book throughout the semester and all of our course readings will come from these texts you may want to consider purchasing a physical copy for your reading convenience (at the time of writing, second hand copies are available online for around 20€), though a digital version is all that is required.

## Course Structure

Below is our schedule for the semester, depending on our progress through the course we may choose to expand or reduce certain sections. In such a scenario I will inform you of any changes sufficiently in advance. Each week we have one ninety-minute session. Most weeks we will begin with a short lecture by me on the topic that we have read for the week's class followed by some practical work. All readings are required and come from Powner's book.

### Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> October 2024 – Introduction

- Expectations
- Discussion of Syllabus
- No readings

### Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> October 2024 – Research Question

Chapter 1



**Wednesday 30<sup>th</sup> October 2024 – Theory & Hypotheses**

Chapter 2

*Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> November 2024 – Reading Week, No Class*

**Wednesday 13<sup>th</sup> November 2024 – Literature Review**

Chapter 3

**Wednesday 20<sup>th</sup> November 2024 – Design Considerations**

Chapter 4

**Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> November 2024 – Qualitative Research Design**

Chapter 5

**Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> December 2024 – Qualitative Data Collection**

Chapter 6

**Wednesday 11<sup>th</sup> December 2024 – Quantitative Data Collection**

Chapter 7

**Wednesday 18<sup>th</sup> December 2024 – Quantitative Data Analysis**

Chapter 8

**Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> January 2025 – Writing Your Paper**

Chapter 9

***Upload Proposal to Moodle: Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> January (09:00)***

**Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> January 2025 – Editing**

Chapter 10



## Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> January 2024 – Presenting & Publishing

Chapter 11

*Depending on the number of participants, we may begin the discussion of proposals in this week.*

## Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> January 2025 – Proposal Discussion

Read two (assigned) of your peers' proposals. You will be expected to provide some brief comments.

## Wednesday 5<sup>th</sup> February 2024 – Housekeeping (if needed)

No reading