

Evaluation PhD Course Research Design, 2022

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The course in Research Design is a mandatory course at the Faculty of Education that provides an overview of different research designs often used in the educational sciences, which are related to qualitative, quantitative and mixed methodologies. The main aim of the course is to strengthen the participants abilities to create adequate research designs in their own research endeavors, and to actively assess the design choices - and their implications - in research conducted by peers. The course covers two half days, and there is a short assignment prior to the first meeting. All participants are expected to actively participate in discussions which are part of the course. The literature for the course is intended to be read prior to the course.

During the course, different designs are presented and discussed, with respect to:

- What type of research questions can be examined / answered in the various research designs;
- What are their possible units of analysis, data sets and methodologies;
- What are their strengths and limitations

Upon completion of the course, candidates are expected to have obtained the competence to

- Demonstrate understanding of different research designs and their epistemological foundations
- Recognize methodological implications of the various designs in general terms
- Compare and assess strengths and limitations of published research that employ different research designs to approach related problems
- Position their own research design in the broader research traditions of the educational and social sciences

As in previous years, the course was well attended and well received. The 2022 group participated actively in the course, asked relevant questions during lectures and provided useful feedback to each others' research designs during the group assignments.

The paper assignment for the course requires that the candidates actively contrast and compare two research designs addressing the same topic in published academic research. This is a difficult task, and we know that for many PhD students this is the very first time they are expected to actively assess and critique methodological choices made by others. As in previous years, around half of the students did not pass the assignment on their first attempt, despite the fact that the course leaders did spend time explaining what typically leads to a fail on the assignment. We would like to emphasize that as in previous years, we provided individual, tailored feedback to each participant. Those who passed received an assessment about why and how their work was a good answer to the challenging task, and those who failed received praise when relevant and very concrete comments on what to do. Some of those who failed had an ongoing dialogue with the course leaders either on e-mail or Zoom, and all those who delivered new assignments passed on the second attempt.

The students' evaluations were gathered during the course, and as a survey from the administration afterwards. The response rate in the survey was low, but the answers there are in accordance with those provided in the course. The response is overwhelmingly positive, as summarized in this typical

comment in the survey: “I really liked this course. It felt relevant and pushed me to reflect upon my own research design. The presentation paper was therefore quite interesting to write as I was confronted with questions I had not yet reflected upon and I had to think about how to present my project to others”. Several students also state that they highly recommend the course and that it gave direction in their own work.

Regarding the course literature, the Cresswell-book received significant praise in the evaluation, as a good introduction to research designs. Further, both the lectures and the group assignment were described as very relevant and rewarding, as evident in this example from the survey “Perfect for new PhD students, and good balance between the different foci (methods, tools, purpose statements, etc.) and activities (discussions, lectures, writing, etc.). I like the lectures. Not boring. Interesting and relevant issues.” Several participants explain that they perceived the work load as hard, but that it was very rewarding work. The information about the course was also appreciated by the participants: “Really good. The UiO webpage gave all the information needed, so I was able to prepare during the summer”.

The course leaders enjoyed teaching the 2022 group and assessing their papers, and we will not change anything next year – other than providing even more detailed information about how to pass the assignment. We believe that those who understood the complexity of the task and had read the course materials well, had no problems passing the course. We also know from several supervisors that those who did not pass on their first attempt, are really happy about the way they were followed up towards their new submission of the paper.

Øistein & Marte