

Investigating and Explaining Society



Unit Information Booklet

UNIT CONVENERS

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Unit Description

Contemporary societies are characterised by major transformations affecting the way we live, work, interact with each other. Information is produced at a dizzying speed yet at the same time it has never been easier to spread misinformation. We are more connected with our family and friends because of digital technologies but this also means we live in bubbles and have less idea about the worlds others inhabit. How should we approach to the ways contemporary societies work and the challenges they face including climate change, structural inequality, racism and the global pandemic?

This unit invites students to learn about different ways of investigating and explaining society. It introduces ten key principles of social science research to guide our efforts to better understand and improve contemporary societies. Each week, we will focus on one principle and show its application in practice. These range from formulating a good research question to achieving impact in social science research.

Lectures will be delivered using different multimedia formats. We will use a mix of expert conversations, 'research in action' demonstration cases, and discussions featuring experienced and renowned social science researchers from around the world.

All lectures will be pre-recorded and run for an hour. Tutorials are two hours long, with activities designed for students to apply the concepts, approaches and methods introduced in the lectures.

Learning Outcomes

After successful completion of this unit, students will be able to:

1. Formulate, conceptualise and operationalise research questions,
2. Describe and understand basic research approaches in the social sciences,
3. Evaluate the soundness of various research designs and discern the implications of using different forms of information, sources and methodological approaches in conducting research,
4. Understand professional and ethical norms and key debates regarding the conduct of research,
5. Harness and maximise the format and communicability of research findings.

Unit Overview

WEEK	DATE	LECTURE CONTENT	ASSESSMENT
Week 1	1 August	Welcome to Investigating and Explaining Society!	
Week 2	8 August	Principle 1: Good research begins with good questions	Assessment A starts Assessment C starts
Week 3	15 August	Principle 2: Good research requires good design	Assessment B starts
	19 August		Assessment A due
Week 4	22 August	Principle 3: Good research builds on previous body of work	
Week 5	29 August	Principle 4: Good research reveals patterns of behaviour	
Week 6	5 September	Principle 5: Good research requires a sharp eye	
Week 7	12 September	Principle 6: Good research requires attentive listening	
Week 8	19 September	Lecture free period	
	23 September		Assessment B due
Week 9	26 September	Principle 7: Good research makes the familiar strange	
Week 10	3 October	Principle 8: Good research respects human dignity and safety	
Week 11	10 October	Principle 9: Good research is transparent	
Week 12	17 October	Principle 10: Good research has impact	
Week 13	24 October	Summary and Reflections	
	28 October		Assessment C due



Welcome to Investigating and Explaining Society!

Lecture Content

Why should we investigate and explain society? How can we go about it? On this first day of this unit, we will discuss these questions, and provide an overview of 'Ten Key Principles of Good Research' we will be examining throughout the semester. We will also introduce the teaching team, share their stories and what drives them to conduct social science research.

Lecturer

Selen Ercan



Principle 1

Good research begins with good questions

Lecture Content

What is a research question, how is it different from the questions we ask in our daily conversations? How do we make sure that we formulate a good research question? This lecture will focus on different types of research questions, consider the qualities of a good research question and outline the necessary steps to develop it.

Lecturer

Selen Ercan

Short Video

Formulating research question

Ariadne Vromen

Required Reading

Wayne, C. Booth, Colomb, Gregory G. and Williams, Joseph M. (2008) "From Topics to Questions". Chapter 3 in The Craft of Research. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press (3rd edition), pp. 35-49.



Principle 2

Good research requires good design

Lecture Content

How do we move from a good research question to a feasible research design? Planning is vital in any kind of social research and it requires some decisions to be made. The research consists of several components or phases. For good research, it is key that these components are well aligned. This week we will focus on the type of decisions we need to make when designing research projects and outline the major components of good research design.

Lecturer

Hans Asenbaum

Short Video

Demonstration case: The power of interpretivist research

Carolyn Hendriks

Required Reading

Schwartz-Shea, Peregrine and Yanow, Dvora (2012) Wherefore Research Designs? (Chapter 1) in Interpretive Research Design. Concepts and Processes. London: Routledge, pp. 15-23.



Principle 3

Good research builds on previous body of work

Lecture Content

What is the purpose of reviewing literature? Good research stands on the shoulders of giants. We advance knowledge by building on an existing body of literature, locating our work in research traditions, and engaging in on-going debates. This lecture will focus on the importance of literature reviews in the research process and outline different ways of undertaking literature reviews. We will also look at how literature reviews can be used as a research method in their own right.

Lecturer

Hans Asenbaum

Short Video

Research Story: Literature Review

Nicole Curato

Required Reading

Durant, Ben (2014) "Doing quicker literature reviews. Four ways to better exploit digital era capabilities", LSE Blog, December 8.



Principle 4

Good research reveals patterns of behaviour

Lecture Content

What counts as 'data' and what should we do with the data gathered for research? This week we will start exploring a range of qualitative and quantitative research methods social scientists use to reveal patterns of behaviour. We will cover the methods such as survey research, interviews and document analysis and reflect on their merits and limits. We will also discuss questions around generalizability of the patterns of behaviour identified through different methods.

Lecturer

Selen Ercan

Short Video

Demonstration case: Spotting patterns in qualitative research

Hendrik Wagenaar

Required Reading

Braun, Virginia and Victoria Clarke (2006) "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology", *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3(2):77-101.



Principle 5

Good research requires a sharp eye

Lecture Content

It is not only text and numbers that social scientists are interested in gathering and analysing. How about the visuals? This week we will focus on the importance of having 'a sharp eye' for conducting good research and consider visual methods scholars use to investigate and explain society. These include methods such as photo elicitation, critical visual analysis, and dramaturgy that can be used to make sense of the images, artefacts or nonverbal performances. We will discuss what the visuals can reveal about the social and political topics under investigation.

Lecturer

Selen Ercan

Short Video

Demonstration Case: Photo Elicitation

Pia Rowe

Required Reading

Bleiker, Roland (2018) 'Mapping Visual Global Politics'. In: Bleiker, Roland (ed.) Visual Global Politics. Oxon: Routledge, pp. 1-30



Principle 6

Good research needs attentive listening

Lecture Content

How can social scientists effectively listen while conducting research? How can we analyse not only what people say but also their silences, hesitations, and glaring omissions? This week, we are going to learn about different listening techniques. Qualitative interviews, surveys, and focus groups all require different listening skills and generate different kinds of data. Moreover, we are going to discuss the grounded theory method, which allows researchers to build theory by talking to people, listening to the environment and observing human (inter)action.

Lecturer

Hans Asenbaum

Short Video

Demonstration case: Listening to the environment

John Dryzek

Required Reading

Bennett, Katy, Cochrane, Allan, Mohan, Giles, and Neal, Sarah. (2015). "Listening", *Emotion, Space and Society* 17: 7-14.



Principle 7

Good research makes the familiar strange

Lecture Content

“Familiarity is the staunchest enemy of inquisitiveness”, argues sociologist Zygmunt Bauman. In this week’s lecture, we will learn how to challenge our taken for granted assumptions and make the familiar strange. But what exactly does this mean? This week’s lecture discusses how ‘making the familiar strange’ is both a research ethos and a methodological practice.

Lecturer

Nicole Curato

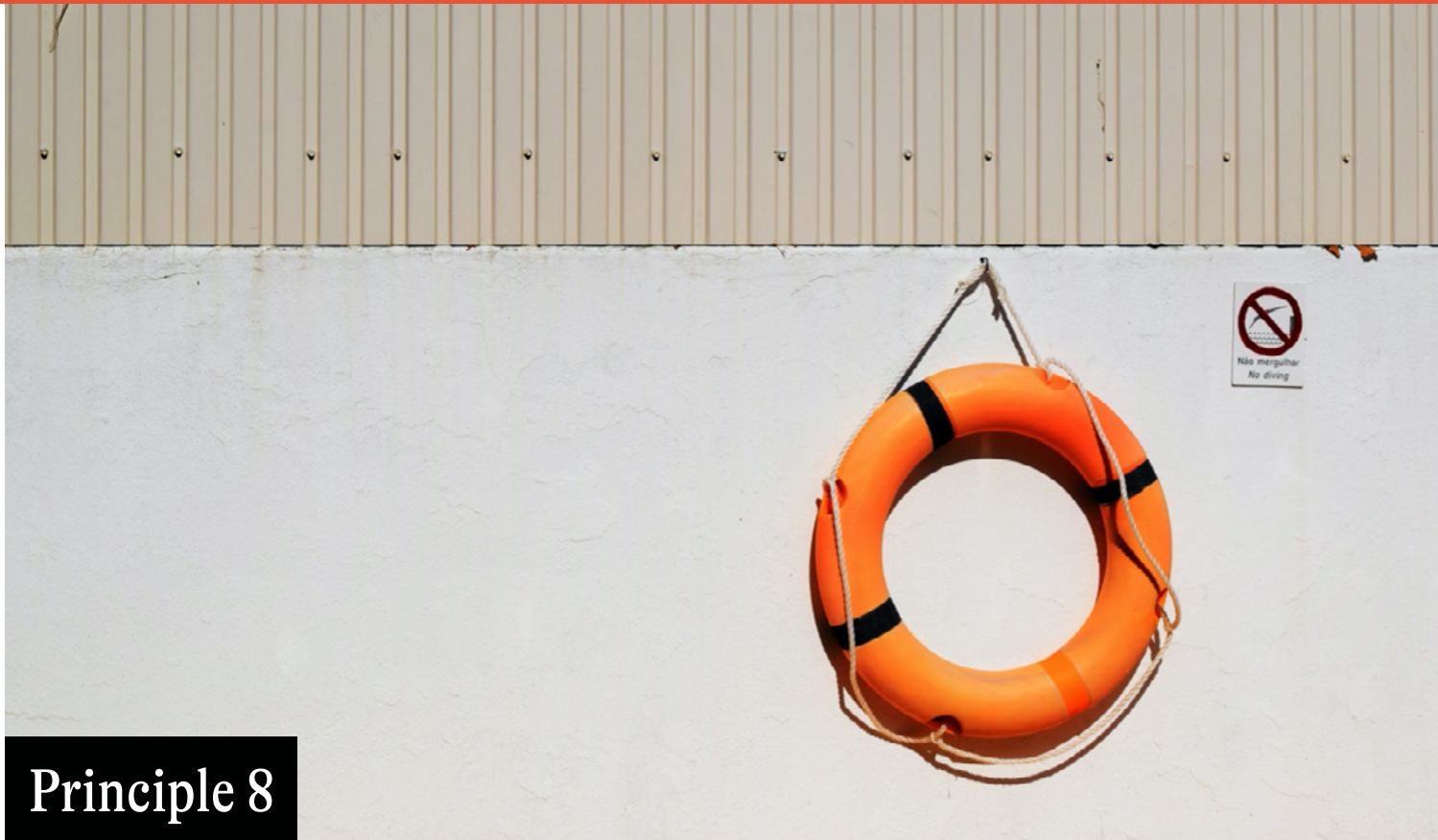
Short Video

Demonstration case: Ethnography for the internet

Annisa Beta

Required Reading

Hochschild, Arlie Russell (2016) “The American Right: Its Deep Story”, Global Dialogue 6(3)



Principle 8

Good research respects human dignity and safety

Lecture Content

What are the ethical standards in social science research? Researchers have various ethical obligations. No study is worth risking the safety and dignity of researchers and their participants. The practice of research, however, is often messy. Inevitably, social scientists will encounter moral dilemmas and ethical issues, which have no easy answers. In this session, we will discuss the ethics and politics of social research and directly learn from researchers' experiences in managing these dilemmas.

Lecturer

Nicole Curato

Short Video

Demonstration case: Researching domestic and family violence

Hayley Boxall

Required Reading

Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Sabelo (2017) 'Decolonising research methodology must include undoing its dirty history,' *The Conversation*. September 27.



Principle 9

Good research is transparent

Lecture Content

Research transparency is central to ethical research practice. What does it mean to make research processes and findings transparent? How can we make sure that research is carried out openly and transparently? This week we will discuss the importance of carrying out transparent research for various stakeholders including the participants of research projects. We will discuss how the transparency can enhance the credibility of research in social science.

Lecturer

Selen Ercan

Required Reading

Johnson, Genevieve Fuji. 2021. 'Research Transparency: Less About Rigor and More About Responsibility'. *Qualitative and Multi-Method Research* 19(1): 14–18.



Principle 10

Good research has impact

Lecture Content

What counts as impact in research? Should researchers even strive to make a political impact? In the final principle discussed this semester, we examine how social science research ‘can make a difference’ by examining different ways in which research can reshape our societies. We revisit classic debates about objective and value-free research as well as innovative ways in which social scientists disseminate their research findings today.

Lecturer

Hans Asenbaum

Short Video

Demonstration case: Activist research

Kehinde Andrews

Required Reading

Mackay, Fiona (2017) “Jane Mansbridge - A Quietly Dangerous Woman”, Dangerous Women Project. 8 March.



Summary and Reflections

Lecture Content

In the final lecture, we will recap the 10 principles of good social science research and reflect on what we have learnt. When your research project asks good questions, is well designed, builds on previous body of work, reveals patterns of behaviour, listens attentively, has a sharp eye, makes the familiar strange, respects human dignity and safety, is transparent and impactful, we guarantee you to be off to a great start.

Lecturer

Hans Asenbaum

Required Reading

Johnson, Genevieve Fuji. 2021. 'Research Transparency: Less About Rigor and More About Responsibility'. *Qualitative and Multi-Method Research* 19(1): 14–18.

Assessments

ASSESSMENT OVERVIEW

	Description	Value	Due Date	Learning Outcomes
A	Develop a research question 350-500 words	20%	19 Aug (23:59)	1, 2, 5
B	Design a research project 12-15 slides	40%	23 Sept 2021 (23:59)	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
C	Review a research paper 1,800- 2,000 words	40%	28 Oct 2021 (23:59)	1, 2, 3, 4, 5

ASSIGNMENT A

Develop a Research Question

Value	20%
Format requirements	Minimum of 350 words, maximum of 500 words. 12-pt font, single spaced
Due date	19 August 2022 (23:59)

Task	Research questions are key to conducting good research. The research question orients the social scientist during the entire research process and hence needs to be well crafted. This assignment requires you to watch a short video on one of the three topics we provide, summarise the content of that video, and develop a research question on the topic.
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See the Canvas site for the sample assignment and further information.

ASSIGNMENT B

Design a Research Project

Value	40%
Format requirements	12-15 PowerPoint slides
Due date	23 Sept 2022 (23:59)

Task	<p>This assignment builds on Assignment A. Now that you have crafted a research question based on the video you watched, we challenge you to further develop that research question into a research design. Instead of writing a paper, we want you to create a PowerPoint presentation that succinctly captures how your research question can be answered.</p> <p>See the Canvas site for further information.</p>
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ASSIGNMENT C

Review a research paper

Value	40%
Format requirements	Minimum of 1,800 words, maximum of 2,000 words. 12-pt font, single spaced
Due date	28 October 2022 (23:59)

Task	<p>Write a review paper (1,800-2,000 words) evaluating a research article based on the 10 Principles of Good Research we covered throughout the semester.</p> <p>In your review paper, you should explain the extent to which this research article conforms to these principles, emphasising their strengths, weaknesses, and limitations, and provide suggestions on how the research presented in this article can be improved.</p> <p>See the Canvas site for further information.</p>
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About Unit Convenors



Hans Asenbaum is a political scientist and political theorist focusing on radical democratic politics, identity, and inclusion. He employs qualitative research methods to make sense of political participation, social movements, feminist and queer politics, and democratic innovations. He is particularly interested in empirical methods for developing political theory in an open and participatory manner. He tweets [@Hans_Asenbaum](#).



Selen A. Ercan is a political scientist with extensive experience in designing and undertaking research projects in both Australia and overseas drawing particularly on interpretive research methods. She has published widely in the areas of democracy and multiculturalism and won awards for best publications. Her recent work focuses on the crisis of democracy and the potential of democratic innovations in addressing this crisis. She tweets [@selenAercan](#).

10 Principles of *Good Research*

PRINCIPLE 1

Good research begins
with *good questions*

PRINCIPLE 6

Good research requires
attentive listening

PRINCIPLE 2

Good research
requires *good design*

PRINCIPLE 7

Good research makes
the familiar *strange*

PRINCIPLE 3

Good research builds on
previous body of work

PRINCIPLE 8

Good research respects
human dignity and safety

PRINCIPLE 4

Good research reveals
patterns of behaviour

PRINCIPLE 9

Good research
is *transparent*

PRINCIPLE 5

Good research
requires *a sharp eye*

PRINCIPLE 10

Good research
has *impact*