

Promising practice

University: Vrije Universiteit Brussel

Academic discipline: Sociology

Course title: Current population issues and urban demography

Course description:

This course is based on fundamental issues in demography and relates to current events. The starting point is a study of recent basic reports, complete with reference articles. Urban demography is a fixed part of the course, with the city of Brussels used as an observation ground. Students visit social organisations or certain districts in Brussels, staff members of those organisations give lectures. Particular attention is dedicated to organisations that are collecting and working on data that is used in demographic studies. This is completed with a research project including a quantitative and qualitative data analysis.

- 6 ECTS-credits, 172 study hours
- 8 hours lecturers
- 36 hours practical exercises
- 128 hours self study

Students should collate the acquired knowledge in a critical research design on population issues. They look up the most appropriate available secondary data to answer the formulated research question. Next, they visit a data producer and a data user of population related research, in order to sharpen their critical data reflection. Study visits to Brussels districts and agents feed their critical reflection while designing their own research. Elaborating a common research assignment stimulates their ability to work in groups.

Learning outcomes:

- Understanding, critically analysing and concluding from reports with a demographic base
- Doing a population analysis, quantifying population processes, interpreting and positioning them within their social and economic context
- Understanding and being able to apply some more advanced analysing methods in social demography

How students' learning is assessed:

- oral exam (40% of end rate): individual oral presentation of the group work
- research project (60%): group work with written reporting

How students learn with civil society organisations through this course:

- Through visiting organisations in the city of Brussels
- Staff members of those organisations give guest lectures

How students learn about dimensions of RRI through this course:

- **Public engagement:** involvement of real organisations and data
- **Open access:** working with open available demographic data
- **Diversity:** understanding the diversity of the Brussels' population and the related challenges for the different municipalities
- **Ethics:** giving students insights into the different kinds of demographic data and the restrictions on its use and matching with other data due to privacy related issues
- **Science education:** building bridges between science and society
- **Reflexivity:** Understanding and critical analysing and concluding from reports with a demographic background
- **Inclusion:** visits with different institutions, including youth organisations (e.g. Chicago School), community center (e.g. Pianofabriek), social services (e.g. OCMW/CPAS), data analysis and policy preparation (Brussels Health and Social Observatory) give students overview of the variety of ways demographic information can be helpful in approaching/organising certain aspects of these institutions
- **Responsiveness:** interpreting and positioning within their social and economic context

RRI keys integrated in the course

Gender and diversity Public engagement/ societal engagement; Open access;
Gender and diversity; Ethics; Science education and outreach from higher education;

RRI process requirements integrated in the course:

Reflexivity; Responsiveness

Contact information:

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Weblinks

<http://www.vub.ac.be/opleiding/fiches/13432/actuele-bevolkingsvraagstukken-en-stadsdemografie>