



**Department of Social Sciences**  
Sociology · Political Science

# MA Social Sciences

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## General Introduction

The MA Programme in the Social Sciences is an interdisciplinary study programme combining political science and sociology. In the course of the MA programme, students choose one of the two disciplines as the focus of their study. The MA Programme in the Social Sciences introduces students to the current academic debates in the two disciplines. It is designed for students interested in gaining deeper insight into the social sciences and wishing to acquire professional training in advanced methodology. The programme fosters the development of independent research skills and the ability to relate a specific research topic to a broad framework of knowledge.

The MA in Social Sciences has been officially accredited by the Ministry of Higher Education and Research of the State Government of North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany. In 2003, the BA and MA study programmes in the Social Sciences were awarded the distinguished prize for the best German BA/MA study programmes by the Stifterverband für die Deutsche Wissenschaft (Donors' Association for the Promotion of Sciences and Humanities in Germany), a joint industry initiative of leading German enterprises for the promotion of science and scholarship.

The MA programme in Social Sciences provides students with comprehensive knowledge of the characteristics and development trends of modern societies as well as high level training in, and engagement with, advanced social science research, theory and methodology. Topics of the courses include:

- social structure and culture of contemporary societies
- political systems and policies
- political participation and the election process in developed democracies
- functions and prerequisites of the rule of law and of welfare states
- mechanisms of informal social control and deviant behaviour
- role of markets and organisations in modern economies
- new forms and functions of publicity and communication and the role of mass media in the information society
- international relations, comparative politics and European integration.

One of the main purposes of the study programme is to foster personal skills, such as independent and analytical thinking, personal commitment, communicative competence and team spirit, by encouraging students to conduct research projects on their own. Thus, students develop both professionally and personally by:

- understanding theories and empirical findings of both sociology and political science
- independently applying state-of-the-art methods and theories of the social sciences to empirical research
- analysing, researching and solving new and complex problems in an interdisciplinary way
- conducting joint research projects.

Students of the MA programme in the Social Sciences will be qualified for demanding jobs in leading positions and for entering Ph.D. programmes and an academic career. The programme has been designed to give students a broad educational background for those professional areas in which a comprehensive and methodologically-sound understanding of social reality and its formative political, economic, social and communicative processes is a prerequisite for professional work. Students will be prepared for careers in planning, adult education, and human resource development, marketing and advertising, market and opinion research, public relations and media consulting in government, public administration, political parties, industrial organisations, business, media companies, interest groups, international organisations, NGOs and cultural institutions as well as for scientific research in public and private institutes.

### Study Profile

The MA programme comprises two years of full-time study. The special features and aims of the programme are as follows:

- to introduce students to state-of-the-art research in political science and sociology
- to provide training in advanced methods of analysis and explanation
- to encourage students to conduct research projects on their own
- to carry out team projects in order to foster team spirit and cooperation.

### The Interdisciplinary Approach

The programme is based on the strong theoretical and methodological links between the two disciplines involved. This not only justifies a joint MA programme in the Social Sciences but also creates a specific profile leading to a qualified academic degree after a period of two years of study. The systematic integration of the two disciplines is reflected in the course structure:

- common methodological training combined with applied empirical study projects
- systematic reflection of the common theoretical and methodological foundations of the two disciplines
- thematic modules focusing on specific issues in which the insights and perspectives of both disciplines are combined.

### Theory and Research

The main objective of the programme is to train students in the application of the theories and empirical methods in the social sciences. In this respect, the three-month „team project“ plays a central role. In the team project, students devise a theoretical or empirical research question, conduct the research and present the results in an oral presentation and a written report. A research team consists of two to five students. The team members should prove that they are capable of conducting a research project according to scientific standards and of presenting the results in an appropriate way. Most importantly, they should learn how to cooperate in a joint academic project thus developing their personal and social skills.

### Programme Structure

The programme structure is based on modules combining thematically, methodically and systematically related courses. The modules are equally offered by both disciplines. The study programme covers one thematic module, one theory module, one method module, one project module and supplementary elective modules or courses:

- the thematic module is composed of the six main subject areas of the study programme
- the theory module serves to support theoretical reflection and the analysis of theory development in the social sciences
- the method module trains students in the advanced methods and research techniques of empirical social research
- the project module consists of the development and presentation of the team project and provides support in the writing of the master thesis
- modules and courses from additional disciplines may be chosen as supplementary modules and courses.

The programme consists of two years of study. During the first year students take a total of 26 semester hours and during the second year 16 semester hours. During the second year students conduct the three-month team project and complete their master thesis within six months.

### Course Contents

- Thematic Module** **Social and Cultural Change** (changing values and social structures, social capital and trust, individualisation and collective action, democratisation and transformation processes, new information and communication media)
- Political Systems and Policies** (parliaments, governments, governance, political parties, interest groups, political participation and election processes, welfare state, political economy, cultural policy)
- Institutions and Social Control** (democracy and rule of law, autocracy and despotism, liberalism and the welfare state, social norms and deviant behaviour, punishment and sanctions)
- Market and Organisation** (sociology of the market, social embedding of economic activities, reputation and trust, organisation models, management and learning organisations)
- The Public and the Information Society** (the information society and mass media, new information technologies and interactive media, the internet and globalisation, political communication and the public)
- Europe & International Studies** (comparative analysis of social structures, European politics and European integration, international politics and global governance, transformation processes)
- Theory Module** **Epistemology & Theory Building** (theory of definition, explanation and hermeneutics, rational, causal and functional explanations, model building, proof and falsification, problem of objectivity and non-normative research, theoretical perspectives in comparison)
- Method Module** **Advanced Methods of Social Research** (research design, project management, forms, procedures and problems of interviews, observation and content analysis, theory of measurement, statistical methods, multivariate data analysis, quantitative data analysis and hermeneutical methods)
- Project Module** **Master Forum:** discussion of questions and problems pertaining to course of studies; development, presentation and discussion of the team project and the master thesis.  
**Team Project:** independent research project conducted as a team.  
**Master Thesis:** writing of an academic thesis.

### Supplementary Elective Modules and Courses

These courses may be chosen freely from the university course catalogue

### Types of Courses

The aims of the study programme are supported by innovative learning methods:

- master forums bring together all students and offer a public platform for discussing issues and problems relevant to the course of study. The forums include academic presentations and debates and help to initiate, develop, and discuss team projects and the master thesis
- team projects bring together small groups of students who devise theoretical or empirical research questions, conduct research projects and present the results.

Additionally the following types of courses are offered:

- lectures present topics in a comprehensive way and prepare students for the independent application of the skills and knowledge acquired in their studies
- master courses offer students the opportunity to present and discuss a topic that students have prepared independently.

### Overview of the Study Programme

<b>Year 1</b>	<b>Thematic Module</b>	3 master courses
	<b>Theory Module</b>	2 master courses on epistemology and theory-building
	<b>Method Module</b>	2 master courses on advanced methods of empirical social research
	<b>Project Module</b>	2 master forums, planning the team project
	<b>Supplementary Elective Modules and Courses</b>	4 courses
<b>Year 2</b>	<b>Thematic Module</b>	1 master course
	<b>Theory Module</b>	1 course on epistemology and theory-building
	<b>or</b>	or
	<b>Method Module</b>	1 master course on advanced methods of empirical social research
	<b>Project Module</b>	2 master forums, conducting the team project (3 months) Master thesis (6 months)
	<b>Supplementary Elective Modules and Courses</b>	2 courses

### Credit Points

Students earn credit points for each course attended and each examination passed. One credit point is equivalent to one ECTS credit point (see page 11 for information on ECTS).

The MA programme consists of a total of 120 ECTS credits, which is equivalent to an average of 30 credits per semester. The number of points credited for a course depends on the required course work:

- 2 ECTS credit points for regular attendance of the master forum and an elective course
- 6 ECTS credit points for a master course plus final examination in the thematic module or in the method module
- 8 ECTS credit points for a master course plus final examination in the thematic module
- 14 ECTS credit points for the team project and
- 24 ECTS credit points for the master thesis.

## Examinations

The Master of Arts degree is awarded to students who have successfully passed the final examinations of all required courses and whose team project and master thesis has been accepted. The students can choose German or English as the language of an examination or of their thesis.

According to the examination regulations, final course examinations can be a written or an oral exam, a research paper, a seminar paper with oral presentation or a study project. Students must demonstrate their skills and knowledge acquired in a given course. • A *written exam* usually lasts 120 minutes. If appropriate, it may be extended to a maximum of 180 minutes. • An *oral exam* usually lasts 30 to 40 minutes. • A *research paper* comprises an oral presentation of 15 to 30 minutes and a paper at 1,500 to 4,500 words. • A *seminar paper* is a written analysis which should be of 3,000 to 6,000 words. • A *study project* involves the application of theoretical, empirical or statistical methods to a topic including an oral presentation of 15 to 30 minutes and a written resume of 1,500 to 7.500 words. • A *study project* may also be assessed by a 60-minute test.

Additionally students must conduct an independent team project, present their research findings orally and submit a written report. For each team member, the oral presentation is 15 to 30 minutes and the report of 4,500 to 7,500 words.

The master thesis must be written during the second year in either political science or sociology and must be completed within six months. The thesis must demonstrate the students' ability to conduct independent research on a given topic according to the standards of the social sciences and to present their results in an appropriate way. The master thesis has to be written either in German or English. It should comprise of approx. 18.000 words and will be assessed by two examiners.

## Grading

Each examination will be assessed according to the following scale:

<b>1 = very good</b>	excellent performance
<b>2 = good</b>	performance above average
<b>3 = satisfactory</b>	average performance
<b>4 = sufficient</b>	performance with deficits, but still acceptable
<b>5 = fail</b>	performance with substantial deficits, not acceptable

A more differentiated grade may be given through an upgrade or downgrade of 0.3. 0.7, 4.3, 4.7, 5.3 are not appropriate grades.

## Study Plan

	Types of Courses	Module	Hours / Credits
<b>Year 1</b>	<b>Semester 1</b>		
	master course	thematic module	2 / 8
	master course	thematic module	2 / 6
	master course	method module	2 / 6
	master forum	project module	2 / 2
	course	supplementary elective courses	8 / 8
			<b>16 / 30</b>
	<b>Semester 2</b>		
	course	thematic module	2 / 8
	master course	thematic module	2 / 8
	master course	theory module	2 / 6
	master course	method module	2 / 6
	master forum	project module	2 / 2
			<b>10 / 30</b>
	<b>Year 2</b>	<b>Semester 3</b>	
master course		thematic module	2 / 8
course		thematic or method module	2 / 6
team project		project module	3 months / 14
master forum		project module	2 / 2
			<b>10 / 30</b>
<b>Semester 4</b>			
master forum		project module	2 / 2
courses		supplementary elective courses	4 / 4
master thesis		project module	6 months / 24
		<b>6 / 30</b>	
	<b>total</b>		<b>42 / 120</b>

## Admissions

The prerequisite for admission to the programme is the successful completion of a BA degree or higher in the social sciences. In exceptional cases, students who have passed other study programmes with equivalent qualifications may be admitted, if they seem to be suited for the study programme on account of their knowledge and training. An additional requirement for admission is proof of a special aptitude in political science, sociology and research methodology. The special aptitude is established by a commission selected from among the faculty of the two participating academic disciplines. Once a year, before the start of the winter term courses, the commission conducts oral examinations in political science, sociology and research methodology. Candidates must submit a written application for participation in the aptitude examination prior to the application deadline.

### Additional Information

**The City and the Region:** Düsseldorf is the capital of Germany's most populous federal state, North Rhine-Westphalia. Historically, the Rhine river has been Düsseldorf's natural link across borders. It has provided not only excellent trade opportunities but also an extensive exchange of ideas, which has become the source of the friendliness that has become a distinguishing mark of the Rhinelander. From Düsseldorf, it takes an hour to the Dutch border by car, and three hours to reach the North Sea. There is an extensive highway system around Düsseldorf, and trans-European trains leave the central train station every hour. Situated geographically and economically at the heart of Western Europe, the state capital with a population of 575,000 has built strong international connections and has established itself as an important economic, academic, and cultural partner within the European Union. Düsseldorf is an internationally noted banking centre and home of continental Europe's largest Japanese expatriate community. Numerous industrial designers, product developers, commercial artists, and advertising agencies contribute to an outstanding creative climate. The new and growing Harbour Media Centre provides the setting for many top communication companies. Electronics firms and photo studios also feature prominently in the city's industrial landscape. Dubbed the Paris of Germany, Düsseldorf's fashion industry contributes to the charm and "joie de vivre" of the city. In the summer its famous and elegant boulevard known as the "Kö" (Königsallee) turns into a vast café, a place to see and to "be seen". Other tree-lined promenades, interspersed with beer gardens, offer inviting places to stroll and watch the boats on the Rhine or look at the eye-catching examples of Art Nouveau facades on the opposite bank of the river. Meadows and parks provide extensive grounds for those that are keen on sports as well as a setting for the annual "Biggest Fun Fair" on the Rhine. The Old Town district, which is still being carefully preserved, is a popular entertainment zone and one of Düsseldorf's most extensive pedestrian areas. It abounds with narrow alleys, restaurants, cafes and pubs, as well as old-fashioned comfort and hospitality. In the early 17th century under the reign of Johan Wilhelm of the Palatinate, who had been popularized as Jan Wellem, the town began to thrive laying the foundations for a rich and multifaceted cultural life that can be found today. The "German Opera" offers a classical and modern repertoire and remarkable ballet performances. There is also a varied theatre scene with an internationally renowned playhouse as its focal point, a political cabaret, and numerous studio theatres. The concert hall stands out for its artistic design as well as its varied music program. All aspects of modern art are very well represented at the State Art Collection, and the Düsseldorf Academy of Fine Arts is one of the three leading art schools in Germany. There are also a number of busy art galleries. Besides the Heinrich-Heine-University and the Academy of Fine Arts, Düsseldorf is the home of a number of research institutes and educational facilities, among them the Robert Schumann Conservatory, the University of Applied Sciences, and the Academy of Business Administration. Children will enjoy the international atmosphere generated by the foreign schools (French, Greek, Japanese and International) with their respective curricula.

**The University:**

The Heinrich-Heine-University of Düsseldorf, situated at the south of the city on a large and pleasant campus site, was founded as a Medical Academy, which was opened in 1907 together with the newly built Municipal Hospital, the most modern hospital complex of Imperial German then. Since the Academy had no university status, it was allowed to instruct medical trainees but no students. The academy itself and the citizens of Düsseldorf launched several initiatives to change the status and in 1923 they finally succeeded. A university constitution including the right to train students was passed, the study of dental medicine was subsequently incorporated, and since 1935 even doctoral degrees can be awarded. After the Second World War the federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia and the City of Düsseldorf signed a contract stating that the federal state takes responsibility for the Medical Academy, while the hospitals remains municipally owned. In November 1965 the Medical Academy became the University of Düsseldorf, and in January 1966 the University established the Faculty of Medicine and the Faculty of Arts and Natural Sciences. In the following years the University has grown continuously both in terms of student population and subject diversity. Today approx. 25,000 students can choose from a distinguished range of disciplines, including medical science, natural sciences, economics, law, and humanities. Graduation is possible in numerous subject combinations, and study programs can be tailored to fit individual needs. Some disciplines, such as Literary Translation, Yiddish Culture, Language and Literature, or Media and Communication Studies are unique features of our curriculum. Further specialities in the Faculty of Arts include Modern Japanese Studies, and German as a Foreign Language, which address the needs of the inter-national business community. The Faculty of Economics focuses particularly on International Management. European and International Law enjoy an elevated position at the Faculty of Law, which is also a renowned centre of commercial law. Research in Genetics and Molecular Biology is focal point within the Faculty of Mathematics and Natural Sciences. The Faculty of Medicine has gained a reputation for its clinical research in Cardiology, Cell and Gene Therapy. The Centre of Biomedical Research (BMFZ) stands out as a centre of excellence. In addition, several institutions devoted to special disciplines are attached to the university, for example the Institute of Diabetic Research, and the Medical Institute for Environmental Hygiene. The Institute for International Communication is also located on campus. In December 1988 the academic senate decided to rename the University to Heinrich-Heine-University in commemoration of one of the city's most renowned sons, the poet Heinrich Heine, whose critical and inquisitive writing and critique of political particularism transcended national borders in the 19th century. Today the University, despite its recent foundation, has an outstanding academic reputation. Although faced with nation-wide cuts in public university financing, the University of Düsseldorf has continued to thrive. The University ranks 18th among the top 45 universities (from a total of 113) that receive 90% of all research funding in Germany. Ample proof of the confidence that sponsors place in the research conducted at HHUD can be seen in the number of collaborative research centres and research training programs. The university's international profile results from lively exchange programs with partner universities in regions as diverse as California and Beijing, Reading and Naples both on student and academic level. The University hosts about 3,000 international students from more than 110 nations and approx. 120 international researchers.

### **The European Community Course Credit System (ECTS)**

It is a system based on allocation and transfer of academic credits. It was developed and tested in a pilot scheme by 145 European institutions of higher education from all Member States and EFTA countries. ECTS was developed as an instrument of improving academic recognition throughout the European Universities by means of effective and general mechanisms. ECTS serves as a model of academic recognition, as it provides greater transparency of study programs and student achievement. ECTS in no way regulates the content, structure and or equivalence of study programs. These are issues of quality, which have to be determined by the higher education institutions themselves when establishing a satisfactory basis for co-operation agreements, bilaterally or multilaterally.

### **The main characteristics of ECTS are:**

Credits are allocated to each course unit. The starting point is the normal pattern of courses a student would have to take in an academic year. 60 credits represent the workload of an academic year of study.

- o Each institution produces an information package as a guide to all courses available to ECTS students. The courses are described not only in terms of content but also have credits added to each course.
- o Before the student leaves for the host institution, the home institution, the host institution, and the student sign a learning agreement in which the study program abroad is agreed upon. A transcript of records, which gives all details of previous higher education, is attached to the learning agreement.
- o The transcript of records lists all successfully complete courses together with details on the course, code, content, and credits.
- o The home institution guarantees full academic recognition. The study period abroad replaces a comparable period of study at the home university. In order to promote a universal implementation of ECTS as part of ERASMUS, the European Commission respects the right of each institute of higher education, to choose whatever recognition methods or agreements best suit their particular needs. If, however, student mobility is to provide universal academic recognition, as many universities as possible should give thought to a system of recognition using commonly understood measurements. ECTS has so far proved the best instrument to create transparency. Universities that receive financial support for their ERASMUS programs should envisage measurements to implement ECTS at their institution - or if it is already in use, to try to progress ECTS implementation within Continuing departments/faculties.

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