

Research in Progress Seminar

Master's Program in Social Science

Carlos III/Juan March Institute
Fall Semester, 2020

Professors: Robert M. Fishman and Sandra León
Thursday 10:00am – 13:00pm
Room: 18.1.A01

The purpose of this course is to help students develop, initiate and complete a major research project for presentation during the second year of the Master's program. This research project is intended to provide the basis for a scholarly publication by its student-author and in most cases to serve as a pathway into the development of a successful doctoral thesis composed either of several such papers or of a book length monographic study of a major question. The skills to be emphasized and developed during the course are ones that should serve students well in the rest of their scholarly endeavors. The discussions will focus on theoretical, methodological and practical challenges that arise in the course of research and scholarly writing. Much of the discussion during the semester will be centered on the projects currently under development by students. **Course requirements include not simply attendance but more importantly active participation in class discussions and both oral and written presentations of work in progress.** Each student will be expected to present a provisional plan for the Masters Thesis, first as a short oral presentation and then in written form. In both cases the presentation can be more or less provisional but it is crucial that all students make written and oral presentations as a basis for their own progress and additionally as the foundation for class discussions. Some students may prefer to present a draft of the Master's Thesis itself, instead of a research proposal – if their work has reached that stage. **The provisional written proposals for the Master's Thesis, or alternatively the drafts of the thesis, will be circulated in advance to all members of the class in order to promote discussion.** For the success of this class – and of the individual papers of its members – it is essential that our discussions be characterized by a constant commitment to constructive criticism and to the formulation of useful questions and suggestions. The weekly plan for course sessions is as follows:

Week One. How to write a research paper.

Introduction to the essential components of a successful Masters Thesis and scholarly paper, practical guidelines for designing and carrying out such a project; useful elements of a research paper.

Reading:

Baglione, Lisa A. (2016). "Writing a research paper in political science". A practical guide to inquiry, structure and methods. Sage Press.

Bryman, A. (2012). "Social Research Methods". Oxford University Press.

McCloskey, Deirdre. "Economical Writing". Waveland Press.

Week Two: Theoretical Frameworks, Empirical Questions and Research Design.

Session 1: Classic Perspectives on the Interrelationship of Components of Research Projects.

Reading: Max Weber, " 'Objectivity' in Social Science and Social Policy"; and Emile Durkheim, "How to Determine Social Causes and Social Types", in *Suicide*.

Optional additional reading: Arthur Stinchcombe, *Constructing Social Theories*.

Assignment: Come to class prepared to discuss the debate between Weber and Durkheim on the relationship between empirical reality and theoretical constructs. Implications for research papers will be drawn out in the discussion.

Session 2: Discussion of Provisional Student Projects, Part I.

Assignment: A third of the class will make brief oral presentations outlining their provisional plans for the Masters Thesis. The class discussion will focus on how to pursue and improve those initial plans.

Week Three: Discussion of Provisional Student Projects (Cont.).

Assignment: Those students who did not do so during week two will present their provisional plans for the Masters Thesis. As in the previous week the class discussion will focus on the students' presentations.

Week Four [Break – students are expected to start preparing their research projects]

Week Five through Eleven: Discussion of Written Research Proposals of Students – or of Drafts of their Work in Progress.

Assignment: Each of the final five class sessions will focus on the discussion of three student research proposals or thesis drafts. In each case the work to be discussed will be completed by the end of the day on the Monday before the Thursday class session and will be circulated to all members of the class by e-mail. Students are expected to participate in the discussion of all of the presented work. Each student will act as a discussant of one of the research projects.

Final course assignment: Students will submit a revised research proposal of 8 – 10 pages in length or a relatively advanced draft of the thesis.