

BA: Research Design and Methods Training

This memo sketches the plan for new methods training for the BA programs at the Department of Political Science.

General Aims

- Improve the students' methodological literacy in both qualitative and quantitative political science at a basic level.
- Enable students to conduct both qualitative and quantitative studies at a basic level.
- Reduce number of students dropping out, i.e. increase the number of students successfully completing their BA and MA.

General strategies

- Increase the number of credits used on political science inference and methods training at the BA from 10 to 20:
 - Transform STV1000 («Introduksjon til statsvitenskap») to a methodological component of STV1010 that introduces the basics of both empirical and normative research.
 - Let the new STV1010 focus on research design and qualitative methods.
 - Let the current STV1020 focus on quantitative methods, in line with the current course description.
- The two courses will be coordinated, but STV1020 should still be possible to take as a single course to students not in our BA program.
- Both methods courses should be problem-oriented and thus connected to substantive political science questions, from different parts of the discipline.
- Offer «STV2020 – Maskinl ring og programmering for samfunnsvitere/ Social science data analysis and programming» when capacity allows.
- Encourage all substantive 2000-courses (advanced BA-level) to include term papers with an empirical component, to allow students to develop their methodological understanding and practical skills.
- Record all lectures so they can be watched again later by students when needed.
- Let STV3900 focus on how to develop, complete and report a small research project/study in practice («How to write a political science paper»). Rename this module to «Bacheloroppgaven». Offer recordings of methods courses so that student can recap materials from earlier courses.

Table 1 Overview BA program

6. semester	STV3090 – Bacheloroppgaven	40-gruppe	40-gruppe
5. semester	Emne p� 2000-niv�	Emne p� 2000-niv�	40-gruppe
4. semester	Fritt emne eller utveksling	Fritt emne eller utveksling	Fritt emne eller utveksling

3. semester	EXPHIL03 – Examen philosophicum	STV1200 – Internasjonal politikk	40-gruppe
2. semester	STV1020: Politisk analyse: Forskningsdesign og kvantitative metoder	STV1300 – Introduction to comparative politics	SVEXFAC03 – Examen Facultatum - Samfunnsvitenskapelig variant
1. semester	STV1010: Politisk analyse: Forskningsdesign og kvalitative metoder	STV1100 – Politisk teori	STV1400 – Offentlig politikk og administrasjon
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Political Analysis 1: Research design and qualitative methods

This course introduces students to political science as a scientific discipline. It elaborates the distinction between “normative” and “descriptive” political analysis, and provides the basis for scientific inference about political phenomena. By using substantive questions and published research in the discipline as basis, students will learn about how to answer different types of questions about political life based on empirical research in a valid and reliable manner. Therefore, we consider collecting original research articles (by asking the IP, KP and OPA sections for suggestions) to illustrate different approaches, and perhaps invite members of staff to elaborate choices made in their own research in a couple of brief sessions.

Doing this, we will first present and explain the basic elements of a research design: the purpose of research, different logics of inference (descriptive, causal, predictive), formulation of research questions, selection of units of analysis and choice of data types. The course will give an overview of pros and cons related to the choice of studying one, a few, or many units and how to combine such strategies.

Next, we will zoom in on those research questions that require the study of a single or few units of analysis, and thus “qualitative methods”. The course introduces various types of qualitative research designs, data collection methods, data usages and analysis techniques:

- Major types of qualitative research designs (theory building vs. theory testing)
- Case selection and sampling choices
- Operationalizing variables with qualitative data sources
- Data collection: archives, media, and internet sources
- Data collection: interviews and participatory observation (emphasis on interviews)
- Research ethics
- How to process and analyze qualitative data
- Building an argument based on qualitative data
- Biases in qualitative data sources and how a multi-method approach might be a solution (this is meant to create a bridge over to STV1020)

Students will try out different techniques in seminars. In written assignments, they will apply the acquired knowledge. Students can self-select into one or two qualitative technique based

on their interest. During seminars, they will get advice on how to go about the analysis in the various stages, and thus get experience with writing of field notes/transcription of interviews and analysis/inference.

The course will enable students to critically read political science literature, and train them to conduct a basic qualitative study on their own. The tools acquired in this course will enable students to better evaluate empirical claims and recognize biases arising from sampling, types of sources, or how key terms are conceptualized and operationalized. They will also learn how to systematically collect information about a topic through interviews, observation or textual sources, how to systematize this information, present results and justify your conclusions. During the advanced substantive BA courses, students will apply this knowledge and further develop their practical skills, before they finally write and submit their BA thesis towards the end of the degree.

These learning outcomes are essential for academic work, but are also useful for information collection at workplaces outside of academia. Moreover, in most jobs in both the private and public sector it is an essential skill to be able to understand and critically evaluate research reports or documents of various kinds. Thus, basic knowledge of qualitative research methods is relevant for a range of different jobs.

Political Analysis 2: Research design and quantitative methods

This course builds on “Political Analysis 1,” but can be taken independently. First, it briefly recapitulates the basic elements of a research design: purpose of research, formulation of research question, logic of inference (descriptive, causal, predictive), selection of units of analysis and choice of data types. Second, the course zooms in on those research questions that require study of many cases, and thus “quantitative methods”. The course introduces students to various types of quantitative research designs, data types (and sets) and analysis techniques – both their assets and limitations. Published research in the discipline is used to exemplify. The course will also show how quantitative methods can be combined with qualitative methods, through «mixed methods». Above all, the course introduces basic statistical analysis, with a focus on measurement, descriptive statistics, data visualization, and regression analysis. Moreover, students are introduced to the programming language R.

The course will enable students to critically read quantitative political science literature, and train them to conduct a basic quantitative study on their own. During the advanced substantive BA courses they will apply this knowledge and further develop their methods skills, before they finally write and submit their BA thesis towards the end of the degree.

A solid understanding of descriptive statistics and regression analysis is essential for academic work. In working life outside academia, students can use what they learn when searching for quantitative data and statistics about society, economy and politics. In many jobs, the ability to run statistical analyses is greatly appreciated or even required. Moreover, in most jobs in both the private and public sector it is an essential skill to be able to understand and critically evaluate quantitative reports or documents of various kinds. Thus, basic knowledge of quantitative methods and statistics for social science is relevant for a range of different jobs.

STV3090 Bachelor Thesis

The bachelor thesis is an individual research paper of about 6000 words, which should meet the general requirements for scientific publication. The purpose of the bachelor thesis is to conduct a basic analysis of a research question within the field of political science, and present the results of your analysis in terms of a research paper.

The bachelor thesis should have a precise:

- Research question
- Appropriate methods
- A systematic argument

The thesis can be focused on a normative or an empirical research question. Students choose the topic of study themselves, and are responsible for formulating the exact research question and identify an appropriate research design to answer this question. This offers an opportunity to apply what they have learned in “Political Analysis 1 & 2” and in substantive courses that formed part of their degree. We will encourage everyone to revisit the material from the methods courses in the recordings available via Canvas.

The curriculum and lectures break down the research paper into its constituent parts and show students what they need to do at each stage to successfully complete each component until the thesis is finished. The learning material includes practical summaries, recipes for success, worksheets, exercises, and a series of handy checklists. Students will present a project proposal and paper drafts in seminars, before submitting their BA thesis towards the end of the term.

The course – lectures and seminars – can be structured around this book: *Writing a Research Paper in Political Science: A Practical Guide to Inquiry, Structure, and Methods*.

<https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/writing-a-research-paper-in-political-science/book249472#description>

These are the topics covered:

- What Is a Research Paper?
 - What Research Paper Writing Entails
- Getting Started: Finding a Research Question
 - Characteristics of a Good Question
- Learning Proper Citation Forms, Finding the Scholarly Debate, and Summarizing and Classifying Arguments: The Annotated Bibliography
 - What Are Bibliographies, and Why Do We Bother With Them?
 - Plagiarism versus Paraphrasing and Avoiding Drop-Ins and Transcripts, Too
 - Annotating the Bibliography
 - Identifying the Key Conceptual Issues
 - Searching for Sources
 - Identifying Similar Arguments and Grouping Your Sources
 - Generic Schools of Thought
 - Writing the Annotated Bibliography

- Making Sense of the Scholarly Answers to Your Research Question: Writing the Literature Review
 - Preparing for and Understanding the Literature Review
 - The Fundamentals of the Literature Review
 - Writing the Literature Review
- Effectively Distilling Your Argument: The Thesis, Model, and Hypothesis
 - The Thesis
 - The Model
 - The Hypothesis
 - Applying These Insights
- Revising and Editing Your Work: The Research-Writing-Thinking Spiral
- Making Your Plan and Protecting Yourself from Criticism: The Research Design
 - Research Design: The Courtroom and Medical Science Analogies
 - Writing the Research Design, Focusing on Hypothesis-Driven Research
 - The Research Design: Two Examples
- Evaluating the Argument: The Analysis and Assessment Section
 - Qualitative Analysis
 - Mixed (Qualitative and Quantitative) Analysis
 - Quantitative and Statistical Analysis
- Bringing the Paper Together in Essential Ways: The Conclusion, Introduction, Title, Abstract, and the Utility of a Presentation
 - Considering the Significance and Limitations of Your Findings: The Conclusion
 - Writing a Good Introduction
 - A Last Element in Attracting Readers: Developing an Appealing Title
 - Almost Done: Writing an Abstract and Giving a Presentation
- Are You Done? The Joy (and Continued Responsibilities) of Finalizing Your Draft