

## SYLLABUS

### Research Seminar for Dissertation Project

Spring semester, 2025-2026 academic year

#### 1. Information regarding the programme

1.1 Higher education institution	Babeş-Bolyai University
1.2 Faculty	Political Science, Public Administration and Communication Studies
1.3 Department	Political Science
1.4 Field of study	International Development
1.5 Study cycle	Master of Arts
1.6 Study programme / Qualification	

#### 2. Information regarding the discipline

2.1 Name of the discipline (en)	<b>Research Seminar for Dissertation Project</b>						
(ro)	Seminar de cercetare pentru scrierea disertației						
2.2 Course coordinator	N/A						
2.3 Seminar coordinator	Dr. Borbála KOVÁCS <a href="mailto:borbala.kovacs@ubbcluj.ro">borbala.kovacs@ubbcluj.ro</a>						
2.4. Year of study	2	2.5 Semester	4	2.6. Type of evaluation	VP	2.7 Type of discipline	DC
2.8 Code of the discipline	<b>UME1403</b>						

#### 3. Total estimated time (hours/semester of didactic activities)

3.1 Hours per week	2	Of which: 3.2 course	0	3.3 seminar/lab	2
3.4 Total hours in the curriculum	24	Of which: 3.5 course	0	3.6 seminar/lab	24
Time allotment:					15 hours
Learning using manual, course support, bibliography, course notes					2x12
Additional documentation (in libraries, on electronic platforms, field documentation)					2x12
Preparation for seminars/labs, homework, papers, portfolios and essays					1x12
Tutorship					
Evaluations					
Other activities: .....					
3.7 Total individual study hours					15
3.8 Total hours per semester					41
3.9 Number of ECTS credits					7

#### 4. Prerequisites (if necessary)

4.1. curriculum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• none</li> </ul>
4.2. competencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• advanced academic writing skills and the appropriate use of sources, including scholarly sources, in writing up one's own research report.</li> </ul>

## 5. Conditions (if necessary)

5.1. for the course	N/A
5.2. for the seminar /lab activities	<p>Attendance is mandatory for at least 75% of classes (9 out of 12). The seminar component of the course can only be improved only upon retaking the entire course during the following academic year.</p> <p>If the student's activity during seminars does not meet the minimal requirements to pass the course, the student has to retake the course during the following academic year.</p> <p>Academic fraud is defined in line with the rules of the Faculty of Political, Administrative and Communication Sciences, Babeş-Bolyai University (<a href="https://fspac.ubbcluj.ro/application/files/9715/6828/0474/Cod_eti_c_studenti.pdf">https://fspac.ubbcluj.ro/application/files/9715/6828/0474/Cod_eti_c_studenti.pdf</a>). Plagiarism and attempts at academic fraud of seminar homework and during exams are punished by granting grade 1 for the entire course and the discussion of the case in the Department's staff meeting for taking further administrative steps.</p>

## 6. Specific competencies acquired

<b>Professional competencies</b>	<p>1/ Planning and carrying out, in the recommended stages, an empirical or conceptual study to form the basis of the MA dissertation, a formal requirement for the awarding of an MA degree. More precisely:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i/ becoming familiar with the steps of elaborating an empirical or conceptual research strategy in the subdomain of international development within political science;</li> <li>ii/ becoming familiar with the steps of writing up a research report based on the study carried out according to the formulated strategy;</li> <li>iii/ planning the various research and writing-up related tasks for the successful completion of the dissertation on time;</li> <li>iv/ formulating cogent and manageable research questions;</li> <li>v/ identifying and working with the relevant scholarly literature to inform the research strategy;</li> <li>vi/ developing resource management skills using software (Zotero);</li> <li>vii/ developing critical and strategic reading and annotation techniques to aid the writing up of research reports;</li> <li>viii/ developing an understanding of generic research strategies and related design-specific techniques, especially: data choice logics; data collection techniques and their strengths and weaknesses; data analysis alternatives and logics.</li> </ul> <p>2/ Writing up the different components of a dissertation, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i/ developing an understanding of the role of the different components of the dissertation;</li> <li>ii/ exercising drafting synthetic presentations of components of the study, including problem presentation; the state of the art in research fields connected with the research problem; summary of the research methodology; the structuring of research findings; conclusions and implications of the study.</li> </ul>
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<b>Transversal competencies</b>	<p>1/ Identifying the steps to carry out a complex task and planning these steps in a given time frame;</p> <p>2/ Identifying resources needed for each of these steps and accessing these resources in a timely manner;</p> <p>3/ Identifying technical solutions to ease and speed up some of the processes underpinning the steps of the research process;</p> <p>4/ Carrying out, in a timely fashion, the tasks associated with each step while also incorporating recommendations and suggestions for improvement;</p> <p>5/ Working effectively, i.e. in-depth and in a focussed, strategic manner;</p> <p>6/ Being strategic about choices to do with the substantive scientific or professional contribution that the empirical / conceptual study and the dissertation might make.</p>
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## 7. Objectives of the discipline (outcome of the acquired competencies)

7.1 General objective of the discipline	To assist final-year MA students in successfully writing up a research report for an empirical/conceptual study that demonstrates (1) substantive knowledge in the field of international development; (2) intermediate social science research skills, comprising choice of research design, empirical research skills and systematic, rigorous analysis abilities; (3) advanced scholarly writing skills, including the appropriate use of references.
7.2 Specific objective of the discipline	<p>This seminar series aims to be a resource for students writing up their MA dissertation, a formal requirement for being awarded an MA degree. Thus, it aims to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Provide reliable information on the formal requirements that students' dissertations need to meet to be successfully defended at the end of the study programme;</li> <li>- Create an inclusive, open space for dialogue where students can think aloud in (i) articulating their research problems and research questions; (ii) discuss the directions for searching and identifying relevant literature to justify the research problem as well as inform the research methodology; (iii) choosing an appropriate research methodology for the problem and research questions chosen; (iv) discuss pitfalls and strategies for successful data collection, processing and analysis; (v) discuss the pitfalls and helpful strategies for successful and rigorous data analysis; (vi) explore findings to their maximum scholarly value; (vii) showcase drafts to get constructive feedback in a timely fashion.</li> </ul>

## 8. Content

8.2 Seminar / laboratory	Teaching methods	Remarks
<p><b>1/ Research problems and research questions</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Choosing a coordinator</li> <li>• What is a research problem?</li> <li>• Narrowing down the research problem</li> <li>• Managing the process of problem development: journals, chats.</li> </ul> <p><b>Exercise: articulate research problem(s).</b></p>	<p>The presentation of key concepts and analytical distinctions in relation to the topic.</p> <p>Interactive discussion of examples.</p>	<p>Students are expected to read the mandatory readings indicated in the syllabus.</p> <p>Students are expected to participate in discussions.</p>
<p><b>MANDATORY READING:</b> Silverman, David. 2013. Doing Qualitative Research, 4th ed. London: Sage. Chapter 6 – Formulating a Research Question, pp. 90-98.</p>		

<p><b>2/ From research problem to research questions / hypotheses</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What RQs do</li> <li>- What RQs could be like</li> <li>- Varieties</li> </ul> <p><b>Exercises: articulate possible RQs for your project.</b></p>	<p>The presentation of key concepts and analytical distinctions in relation to the topic.</p> <p>Interactive discussion of examples.</p>	<p>Students are expected to read the mandatory readings indicated in the syllabus.</p> <p>Students are expected to participate in discussions and complete in-class exercises.</p>
<p><b>MANDATORY READING:</b>  Silverman, David. 2013. Doing Qualitative Research, 4th ed. London: Sage. Chapter 6 – Formulating a Research Question, pp. <b>79-90; 95-99; 102 (Exercises).</b></p> <p>Bell, Judith. 2014. Doing Your Research Project: A guide to first-time researchers, 6th ed. Maidenhead, UK: McGraw-Hill Education &amp; Open University Press. Chapter 2 – Planning the Project, pp. <b>29-33 (of volume).</b></p>		
<p><b>HOMEWORK 1: Research problem description &amp; RQ(s) [DDL: week 4]</b></p> <p>Articulate the research problem you are focussing on, in context. Include your tentative research questions.</p> <p><b>Contents:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Describe the real-life context within which some social phenomenon of interest is taking place</li> <li>- Articulate what exactly about it we know</li> <li>- Articulate what exactly about it we do not know and which warrants scholarly (research) attention.</li> </ul> <p>You are encouraged to use research / programme evaluation reports; official statistics; and other externally valid data to substantiate the problem and its nature.</p> <p><b>FORM:</b> 750-1000 words plus references, attention to spelling and punctuation. Chicago-style citation and referencing rules apply. <b>A single .docx (or .pdf) file / student: LastnameFirstname HW1.docx.</b></p>		
<p><b>3/ INDIVIDUAL meetings:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <b>Research topic &amp; puzzle</b></li> <li>- <b>Narrowing down the focus</b></li> <li>- <b>RQ(s)</b></li> </ul>	<p>Students will have 15 minutes each to discuss their topic and potential RQ(s).</p>	
<p><b>NO MANDATORY READING.</b></p>		
<p><b>4.1/ Writing up the skeleton of the dissertation</b>  <b>You need to bring equipment (ideally, laptop) to this meeting.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The recommended structure of the dissertation, heading by heading</li> <li>• Drawing up the structure of the dissertation in Word</li> </ul> <p><b>4.2/ Literature search</b>  <b>Please download Zotero from Zotero.org and the Chrome connector ahead of class.</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Where to search for lit</li> <li>• Organising the lit by dissertation chapter</li> <li>• Keyword search: where</li> </ul> <p><b>Exercise: lit search</b></p>	<p>The presentation of key concepts and analytical distinctions in relation to the topic.</p> <p>Interactive discussion of examples.</p> <p>Actual search for relevant lit in the second hour.</p>	<p>Students are expected to read the mandatory readings indicated in the syllabus.</p> <p>Students are expected to participate in discussions.</p>
<p><b>NO MANDATORY READING.</b></p>		

## **HOMEWORK2: Starting literature list [DDL: week 5]**

Your starting literature list is a list of titles that should jumpstart your delving into your research topic.

The homework should contain:

- 1/ a concise, but detailed description of your search efforts, step-by-step and the text(s) you identified using each search action (as an in-text citation in this description);
- 2/ a reference list, as in any scholarly piece, containing at least 15 items (especially scholarly texts, including volumes, chapters from edited volumes, articles, programme evaluation reports, other reports, official statistics, databases etc.), using Chicago-style referencing.

**FORM:** Chicago-style citation and referencing rules apply. **A single .docx (or .pdf) file / student: LastnameFirstname\_HW2.docx.**

### **5/ The Lit Review chapter**

- Objectives of this chapter
- Conceptual frameworks and their use
- Key concepts and using the lit to identify & define them
- Revising empirical lit on the topic: structure & style
- Examples: synthesis in the lit review

The presentation of key concepts and analytical distinctions in relation to the topic.

Interactive discussion of examples.

Students are expected to read the mandatory readings indicated in the syllabus.

Students are expected to participate in discussions.

Silverman, David. 2013. Doing Qualitative Research, 4th ed. London: Sage. Chapter 19 – The Literature Review Chapter, pp. 340-350.

Silverman, David. 2013. Doing Qualitative Research, 4th ed. London: Sage. Chapter 7 – Using Theories, pp. 111-117.

## **HOMEWORK 3 Draft lit review [DDL: week 8]**

This is your draft lit review.

It should be structured according to the headings we wrote up in week 4; and should contain:

- An introductory paragraph laying out the contents of the chapter: succinct, but detailed;
- A section on key concepts, supported by a synthetic discussion of alternatives and a brief justification of your choice of conceptualisation for these key concepts;
- A structured section reviewing the empirical literature, organised thematically and/or methodologically. In discussing extant bodies of lit, you should articulate where gaps in knowledge remain.
- A concluding section should provide a brief summary of the lit review and explain why, given the gaps in knowledge identified, your RQs are justified.

In addition, you may include a section on conceptual framework and the justification for its choice. You may also include a section detailing contextual background to your selected case(s).

**FORM:** 2500-4000 words plus references, attention to spelling and punctuation. Chicago-style citation and referencing rules apply. **A single .docx (or .pdf) file / student: LastnameFirstname\_HW3.docx.**

### **6/ Choosing your research design / methodology**

- Methodology versus method
- Primary data versus secondary data
- Naturally occurring data?
- Sources of data for your study
- Research ethics in research work with human subjects

Examples: Methodology chapter samples

The presentation of key concepts and analytical distinctions in relation to the topic.

Interactive discussion of examples.

Students are expected to read the mandatory readings indicated in the syllabus.

Students are expected to participate in discussions.

**MANDATORY READINGS:**

Silverman, David. 2013. *Doing Qualitative Research*, 4th ed. London: Sage. Chapter 8 – Choosing a Methodology, section 8.3 – Your Research Strategy, pp. **122-126**; & section 8.5 – Naturally Occurring Data?, pp. **132-136**.

Silverman, David. 2013. *Doing Qualitative Research*, 4th ed. London: Sage. Chapter 10 – Ethical Research, pp. **159-163**.

Silverman, David. 2013. *Doing Qualitative Research*, 4th ed. London: Sage. Chapter 20 – The Methodology Chapter, pp. **351-355**.

**7/ INDIVIDUAL meetings:**

- **Research topic & RQs**
- **Research Methodology**
  - o Choice of data
  - o Fieldwork?
  - o Analysis approaches
  - o Limitations?

Students will have 15 minutes each to discuss their methodological choices.

**NO MANDATORY READINGS.****HOMEWORK 4 Draft Methodology chapter [DDL: week 10]**

This is your draft Methodology chapter.

It should be structured according to the headings we wrote up in week 4; and should contain:

- The choice of research strategy and its justification;
- A presentation of cases and primary data, as pertinent, and justification for choice of data;
- Data collection procedure and steps, including ethical issues, if pertinent;
- Data processing steps, if pertinent;
- Data analysis method and justification; and analytical procedures;
- Limitations of the empirical component.

**FORM:** 1000-1500 words plus references, attention to spelling and punctuation. Chicago-style citation and referencing rules apply. **A single .docx (or .pdf) file / student: LastnameFirstname HW4.docx.**

**8/ Writing up findings**

- Findings: mining your results – no relationships/ absences are also findings!
- Selecting findings and discarding others
- Structuring your findings: macro- and micro-structure
- Visual elements

The presentation of key concepts and analytical distinctions in relation to the topic.  
Interactive discussion of examples.

Students are expected to read the mandatory readings indicated in the syllabus.  
Students are expected to participate in discussions.

**MANDATORY READINGS:**

Silverman, David. 2013. *Doing Qualitative Research*, 4th ed. London: Sage. Chapter 21 – Writing Your Data Chapters, pp. **360-372**.

**EXAMPLES:**

Kovács, Borbála. 2022. ‘Flat-Rate Personal Income Tax in Lithuania, Romania and Hungary: A “revolutionary” Policy Idea without Revolutionary Outcomes’. *Journal of European Social Policy* 32 (1): 60–74. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09589287211035707>.

Kovács, Borbála, Jeremy Morris, Abel Polese, and Drini Imami. 2017. ‘Looking at the “Sharing” Economies Concept through the Prism of Informality’. *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society* 10 (2): 365–78. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cjres/rsw046>.

Tonelli, Simone, Eloisa Harris, and Franziska Deeg. 2024. 'Cross-Class Solidarity in Times of Crisis: The Economic Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Support for Redistribution'. <i>Journal of European Social Policy</i> 34 (5): 556–72. <a href="https://doi.org/10.1177/09589287241271037">https://doi.org/10.1177/09589287241271037</a> .		
<b>9/ Concluding chapter and other parts of the dissertation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- What should the conclusion contain?</li> <li>- What are Appendices for &amp; what to include</li> <li>- Last minute stuff: reference lists; typos; signposting; headings; abstract &amp; introduction.</li> </ul> <b>Exercise:</b> Brainstorm implications of research & future lines of study	The presentation of key concepts and analytical distinctions in relation to the topic. Interactive discussion of examples.	Students are expected to read the mandatory readings indicated in the syllabus. Students are expected to participate in discussions.
Silverman, David. 2013. <i>Doing Qualitative Research</i> , 4th ed. London: Sage. Chapter 22 –Your Concluding Chapter, pp. 373-379.		
<b>10-11/ Data analysis and writing up findings workshop</b>	These meetings are for students to bring in drafts of Findings sections to discuss; to improve; to show.	Students have the obligation to work on their dissertation bits for 2 * 40 minutes
<b>NO MANDATORY READING.</b>		
<b>12/ Oral presentations</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mock oral presentation of the dissertation in preparation for the degree presentation</li> </ul>	Timed oral presentations with feedback based on rubrics.	Students have the obligation to present their work.
<b>NO MANDATORY READING.</b>		

**9. Corroborating the content of the discipline with the expectations of the epistemic community, professional associations and representative employers within the field of the program**

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**10. Evaluation**

Type of activity	10.1 Evaluation criteria	10.2 Evaluation methods	10.3 Share in the grade (%)
10.5 Seminar/lab activities	Oral participation	Students need to engage orally during class meetings. Grading takes into account familiarity with mandatory readings; proactively using the class for one's dissertation writing; engaging constructively with colleagues' work; and consistency in participation.	20%
	Homework 1	See rubrics.	15%
	Homework 2	See rubrics.	15%
	Homework 3	See rubrics.	30%
	Homework 4	See rubrics.	20%
10.6 Minimum performance standards			
In line with art. 29 (2) of The Rules governing Babeş-Bolyai University Students' Status ( <a href="https://fspac.ubbcluj.ro/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/statutulstudentului.pdf">https://fspac.ubbcluj.ro/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/statutulstudentului.pdf</a> ), students are required to participate in <b>at least 75% of seminars</b> , i.e. 9 out of 12 meetings. Students who do not meet this requirement cannot graduate the discipline and need to retake it in the			

following academic year.

Academic fraud is defined in line with the rules of the Faculty of Political, Administrative and Communication Sciences, Babeş-Bolyai University ([https://fspac.ubbcluj.ro/application/files/9715/6828/0474/Cod\\_etice\\_studenti.pdf](https://fspac.ubbcluj.ro/application/files/9715/6828/0474/Cod_etice_studenti.pdf)). Plagiarism and attempts at academic fraud of seminar homework and during exams are punished by granting grade 1 for the entire course and the discussion of the case in the Department's staff meeting for taking further administrative steps.

Any academic paper relies on information with proper sources cited according to scientific rules. It is strongly recommended that you use a referencing style common in the social sciences (APA, MLA, Chicago, Harvard, Oxford etc.). The Department of Political Sciences recommends the use of APSA (the American Political Science Association) citation and referencing rules (Chicago style). If any other style is preferred, it should be used consistently throughout the paper. The evaluation of written assignments takes into account the correct use of the chosen citation style.

Date  
20 Feb 2026

Signature of course coordinator  
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Signature of seminar coordinator  
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Date of approval  
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Signature of the head of department  
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