SGR002F Philosophy of Science for the Social Sciences, 7.5 credits, third cycle

The course was established by the board of the Faculty of Social Sciences at Lund University on 6 June 2018 and the course syllabus was approved by the Research Studies Council on 23 May 2018.

The syllabus is valid from autumn semester 2018.

A. General information

The course is offered as a freestanding course for the social sciences. The language of instruction is English or Swedish, depending on the group of course participants.

B. Learning outcomes

On completion of the course, the student shall be able to

- demonstrate knowledge about and understanding of the philosophy of the social sciences as an intellectual tradition and activity,
- critically examine different contributions within the philosophy of the social sciences and their impact on various social science traditions,
- discuss key concepts within the field of the philosophy of the social sciences and their relevance for the conduct of social scientific inquiry and research,
- examine analytical strengths and shortcomings of various schools within the tradition of the philosophy of the social sciences,
- consider how research questions and problems identified in their dissertation work are related to various schools within the field of the philosophy of the social sciences.

C. Course content

The course aims at providing a critical introduction to a bouquet of classical and contemporary texts as well as debates in the philosophy of the social sciences. The course begins with a series of lectures that discuss the history of the field, as well as the four main contemporary positions. Two lectures discourse on the conceptual
Enlightenment origins of the social sciences, the breakthrough with theorists as Comte, Marx, Weber, and Durkheim, and the 20th century theory of science with i.a. positivism, Popper and Kuhn. Thereafter four lectures deal with contemporary positivism, constructivism broadly understood, critical social science, and realism. Thereafter, a series of eight seminars are concerned with specific themes and debates within the philosophy of the social sciences. Examples of themes are the fact-value distinction, agency, or the philosophy of social science at work in research design. At each seminar a group of students makes an oral presentation on the theme, and all students prepare a short text on “how this problem is relevant in my dissertation project”?

D. Course design
The course introduces the history of the field of the philosophy of the social sciences, contemporary main positions, and critique. The course covers the Enlightenment and the History of the Social Sciences; Hermeneutics and Phenomenology; Positivism; Critical Theory; Constructivism; Post-Structuralism; Postcolonialism; and New Materialism and Critical Realism. The course consists of lectures and seminars at which themes such as fact-value, distinction, verification, truth, critique, intersections, epistemologies and ontologies as well as practices and agency are critically explored. Each seminar is composed of group presentations of course literature and peer-review of individually produced texts. Aiming at being of direct relevance for participants’ dissertation work, the course emphasizes the writing process.

E. Assessment
The teaching consists of lectures and seminars. Active participation is required. Continuous examination is applied: students make oral presentations and written contributions at seminars. At a workshop individual texts will be presented while the submission of a final paper will conclude the course.

F. Grades
The grades awarded are Pass or Fail. To receive a Pass the doctoral student must fulfil the learning outcomes of the course.

At the beginning of the course, students will be informed about the learning outcomes stated in the syllabus as well as the grading scale and how it is applied at the course.

G. Entry requirements and selection
Applicants must be admitted to a doctoral programme. If the number of applicants exceeds the number of available places at the course, students from the Faculty of Social Sciences, Lund University, will be given priority.