



LEUPHANA
UNIVERSITÄT LÜNEBURG

Studium Individuale

Sample Syllabus* : Collaborative Research Project

Semester:

Instructor:

Office:

Class Meetings:

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* This sample syllabus originally by Dr. Sara Tomczuk was developed for a course in the Studium Individuale at Leuphana University of Lüneburg. It is included as an example of research-based learning in the CREATES Toolkit for Co-creative Learning. For more educational tools, visit <http://europe-creates.eu>

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General Information

Course Description

In this core course of the Studium Individuale, students will work in teams to execute a collaborative research project addressing a question of social significance during the semester. The instructor will assist students, working in teams, to select a suitable topic and in the organization of the research process, but overall the process is led and carried out by the students. The teams will work closely with the instructor and/or other experienced researchers, who will help guide and support the research.

The course learning objectives (below) involve both the process of research and the collaborative experience of working in a group to plan and produce a collective output. The goal of the project is to serve the participants' different academic interests and yet bring together their varying knowledge and skills in a complementary and productive way. While the module does not train students in any particular methods, the instructor or other experienced researchers will advise students on the appropriate and rigorous application of their chosen methods.

Research is here understood as the process of responding to a problem of wider relevance by contributing original knowledge to the world. By gaining practical group research experience, students develop many skills – from time management and problem solving, to productive teamwork and the ability to present and justify achievements to a wider audience. With the research project, students take an important step towards making their study experience within the framework of the Studium Individuale more broadly relevant outside the curricular context.

Learning Objectives

Students will experience and participate in each step of the process of designing and executing an original group social research project –from choosing a topic to writing a complete report. More specifically:

1. Students will develop a specific research question and eventually a corresponding strong thesis statement out of a broader topic of interest.
2. Students will determine and articulate gaps in existing research through surveying the literature(s) relevant to their topic.
3. Students will compare the strengths and weaknesses of various methods for answering their particular research question.
4. Students will select, collect, organize, and analyze original data.
5. Students will summarize findings and draw generalizations from their data analysis.
6. Students will collaborate with each other and their instructor (and/or advisor) to efficiently and realistically manage their time and tasks.
7. Students will reflect on their own experience of the research process.

Class Meetings

We will meet every second Tuesday throughout the semester. Our meetings will NOT be formal lectures and will NOT be an overview of particular research methods, but will require everyone to participate in the discussion of our specific collaborative research project(s) and its progress. A collaborative assignment is due the Wednesday night BEFORE each of our meetings.

In addition to these five meetings, you should also plan to meet as a group every week and should meet with your advisor at least once every month. Students must also plan on attending one session and at least one group consultation run by our student assistant on communication and structure in group work.

1st Meeting 7. April

What is research?

Introductions

Structure of the course

Organization of tasks and information

Expectations and Assessment

Research, Questions, and Interdisciplinary and Multi-Method Approaches

Special session I: Basics of Communication in Group Work Tuesday 14. April,
8:00-10:00

2nd meeting 21. April

What makes your topic interesting (to you and to others)?

Discussion of Assignment 0: Your Topic [due midnight, Wednesday, 15. April]
Wading into the literature
Considering appropriate, complementary methods

Special session II: Basics of Structure and Organization in Group Work

Tuesday, 28. April, 8:00-10:00

3rd meeting 5. May

How can we formulate a question?

Discussion of Assignment 1: Your Question [due midnight, Wednesday, 29. April]
Crafting a literature review
Selecting a method

4th meeting 19. May

How can we look for answers to our questions?

Discussion of Assignment 2: Your Method [due midnight, Wednesday, 13. May]
Coding and analyzing data

5th meeting 2. June

How do we interpret what we found?

Discussion of Assignment 3: Analysis [due midnight, Wednesday, 27. May]
Including and excluding data, other methodological choices
Summarizing and generalizing from data
Writing it up

6th meeting 16. June

How do we share what we learned?

Discussion of Assignment 4: Writing [due midnight, Wednesday, 10. June]
Workshopping a thesis
Revising a draft
Formatting a report

7th meeting 30. June

How do we wrap up a project?

Communicating limits
Admitting what we still don't know

Final Marks

You will be assessed on the research process as well as on the final report. Most of your final mark will be based on the group assignments, though the self-reflections will be marked individually.

- I. 50% **final report** (group earns the same mark)

- II. 35% **short assignments** (25% scored as a group, 10% scored individually)
- III. 15% **alternative report** (group earns the same mark)

Detailed information about marking:

I. On the [final report](#) (50% of final mark), everyone will earn the same grade based on the following criteria:

- Argument and structure (35%)
 - The report is well organized and presents a logical and convincing argument to answer a clearly defined research question.
- Substance (50%)
 - The report presents a thorough and accurate academic literature review, appropriate summaries of data, both reflecting the implementation of rigorous and high-quality research methods.
- Form (15%)
 - The language of the report is clear and the grammar is correct. Presentation and citation style are professional and consistent.

For more information about expectations within the above criteria, please consult the Studium Individuale Grading Scheme and/or discuss with your instructor/advisor.

II. The **short assignments** (35% of final mark) includes both a portfolio of group assignments and a separate portfolio of reflection diary entries submitted with the final report.

1. The [group short assignments portfolio](#) (25% of final mark) will be marked for demonstrating revisions to group assignment prompts (1-4) based on your advisor's feedback and in-class discussions.

2. [Self-reflections research diary](#): (10% of final mark) A collection of self-reflections on one's participation in the research process in response to specific prompts will be completed during class meetings and once individually near the end of the research process will be marked with attention to the demonstrated thoughtfulness about and active participation in the research process. The submission of the entire collection of self-reflections along with the final report will be scored individually (10% of the final mark). The diaries will NOT be scored for grammar, tone, or style.

III. The **alternative report** requirement (15% of final mark) is a report of your main findings for a lay audience in a short blog post, interactive webpage, short video, or other media form and is due with the final report. You will be scored as a group on:

- a. clarity and relevance of the message,
- b. quality of the substance and evidence reported and
- c. originality and appropriateness of the form of the alternative report.

See further instructions below.

Work Load

The following is a rough breakdown of how the 150 hours of working for this course should be spent for each individual.

Type of Work	Breakdown	Number of hours
Contact Hours		
Class sessions	7 x 2 hours	14
Special sessions	2 x 2 hours	4
Advisor consultations	5 x 1 hour	5
Group communication consultation	1 x 1 hour	1
Group meetings	18 x 1 hour	18
		Total: 42 hours
Preparation		
Before each class meeting (after the first one)	6 x 8 hours	48
		Total: 48 hours
Expectations		
Final Report	1 x 30 hours	Total: 30 hours
Group Assignments	4 x 4 hours	Total: 16 hours
Portfolio		
Self-Reflections Diary	2 hours	Total: 2 hours
Alternative report	1 x 10 hours	Total: 10 hours
Total for course: 148 hours		

Data, Consent and Confidentiality

Your team may choose to collect data from or about human subjects (interviews, ethnographic observations, surveys, etc.). When collecting personal information, you may not coerce or confuse anyone into participating in your study without their consent. This means that you clearly articulate that you are a student conducting research for a course and that their participation is entirely voluntary. Different kinds of studies may require more stringent or formal practices around consent. Be sure to consult with your instructor or advisor about consent BEFORE you begin collecting data.

Additionally, all data should be kept confidential, and if possible, anonymous. No identifying information about your subjects should be posted online or written into assignments (change all subjects' names, for example). Do not store data on shared

drives unless all identifying information has been removed. If you have further questions about confidentiality, please ask your instructor, advisor or the Methods Center.

[Learning Environment, Accommodations and Unforeseen Circumstances](#)

As this is a collaborative group project, we will be working closely with one another. I seek to create an open, productive learning environment which can accommodate for different students' needs and learning styles. I also understand that unforeseen circumstances can arise during the course of the semester. Please feel free to express your needs either to the group and/or to me individually in office hours.

[Resources](#)

As I am not an expert in many research methodologies, you will likely need to seek outside consultation during the research process, perhaps especially during the phases of data collection and analysis. Please feel free to discuss the use of the following resources (or others) with me and your group.

Recommended Text:

Students are encouraged to use the chapters from Alan Bryman's (2016) *Social Research Methods*.

[Methodology Center](#)

The center on campus offers consultations, evaluations, and [workshops/lectures](#) for a variety of methodologies. I recommend making appointments early and often.

[Writing Center](#)

While I am available to work closely with you on writing, I also recommend using the writing center as a resource.

Group Assignments Prompts

All of your assignments should be written in simple, jargon-free language that a smart sixteen-year-old student could understand. If you must use a specialized term, clearly define it. Include the questions/prompts in the assignment. Please upload each assignment in a text file (.doc, .docx, .txt, for examples) not as a PDF.

Assignments 1- 4 will be submitted as a portfolio that demonstrates the research process along with your final report. As each assignment builds on the one before it, the portfolio will document the revision of the answers to each prompt and will account for 25% of the [final mark](#).

Discussion Lead

The group assignments will serve as the basis for our discussions in our class sessions. One or two students from each group will be the discussion 'lead' for each session (aside from the very first one).

The 'lead' should prepare by becoming very familiar with the group assignment under discussion that week. They should expect to:

- a. speak informally about the stage of the project (2-3 minutes)
- b. bring up a few key successes, issues, problems, and/or questions. Do not hesitate to discuss where the group may be struggling, our sessions are a great time to work out problems.
- c. And feel free to bring visuals or other materials to aid in the group discussion.

Important: Though one (or two) people from the group will be the designated 'lead(s)', everyone should participate in the discussion each week and be prepared to speak to their individual contributions to the research thus far.

ASSIGNMENT 0: Your Topic [not included in the portfolio]

i. **Broad topic.**

Identify your item, trend, or event of interest This should be a social change/event/phenomenon that you want to *explain* and not just describe.
Maximum 25 words

ii. **Get specific.**

What are the boundaries of your topic of interest? These may be geographical, temporal, or some other category. Articulate the level on which you will analyze the topic. In other words, what is your unit of analysis (individuals, groups, entire societies)? Maximum 50 words

iii. **Why is this topic interesting?**

What about this topic is interesting, unfamiliar, puzzling, upsetting, or exciting?
Maximum 50 words

iv. Identify at least two different ways of understanding the topic/problem.

This might be the approaches of two different disciplines or fields that address the topic, two theories that attempt to explain it, and/or commonly held understandings of/assumptions about the topic. Maximum 50 words for each way.

v. Interdisciplinary or multi-method approach.

How may each of the different disciplines, approaches, or methods discussed in iv. offer competing and/or complementary explanations of the topic/problem.
Maximum 100 words

vi. Schedule of discussion leads.

Identify who will lead the discussions for each of the coming class sessions.

ASSIGNMENT 1: Your Question

STEP 1: Rewrite your answers to the questions above (Assignment 0) based on feedback

STEP 2: Add the following questions:

1) Research Question.

Write your research question using simple language. Maximum 25 words

2) So what?

Explain which potential audiences (academic or otherwise) should care about this and why. Maximum 50 words

3) Derivative questions.

List up to three subsidiary questions that emerge from the general question. In order of importance. Maximum 25 words (each question)

4) Identify the gap in the literature.

How has the literature addressed similar questions? What did they find? Why is previous research incapable of answering this question? [Make this an ongoing literature review] Maximum 300 words

5) What argument do you anticipate making in regards to the question?

Explain two or three possible answers to your questions. If you have a working theory about what you will find, state it here. Maximum 100 words

ASSIGNMENT 2: Your Method

STEP 1: Rewrite your answers to the questions 1-5 (Assignment 1) based on feedback

STEP 2: Add the following questions:

6) What information would allow you to answer your questions?

Be specific here about what kind of information or data you would need, and how that information precisely answers your research question. (For example, if you want to know if students practice more sustainable behaviors after beginning university study, you will need to know about their behaviors *before and after* they began studying.) Maximum 100 words

7) How will you gather this information?

Here you should explain all of the information you plan to gather, taking care to show how this information will *provide answers to your research questions*. Be as specific and detailed as possible about your plans at this stage. (For example, if you are doing interviews, explain who you will sample, how you will contact them, what kinds of questions you will ask, etc. If you are analyzing census data, what is your plan to access the data, which variables will you select to download, etc.?) Maximum 500 words.

8) How will you analyze this information?

In addition to explaining your plans for analysis, be specific about *how these analyses will answer your research question*. Continue to use simple language and avoid jargon. Maximum 500 words

9) What are you worried about?

Chances are some part of this process is overwhelming or perplexing you to the point that it is slowing down your progress. Write down your concerns here so we can help address and/or troubleshoot them. Maximum 100 words.

ASSIGNMENT 3: Analysis

STEP 1: Rewrite your answers to questions 1-9 above (Assignments 1 and 2) based on feedback

STEP 2:

Detail your process of analysis, include justifications for how you selected, organized, compared, or excluded information from your research. Be very specific, include tables or graphs, or examples when relevant. Eventually, this may be the basis for a 'methods' section of your report. (2-3 double-spaced pages)

ASSIGNMENT 4: Writing

STEP 1: Rewrite your answers to the questions 1-9 (NOT Assignment 3) based on feedback

STEP 2:

Write a short (3-4 double-spaced pages or so) overview of major themes and findings from your research so far [You may be using the evolving insights document template]. Include a working thesis statement that is a *specific answer to your research question(s)*.

Final Report Instructions

(50% of [final mark](#))

Submit a professional, complete report of your group's research this semester. There is no maximum or minimum page requirement, but generally something between 20-25 pages (double-spaced, 12 pt font) or 5000-7000 words will be appropriate. Your report could be structured somewhat like this:

- Introduction [1.5-3 pages]
- Case background (if necessary) [0.5-1 page]
- Literature review [3-4 pages]
- Methods [1-3 pages]
- Findings [4-5 pages]
- Discussion [2-3 pages]
- Conclusion [1-2 pages]

Based on the kind of study you are doing, you may exclude some of the above sections and/or include others. The above page estimates do not include tables or graphs, the (necessary) bibliography, appendices with survey or interview instruments (or other methodological tools), title, abstract or contents pages, etc.

Short Assignments Instructions

Group Assignments Portfolio (25% of [final mark](#))

Submit a portfolio made up of assignments 1, 2, 3 and 'step 1' of assignment 4. As they are meant to document the real research process, please do not edit them.

Thus, the portfolio is basically ready at the time of our last session meeting. You may want to write a short 1-2 paragraph introduction to the portfolio pointing to any major changes that occurred over the research process or since our last session meeting.

Group Assignments Portfolio Rubric		
Relevance (35%)	Does each group assignment in the portfolio represent an effort to fully answer the questions based on the stage of the research at the time it was written?	
Revisions (50%)	Does each assignment reflect thoughtful revisions based on feedback from the advisor and on the progress of the research?	
Form (15%)	Are the group assignments written in clear, simple language? Are specialized terms defined?	Does the portfolio contain all group short assignments and the advisor's feedback? Were all instructions followed?

Self-Reflections Diary (10% of [final mark](#))

One of our course objectives is to allow students to reflect productively on the research process. Metacognitive (thinking about thinking) self-reflection can lead to our being more creative, self-directed, and productively communicative. With this in mind, we will incorporate several self-reflective exercises into our session meetings and will respond to one prompt near the end of the research process asking you to reflect on the experience as a whole.

These will give you space to think through what is going well with the research, but more often will be about specific issues that have arisen. You will receive feedback on the self-reflections completed in our session meetings.

The diary will be submitted with the final report and will be made up of your 3-4 self-reflections entries from our sessions (including instructor comments) and one additional entry to a specific prompt distributed by the instructor after our last session meeting.

Self-Reflections Diary Rubric	
Relevance (30%)	Are the self-reflection responses relevant to the given prompts and were they submitted in a timely manner throughout the semester?
Content (50%)	To what extent do the responses show an attempt at deep thinking about 'thinking', 'learning' and 'researching'?
Form (20%)	Are all the responses included in the diary?

Alternative Report

Alternative Report (15% of final mark)

Formal research reports are not the only way that research findings are disseminated. For many audiences, reports are much less accessible than alternative forms of presenting new information. Along with the final report, your group will submit, an alternative report of your findings for a lay audience. Your group may choose the form, including, but not limited to:

- a. a short (300-500 words) blog entry including photographs, figures, or other visuals,
- b. a short (3-5 minute) informative video, or
- c. an interactive webpage

Alternative Report Rubric		
Structure and Message (35%)	To what extent is the message of the alternative report clear to a lay audience?	How well are the findings situated as relevant or important?
Content (50%)	To what extent does the alternative report utilize quality data and information from the research?	
Form and delivery (15%)	To what extent is the alternative report professional and/or polished? Was proper attention paid to citations, language, and overall impression?	

Collaborative Research Group Templates

Feel free (but not obligated!) to use these templates as living group documents to help organize your literature, research, and tasks. I also recommend that you use a dropbox or a shared drive to collaborate on Assignments 1-4, simply duplicating and then editing the document as you update your answers for assignments 1-3.

Important: Remember to never store identifying information collected from human subjects on shared drives.

Annotated Bibliography

[As this grows, you may choose to organize this list alphabetically, by discipline, by theoretical approach, or any other way the group finds most useful.]

APA citation:

Thesis/Question/Argument:

Method(s):

Key Findings:

Critiques, gaps, remaining questions and/or calls for further research:

Relevance to current project:

APA citation:

Thesis/Question/Argument:

Method(s):

Key Findings:

Critiques, gaps, remaining questions and/or calls for further research:

Relevance to current project:

Evolving Analysis

[Use this document to organize tasks and to keep track of your ideas and argument as you develop them]

Action items

- Group member 1
 - Action item A
 - Action item B
- Group member 2
 - Action item C
 - Action item D
- Group member...
- Unassigned or group tasks

Top 5 insights (in order of importance)

1. Insight 1
 - a. Subpoint
 - i. Supporting quote, statistic, or summary of evidence.

Less formulated thoughts

- Less formulated thought A
- Less formulated thought B

Problems, concerns, unanswered questions

- Unanswered question A
- Unanswered question B
- Possible alternative explanation A
- Possible alternative explanation B