

Course Title	:	Comparative Social Policy Research Methods
Course Code	:	SOC502, IHEM 503
Recommended Study Year	:	Taught Master Year 1
No. of Credits/Term	:	3
Mode of Tuition	:	Computer Workshop and Group Seminars
Class Contact Hours	:	9am-5.30pm Saturdays: 18/25 Nov, 2/16/23 Dec
Category in Major Prog.	:	Master in Comparative Social Policy (International) Master in International Higher Education and Management
Discipline	:	Sociology and Social Policy
Prerequisite(s)	:	N/A
Co-requisite(s)	:	N/A
Exclusion(s)	:	N/A
Exemption Requirement(s)	:	N/A

Brief Course Description

This course begins with a broad overview of the reasons why we might want to compare social policy, how we might compare its key pillars, such as education, employment, social security, housing and health care and the problems that can occur when we do. The remaining sessions are then based around a consideration of comparative data provided by international organizations, including OECD, World Bank, UNESCO offering students the opportunity to explore the mixed economies of these pillars and the key structural changes occurring in the context of increasing internationalization through ‘hands on’ exercises.

The course as a whole is underpinned by a series of interrelated data workshops that require students to explore and interpret empirical data relating to social policy. These workshops will enhance students’ understanding by requiring them to relate and apply conceptual and theoretical knowledge, e.g. considering the big structural changes affecting labour markets and international student movement, to the raw data in order to give it meaning. The exercises will also allow students to test the validity of arguments put forward by key theorists, e.g. the effect of government policy on global trends in social mobility, and to explore some of the methodological difficulties involved in conducting macro-comparative research.

Students studying on different programs will meet in separate group seminars to share their key findings and learning outcomes on a weekly basis. The data exercises are preceded by a skills workshop that offers a beginner’s guide to the key software packages (OECD.Stat, Excel, SPSS) that need to be used throughout the course. The assessment for the course will build on these exercises and group seminar discussion by allowing students to choose their own research question relevant to their study program.

Aims

1. Introduce the comparative approach to the study of key pillars of social policy, such as education, employment, social security, housing and health care policy;
2. Understand the issues associated with comparing mixed economies of social policy across the globe;

Measurement of Learning Outcomes

Research Report 100%	<p>One research report of not more than 5,000 words.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• During the course students will be asked to complete a number of data exercises and to discuss key findings from these exercises with their peers. The rationale behind this approach is that the best way for students to understand the key methodological, theoretical and conceptual debates that dominate the field is for students to conduct some comparisons of social policy activity on their own.• Through the data exercises students will be introduced to the key data sources used by comparative researchers in different academic disciplines, explore the key dilemmas facing those comparing social policy activity and encourage students to challenge the validity of existing studies in their field of study.• Once students have completed the data exercises – which start from a relatively basic level and increase in complexity as the course progresses – students will have developed considerable expertise in conducting comparative analyses of social policy activity and outcomes relevant to their program of study.• Given both these factors, the assessment for the course has been designed in such a way that it will allow students to (a) exploit the skills they have developed in completing the exercises and (b) build on the discussions generated by them. Rather than asking students to write a traditional essay, they will be asked to write a research report of not more than 5,000 words. The theme of the report is the students' choice: students can choose any area(s) of social policy relevant to their program of study in any set of countries.
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Readings

There is no single book that covers the content of the course well as most of the main textbooks focus on describing theories, policies and countries rather than training students how to compare countries using the data that is available. Because of this, students will be given detailed handouts each week once the data workshops begin.

The following books will be useful in terms of providing background knowledge about substantive issues in the macro-comparative literature:

Bonoli, G. and Natali, D. (2013) *The Politics of the New Welfare State*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Bussemeyer, M. R., & Trampusch, C. (2012) *The Political Economy of Collective Skill Formation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Hemerijck, A. (2012) *Changing Welfare States*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

OECD (2016a), *Society at a Glance 2016: OECD Social Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264261488-en>

OECD (2016b), *Education at a Glance 2016: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publishing, Paris. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/eag-2016-en>

Morel, N., Palier, B., & Palme, J. (2012). *Towards a Social Investment Welfare State?: Ideas, Policies and Challenges*. Bristol: Policy Press.

Rizvi, F., & Lingard, B. (2009). *Globalizing Education Policy*. London/New York: Routledge.

Van Kersbergen, K. and Vis, B. (2014) (eds.) *Comparative Welfare State Politics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Important Notes

- (1) Students are expected to spend a total of 9 hours (i.e. 3 hours of class contact and 6 hours of personal study) per week to achieve the course learning outcomes.
- (2) Students shall be aware of the University regulations about dishonest practice in course work, tests and examinations, and the possible consequences as stipulated in the Regulations Governing University Examinations. In particular, plagiarism, being a kind of dishonest practice, is “the presentation of another person’s work without proper acknowledgement of the source, including exact phrases, or summarised ideas, or even footnotes/citations, whether protected by copyright or not, as the student’s own work”. Students are required to strictly follow university regulations governing academic integrity and honesty.
- (3) Students are required to submit writing assignment(s) using Turnitin.
- (4) To enhance students’ understanding of plagiarism, a mini-course “Online Tutorial on Plagiarism Awareness” is available on <https://pla.ln.edu.hk/>.