

SV9108 - Philosophy of Social Science

Professor Andrea J. Nightingale (Human Geography) and Professor Gaute Torsvik (Economics)

Course content

Philosophical questions underpin all research whether explicitly acknowledged or not. Within the social sciences, important differences exist between, for example, how social processes are conceptualised, how to isolate causality (epistemology), and what methods produce valid data (methodology). At core, they reflect underlying assumptions (ontologies) about how society works, some of which are in direct contradiction with each other. These differences have important implications for the way that evidence is gathered and validated. As a result, it is important to grasp these differences and to be able to recognise how they influence the research process.

The course is aimed at providing students with a working knowledge of current philosophical debates and to help them understand the core concerns of all the disciplines in the social sciences. It links philosophical underpinnings to the different types of empirical analysis that are used, and discusses the challenges associated with identifying causal relationships in data on human interactions. The goal is to strengthen students' skills in using different theoretical frameworks in their own work, and to enhance their abilities to work across disciplines.

Learning outcome

Knowledge

Students will:

- Become familiar with the dominant philosophical debates in the social sciences and how these compare to the physical sciences.
- Be provided with a working knowledge of current philosophical debates.
- Understand the core debates within most disciplines in the social sciences.

Skills

Students will know how to:

- Differentiate the ontological and epistemological differences that underpin research traditions
- Recognise different ontological and epistemological frameworks in their own work.

Competences

Students will:

- Improve their abilities to use theory appropriately within their own work.
- Improve their abilities to match their methods with theoretical commitments.
- Enhance their abilities to work across disciplines.

Admission

The course is compulsory for all candidates on the PhD programme at the Faculty of Social Sciences.

PhD candidates must each semester register for classes and examinations through [Studentweb](#).

The deadline for registering is February 1st for courses in the spring semester and September 1st for courses in the autumn semester.

This course is only available for candidates admitted to the PhD programme at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Oslo.

Overlapping courses

- 4 credits overlap with [SV9101 – Philosophy of science \(discontinued\)](#)
- 4 credits overlap with ECON9010
- 4 credits overlap with SV9105 – Philosophy of social science

Teaching

Lectures and interactive sessions spread over 4 days

Compulsory activities

- 75% attendance on all instruction days.
- Active participation during the lectures, seminars and group discussions.

Examination

Essay

Language of examination

You may write your examination paper in English.