

Thesis Writing Seminar
Mandatory MA 2/2 Course, Fall 2017
Instructor: Robert Sata
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Central European University

Credits: 0.5 CEU credits, 1 ECTS credits

Classes: Mondays 13:30-15:10, FT#908 (starting November 7)

Office hours: available via email appointment

Course Description:

This is a mandatory course for students in the second year of the 2-year MA program that is organized around the presentation and discussion of the first substantive, empirical draft chapter to be prepared for the MA thesis by every participant by mid-October. The objective of this seminar is to help preparing MA theses and think through related issues of theory, research strategy, methodology, and write-up. Course participants present and discuss the newly written fieldwork/analysis chapters that they have to submit as part of their half thesis-length drafts, required by the departmental thesis writing policies.

The in-class discussions are to focus on the choice and formulation of the research question and the methodology; their justification in terms of relevance, timeliness, and tractability; the clarity of theory; the translation of the research question into a manageable research agenda via hypotheses or other means; the suitability of concept formation and measurement; the identification of appropriate research methods; the appropriateness of supporting arguments throughout the draft; the structure, quality and readability of figures, tables and text; and the clarity and implication of the findings. The classes provide exercises in critically engaging with other scholars' work and spotting how they could be improved, and improve participants' skills in matching research questions with data and methods, and findings with interpretation and further theorizing.

Learning Outcomes:

- Ability to conceive, elaborate and defend a research plan
- Reason analytically, applying abstract models to complex empirical situations and engage with different intellectual traditions, subfields, research designs and methodologies in the social sciences
- Ability to design, implement and write up an original academic or applied research in a rigorous and consistent manner
- Ability for effective oral presentation of scholarly thoughts, developing listening and discussion skills
- Ability to harmonize the research plan with the empirical findings, to foresee the difficulties of empirical research, to integrate unexpected results

Evaluation:

This course is meant to help developing the MA thesis, which will be separately graded at the time of graduation. Therefore coursework in this seminar will be merely assessed with a pass/fail grade. To earn a pass grade you need to prepare and deliver your own presentation thoughtfully and within the given time constraint; make the progress required in the departmental thesis grading policy; serve as chair, discussant and assistant note-taker (once each) in the subsequent discussions; and help your peers with active and well-prepared participation at their presentations. Active participation means carefully reading and thinking through their drafts beforehand and making comments on them and the presentation as appropriate; i.e. personally contributing to the creation of a stimulating, engaging, focused, supportive, and yet challenging learning environment for all participants in the class. Regarding expectations and assessment methods for the thesis, please see the departmental policies at <http://politicalscience.ceu.hu/departmental-policies-0>

Your assignments:

Each participant will have ten minutes to introduce his/her draft, situate it within its broader context in the thesis and the literature, and highlight what s/he thinks are the most pressing, salient issues regarding any further work on the chapter and the thesis as a whole. This will be followed by an approximately 30-minute discussion. Course participants will take turns in chairing discussions, and serving as assistant note-taker and discussants. The chair will have to decide who can speak next and take care of good time keeping (e.g. stop discussants taking too much time while saying not much new or constructive, and make sure that the presenter does not go beyond his/her five minutes in introducing the discussion). The assistant note-taker will help the presenter to remember the content of the discussion about his/her chapter by taking notes of the discussion and then share the notes with the presenter.

Readings:

There are no specific readings for this seminar but it is expected that the review of your drafts by you peers will result in recommendations for further readings, and these recommendations should be shared with you by your peers and the course instructor. You will also receive a detailed list of readings available in the library on various topics that one needs to address during the process of writing a thesis: epistemology, causality, theory making, conceptualization, key methodologies, academic writing and literature reviews.