Syllabus

Summary

Name of Discipline:	Fundamentals of Research Planning
Teacher(s):	Székedi Levente, PhD
Contact(s):	szekedi.levente@partium.ro
Weekly Hours (course + seminar/lab/practice):	4 (2 course + 2 seminar)
Credits:	10
Language of Instruction:	English
Year of Study (recommended):	At least undergraduate (BA) 2 or 3

Prerequisites

The course can be taken by the students of any specialisation, though most examples are provided from the field of social and economic sciences. The course is primarily aimed at second or third year BA students who have already completed courses in introductory statistics and research methodology. Although this is not a prerequisite, the course assumes basic knowledge in these areas. Students should be familiar with standard office software and have intermediate digital skills. Students should bring their own laptops to most classes.

Course Content

Abstract

This 14-week course guides students through the complex process of scientific research planning, with an emphasis on practical examples and applications. The course will provide students with a comprehensive understanding of scholarly sources and effective bibliographic organisation. Students will learn how to identify, evaluate and use different types of scholarly literature and sources, including books, articles, research papers and various online resources, including online datasets. In addition, the course will cover essential referencing styles (e.g. APA) and their application in academic writing. Plagiarism and techniques for avoiding it are also covered. Students will learn how to adapt the research methodology to the research objectives and scope, how to define the target audience and select an appropriate sampling procedure, how to choose an optimal data collection mode, how to plan and budget the research carefully based on the available resources. Ethical issues are also discussed. Students will learn how to develop and present a research proposal and how to peer review a proposal written by another student.

Topics

Week	Description of topics (The seminars will have classroom discussions and exercises related to the topics.)
Week 1	The importance of research planning ● Overview of the research process ● Main elements of a research plan Define the research problem ● Selecting the topic ● Exploratory or explanatory research? ● Formulating the research questions (and hypotheses, depending on the type of research) ● Elaborate the research objectives
Week 2	Literature review ● Purpose and scope ● Finding the relevant literature ● Summarise existing research ● Create conceptual frame Introduction to scientific sources ● Types of sources: books, book chapters, articles etc. ● What differentiates scientific sources from the non-scientific ones? ● Reliability and credibility of sources ● Understanding the quality assurance processes in the scientific production of texts (peer review etc.) ● Using databases, specialised search engines, and library catalogues
Week 3	Online data sources ● Reliable and unreliable data sources ● The most important free online statistical data sources (Eurostat, World Bank, UN Data etc.) ● Freely available survey data (e.g. GESIS) ● Data formats and possible conversion issues ● Data cleaning
Week 4-5	Bibliographic styles and reference management ● Bibliography and citation ● Major bibliographic styles ● In-text and other citations ● List of references Citation management software ● An overview ● The Zotero reference management software AI tools in literature discovery *Mid-term assignment: The students will create a thematic Zotero bibliography.*
Week 6	Citing and avoiding plagiarism ● Defining plagiarism ● Techniques to avoid plagiarism ● Quoting, paraphrasing, and summarising ● Integrating sources into your writing ● How to use AI ethically?

Week	Description of topics (The seminars will have classroom discussions and exercises related to the topics.)
Week 7	Research design and methodology ● Choosing the proper approach: quantitative, qualitative, mixed ● Selecting the proper research methods in accordance with the objectives ● Choosing the research tools (online or offline survey, interview etc.), methodological and practical considerations
Week 8	Defining the target group and sample ● A short review of the sampling methods ● What sample should I choose? (feasibility, affordability, and other aspects) ● Determining the sample size
Week 9	Data collection choices ● Primary and/or secondary data ● Designing the quantitative data analysis process (software used, statistical tests etc.) ● Designing the qualitative data analysis process (software used, coding system etc.) ● Other topics: data storage, reproducibility of analysis, possibilities of upload into data repositories etc.
Week 10	Timeline, budgeting, and resource management ● Timeline creation (Gantt chart etc.) ● Research project management tips ● Assessing the resource need of the project and managing resources effectively ● Creating the project budget
Week 11	Ethical issues ● General considerations related to the academic ethics ● Informed consent of the participants ● Ensuring confidentiality and privacy ● Handling sensitive data ● Preventing negative impacts of the research
Week 12	Writing the research proposal / plan ● Creating the structure, the usual structure of a research plan ● Style and formulation (clarity, coherence, punctuality etc.) ● Length ● Formatting issues, recommandations ● Adapting the proposal to the audience *Assignment: Write a 3-5 pages research proposal*
Week 13	Peer review, constructive evaluation of the research proposals ● Understanding the peer review process ● Peer review variants ● Guidelines on writing a constructive review *Assignment: Each student will review one other student's research proposal.* *Assignment: The research proposal will be revised based on the review.*
Week 14	The presentation and discussion of the research proposals ● Each student will present her/his proposals in 10-15 minutes (slides + oral presentation) ● Classroom discussions ● Assessment of proposals, closing remarks

Bibliography

This is a provisional list of references, which is going to be updated before the start of the course, based on the availability of the resources.

- APA Style. (n.d.). Retrieved 30 September 2024, from https://apastyle.apa.org
- Crowley, M. (n.d.). LibGuides: Sage Research Methods: Start Your Research. Retrieved 30 September 2024, from https://sagepub.libguides.com/research-methods/startyourresearch
- Denicolo, P., & Becker, L. (2012). Developing Research Proposals. SAGE Publications, Ltd. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526402226
- Denscombe, M. (with Internet Archive). (2012). Research proposals: A practical guide. Maidenhead : Open University Press. http://archive.org/details/researchproposal0000dens
- Style Guide Overview—Purdue OWL®—Purdue University. (n.d.). Retrieved 30 September 2024, from https://owl.purdue.edu/owl/avoiding_plagiarism/guide_overview%20.html
- Wang, G. T. (with Park, K.). (2016). Student research and report writing: From topic selection to the complete paper / Gabe T. Wang and Keumjae Park. Wiley Blackwell.
- Zotero Quick Start Guide. (n.d.). Retrieved 30 September 2024, from https://www.zotero.org/support/quick_start_guide

Learning Outcomes

Students will learn to formulate clear and focused research questions. They will be well versed in the processes of locating, evaluating, and effectively using scholarly sources in their academic research and writing, and will have a comprehensive understanding of bibliographic styles and best practices for organising and citing their sources. Students will become familiar with the use of the Zotero reference management software. Students will be familiar with several free but high quality data sources. Students will be able to select and describe a research methodology appropriate to the research objectives, understand the ethical considerations of research, prepare and present a research proposal. The students will get familiar with the peer review process and be able to write a basic critical review of a research proposal.

Assessment

The final grade consists of the following:
- Thematic Zotero bibliography (20%)
- Peer review (20%)
- Initial and revised research proposal (20%)
- Presentation of the proposal (30%)

Requirements to Pass

A minimum of 50% attendance at lectures and a 75% attendance at seminars is required. In order to pass the course, students must complete and pass with at least 5 the following assignments:
- Thematic Zotero bibliography
- Peer review
- Research proposal
- Presentation of the proposal