

Theory Construction

Academic Year: (2023 / 2024)

Review date: 22-03-2022

Department assigned to the subject: Social Sciences Department

Coordinating teacher: SANDELL , FRANK RICKARD

Type: Compulsory ECTS Credits : 6.0

Year : 4 Semester :

REQUIREMENTS (SUBJECTS THAT ARE ASSUMED TO BE KNOWN)

Courses in statistics, and Sociological Research Methods (both qualitative and quantitative)

OBJECTIVES

General:

1. Ability to work in groups.
2. Ability to communicate ideas in oral and written form.
3. Capacity to organize and plan research and inquiry both individually and/or in groups.
4. Capacity to organize and analyse complex information.
5. Understand existing theory and to understand the main views in academic debates and identifying the relevant pieces of empirical evidence used to sustain positions.

Specific:

Ability to:

1. Formulate a research problems/question.
2. Develop denominations, concepts, typologies, etc., to help analysing a specific research topic.
3. "Theorize": when having to formulate a research question, be able to link it to the construction of abduction-oriented theory.
4. Extract hypotheses from a theory.
5. Find data and define measures that address a specific research problem.
6. Identify, organize, and analyse information in a critical and systematic way.
7. Identify methods for analysing data and measurement.
8. Knowledge of quantitative and qualitative techniques and ability to choose which is most adequate to apply in different fields of social sciences.
9. Hypothesis testing.
10. Explore the relationship between theory, methods, and the broader goals of research.

DESCRIPTION OF CONTENTS: PROGRAMME

The main goal is to prepare the students, and provide them with basic skills, to undertake a research in the field of social sciences.

The course will try to exercise in an experimental way the theorizing capacity of the students, developing their sociological imagination, linked to the importance that enquiry and research have for the elaboration of sociological theory.

The different aspects of the research process will be addressed:

1. Preliminary theorizing.
2. Questions.
3. Theories.
4. Hypotheses.
5. Research design and hypothesis-testing.
6. Hypothesis-testing.
7. Implications.

Particular emphasis is focused on the art of theorizing, and the technique of theory construction with an aim to explain social and societal phenomena. The course will provide the students a first contact with how to use theory data and methods in a coherent way to enable a systematic study of a social or societal phenomenon, based on their ability to observe, conjecture and explain phenomena in an original way. The course will show how questions through theorising can be turned into significant theory. Theories motivate hypotheses which in turn can be contrasted by means of collection of empirical evidence and data. We will assess the feedbacks between empirical evidence and theories.

We aim to show how new or better evidence shape theories, and how theories also discipline the enquiry into the social world by affecting measurement instruments, or by focusing the attention on specific types of evidence. We will discuss what measurement means, what guides measurement, and the problems of various sorts of evidence and the alternative research designs involved (experimental, comparative historical, statistical) and their limits. This means that we will also take in consideration social research that does not use statistical analysis but that has contributed and contributes much to theoretical creation and its subsequent analysis. In short, we will work with all kinds of discourses, taking in consideration the way in which empirical evidence becomes the information that provides the basis for the theoretical creator to develop a theory and a series of hypotheses. These, through inference, could become the basis for the development of policies and strategies at all levels of society.

LEARNING ACTIVITIES AND METHODOLOGY

The course is divided into theoretical and practical sessions. The theory sessions involve a mix of master class and discussion on the proposed readings before each theory session.

In theory class, students can take notes of one of the various readings proposed for each session and should be prepared to participate in the debate on it. These notes should not be delivered but they are advisable in order to make an active and optimal participation in the debate.

The practical classes consist in different theoretical-practical analysis exercises that will be presented and analyzed in the session itself, as well as several preliminary theorizing practices to exercise the art of theorizing and research.

Of these theoretical-practical analysis exercises, everyone must submit practice number one and between sessions two and five all students must submit one of the practices as a compulsory form.

On the other hand, each student will carry out two small tasks of empirical research and preliminary theorizing, among three to choose from. These exercises have to be documented and will be evaluated. Each exercise covers one practical session.

For these preliminary theorizing practices, we will begin by finding a topic among all the possible ones within a choice framework, providing some data about it. We will continue to think of a denomination, some concepts, typologies, metaphors, and other theorizing tools that help to analyze the chosen phenomenon. The process ends with the explanation of it through a preliminary theory.

The whole process must be documented, what you have thought and how you got there, as well as systematize the extracted theory in a brief review. All deliveries must be made in digital format.

Students have to complete four tasks to get their grade.

- 1) Participate in the class discussion, sharing the ideas of chosen reading.
- 2) Carry out two theoretical-practical exercises (one in the first practical session and one to choose between practical sessions two and five).
- 3) Carry out the two assessable preliminary theorizing exercises.
- 4) Write a small research paper (in groups of three to five people).
- 5) Final exam on the readings of the theoretical classes.

The research paper consists of carrying out a new free theorizing exercise, or converting one of the two preliminary theorizing exercises (the one that most attracts us from any of the group members) into a short research report, from 3.000 to 5.000 words.

Regarding the methodology to be used, it will be of a participatory nature, encouraging the constant intervention of the students, as well as presentations of their work to improve their public speech.

The tutoring schedule will be determined and communicated to the students at the beginning of the course.

ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

1. Class participation mandatory.
2. Final exam: 50% of the grade.
3. The continuous assessment is made up of: two theoretical-practical exercises (5% each), two preliminary theorizing exercises (12,5% each) and team research paper (15%). In total it will represent the remaining 50% of the qualification.

% end-of-term-examination:	50
% of continuous assessment (assignments, laboratory, practicals...):	50

BASIC BIBLIOGRAPHY

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ADDITIONAL BIBLIOGRAPHY

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