



Sustainability Research in the Social Sciences and Humanities: Current Topics and Research Designs

Educational subject description sheet

Basic information

<p>Field of study Joint Bachelor in Sustainability</p> <p>Speciality Social Sciences & Humanities</p> <p>Organizational unit Faculty of Law and Administration</p> <p>Study level first cycle (joint degree programme)</p> <p>Study form full-time degree programme</p> <p>Education profile General academic</p> <p>Mandatory obligatory</p>	<p>Education cycle 2025/26</p> <p>Subject code UJ.WPAJBSSSHS.8100.16612.25</p> <p>Lecture languages english</p> <p>Subject related to scientific research Yes</p> <p>Disciplines Sociology of science, Learning about the culture and religion, Political science and administration</p> <p>ISCED classification 0288 Interdisciplinary programmes involving broad field 02</p> <p>USOS code</p>	
Subject coordinator	Piotr Szwedo	
Lecturer	Basil Bornemann	
<p>Period Semester 5</p>	<p>Examination graded credit</p> <p>Activities and hours Discussion class: 28</p>	<p>Number of ECTS points 6.0</p>

Goals

C1	Building on the courses “Sustainability Research in the Social Sciences and Humanities: Approaches and Methods” and “Sustainability Research in the Social Sciences and Humanities: Applications and Explorations,” this course aims to deepen students' understanding of current issues and topics in SSH-based sustainability research and prepare them for their bachelor’s thesis. Students will explore a current topic in sustainability research and develop a provisional proposal for their bachelor’s thesis. The exploration of the current topic will be further developed into a small seminar paper. The course fosters critical thinking, research skills, and cohort integration through individual projects, collaborative discussions, and peer reviews. The final outputs include a preliminary research design and a small seminar paper based on the literature review, which will contribute to a common course publication on current topics in sustainability research.
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Subject's learning outcomes

Code	Outcomes in terms of	Effects	Examination methods
Knowledge - Student knows and understands:			
W1	current issues and debates in sustainability and SSH-based sustainability research.	JBS_K1_W04, JBS_K1_W05, JBS_K1_W06	credit with grade, portfolio
W2	how to conduct systematic literature reviews and identify research gaps.	JBS_K1_W07	credit with grade, portfolio
Skills - Student can:			
U1	develop comprehensive research proposals, including clear research questions, methodologies, and expected impacts.	JBS_K1_U01, JBS_K1_U03, JBS_K1_U04	credit with grade, portfolio
U2	systematically identify, critically analyze, and synthesize literature on a sustainability topic, and identify relevant knowledge gaps.	JBS_K1_U01	credit with grade, portfolio
Social competences - Student is ready for:			
K1	to provide constructive peer feedback and engage in academic discussions.	JBS_K1_K01, JBS_K1_K02	credit with grade, portfolio
K2	to engage in self-reflection and assess their own competencies and areas for development.	JBS_K1_K04, JBS_K1_K05	credit with grade, portfolio

Calculation of ECTS points

Activity form	Activity hours*	
Discussion class	28	
preparation for classes	28	
conducting literature studies	35	
paper preparation	89	
Student workload	Hours 180	ECTS 6.0

* hour means 45 minutes

Study content

No.	Course content	Subject's learning outcomes
1.	<p>Introduction to Course and Thesis Proposal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Overview of course goals, structure, and expectations• Introduction to the bachelor's thesis process• Organizational matters and initial discussions on topics	W1, W2, U1, U2
2.	<p>Identifying Research Topics in Sustainability</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Current issues and debates in sustainability research• Methods for identifying research topics• Group brainstorming sessions	W1, W2, U1, U2
3.	<p>Working Session on Current Topics</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Group discussion on current sustainability issues• Identifying key themes and research gaps• Initial individual research topic presentations	W1, W2, U1, U2
4.	<p>Elements and Writing of a Research Proposal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Key elements of a research proposal• Writing techniques and structuring the proposal• Practical exercise: Drafting a research proposal outline	W1, W2, U1, U2
5.	<p>Systematic Literature Review Techniques</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Steps for conducting a systematic literature review• Tools and databases for literature search• Practical exercise: Starting a literature review	W1, W2, U1, U2
6.	<p>Individual Work Session I: Literature Review</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Individual progress on literature reviews• Identifying key themes and gaps• Peer and instructor feedback	W1, W2, U1, U2, K1, K2

No.	Course content	Subject's learning outcomes
7.	Developing Research Questions and Hypotheses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Formulating clear research questions • Developing hypotheses based on literature reviews • Practical exercise: Drafting research questions 	W1, W2, U1, U2
8.	Individual Work Session II: Research Questions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Refining research questions and hypotheses • Individual progress and feedback • Peer and instructor feedback on research questions 	W1, W2, U1, U2, K1, K2
9.	Research Design and Methodology <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elements of a research design • Choosing appropriate methodologies • Practical exercise: Developing a research design 	W1, W2, U1, U2
10.	Individual Work Session III: Research Design <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finalizing research designs • Individual progress and feedback • Instructor and peer support on methodology choices 	W1, W2, U1, U2, K1, K2
11.	Expected Results, Outputs, and Impacts of Research Projects <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Defining expected results and outputs • Identifying potential impacts of research projects • Practical exercise: Articulating project impacts 	W1, W2, U1, U2
12.	Individual Work Session IV: Proposal and Presentation Preparation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Finalizing the research proposal • Preparing the presentation • Individual progress and feedback • Peer and instructor support 	W1, W2, U1, U2, K1, K2

No.	Course content	Subject's learning outcomes
13.	Final Presentations and Jury Review <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Presentation of preliminary research designs • Jury setup involving students and academic and practical experts on sustainability • Structured peer review and feedback • Discussion on research proposals 	W1, W2, U1, U2, K1, K2
14.	Conclusion and Course Wrap-up <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflection on course learnings • Planning for short seminar paper, bachelor's thesis, and common report • Course evaluation and feedback 	W1, W2, U1, U2, K1, K2

Course advanced

Teaching methods :

text analysis, brainstorming, conversation lecture, discussion, peer review

Activities	Examination methods	Credit conditions
Discussion class	credit with grade, portfolio	Portfolio: • Written draft of the research proposal (2000 words, 30% of the final grade); • Individual research proposal presentation to a jury (20% of the final grade); • Short seminar paper exploring a current topic in sustainability research based on the literature review (5000 words, 40% of the final grade), as contribution to common report on current topics. Active participation: • Participation and contribution to discussions and peer reviews (10% of the final grade).

Entry requirements

None

Literature

Obligatory

1. Bianchi, G. (2020). Sustainability competences. A systematic literature review.
2. Bornemann, B., & Simoens, M. (Hrsg.). (2026). Handbook of Research Methods and Applications in Sustainability Transformations: Social Science Perspectives. Edward Elgar
3. Fahy, F., & Rau, H. (Hrsg.). (2013). Methods of sustainability research in the social sciences. Sage.
4. Franklin, A., & Blyton, P. (2011). Researching sustainability: A guide to social science methods, practice and engagement. Earthscan.
5. Hart, C. (2018). Doing a Literature Review: Releasing the Research Imagination (2nd ed.). London, UK: SAGE Publications Ltd.
6. Petticrew, M., & Roberts, H. (2006). Systematic Reviews in the Social Sciences: A Practical Guide. Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Effects

Code	Content
JBS_K1_K01	The graduate can encourage sustainability-driven practices in the workplace and appraise sustainability of own values, perceptions, roles, and actions, with a special focus on environmental wellbeing.
JBS_K1_K02	The graduate can demonstrate considerable entrepreneurial initiative, autonomy, and readiness to act in complex and changing environments, especially in the context of supporting, undertaking, and co-organising activities beneficial for a sustainable society.
JBS_K1_K04	The graduate can critically assess and verbalize own competencies and skills related to different aspects of sustainability as well as their need for development.
JBS_K1_K05	The graduate can defend the importance of scientific data and methods as a basis for decision-making.
JBS_K1_U01	The graduate can critically analyse academic literature, formulate research questions and conduct research under supervision.
JBS_K1_U03	The graduate can apply adequate methods and tools, including selected IT tools, to solve problems related to data collection, analysis, and management in the context of sustainability.
JBS_K1_U04	The graduate can plan and effectuate simple sustainability-related projects under supervision and in the context of personal lifelong learning, both individually and in a team, using appropriate transversal skills and taking shared responsibility for the outcome.
JBS_K1_W04	The graduate can identify sustainability-related problems specific to selected cultural, geographical, and political contexts.
JBS_K1_W05	The graduate can identify essential international instruments and institutions related to sustainability and explain their potential role in resolution of a given problem.
JBS_K1_W06	The graduate can describe interconnections between various aspects of sustainability and identify their significance in the context of natural and social sciences, with a special focus on disciplines included in the selected specialisation track (law and politics; chemistry and physics; chemistry and biology; economics and geography; economics, management and engineering; humanities).
JBS_K1_W07	The graduate can apply the theory and methodology of disciplines included in the selected specialisation track to sustainability-related problems, taking into consideration practical limitations such as protection of intellectual property.