Prof. Dr. iur. Tilmann Altwicker
LL.M. | DAS ETH in Applied Statistics

Center for Legal Data Science
Universität Zürich | Rechtswissenschaftliche Fakultät
Seilergraben 49 | CH-8001 Zürich
tilmann.altwicker@rwi.uzh.ch

Seminar: *Empirical Analysis of the Law: A Challenge-Based Approach Using R*

Fall Semester 2023

Course Description

In today's data-driven world, empirical literacy is becoming increasingly important – including in law. Not only are data science skills highly sought-after by employers, but (big) data increasingly influences how the law is created, applied and evaluated. Already today, statistical analyses are being used to inform court judgments, to assess the impact of legislation, and to revolutionize legal research and practice. Given this ongoing 'datafication of law', it is crucial for future legal professionals to be able to understand, evaluate and critique the use of empirical methods in legal contexts.

This seminar aims to provide law students with a basic understanding of the empirical legal research process – from conceptualization, through data collection and analysis, to reporting. To learn how to apply this knowledge to their own research, students will work collaboratively in small groups to conceptualize and implement a small empirical legal research project using basic statistical methods in R. The seminar is designed for students who take part in the lecture Introduction to Empirical Legal Studies and/or the Online Course II in Legal Data Science. In addition, students with basic prior knowledge of statistics and R are also eligible. Students are expected to take active part in the discussions and to provide feedback on fellow participants' presentations.

Learning Objectives

The course follows a hands-on, self-directed approach. Through a combination of in-class discussions and group work, students will learn how to formulate research questions, design research projects, collect and analyse data, and draw meaningful conclusions from their findings. At the successful completion of the course, students will:

- have deepened their knowledge of quantitative methods and their application in the field of empirical legal studies;

- have acquired practical knowledge on how to plan and carry out entry-level empirical legal research projects;

- be able to employ simple quantitative methods in the legal field using the appropriate software, to assess the validity of the results and the limitations of empirical approaches to law;

- be able to read and to critically evaluate empirical research articles from different legal areas.

Prerequisites

Students should ideally have some prior knowledge of statistics and R. It is, however, sufficient if students participate, in parallel to the seminar, in the lecture Introduction to Empirical Legal Studies and/or in the Online Course II in Legal Data Science offered in the Fall 2023.

Assessment

The seminar includes completion of a Bachelor thesis (6 ECTS) or Master thesis (12 ECTS). This is comprised of:

1. **All participants: Group Project (40%):** Students will work in small groups of 3-4 persons to design, implement and present an entry-level empirical legal project. All group members will receive the same grade. Groups will present their research design at the end of October and their results at the beginning of December.

2. **Bachelor students only: Critical Review Paper (60%):** Each student submits a response paper on one of the assigned journal articles dealing with the empirical analysis of law (20–25 pages 40,000– 50,000 characters, with footnotes but not including spaces; plus cover sheet and indices). The papers need to provide a summary of the article and a critical examination of the data, methods used, results and discussion. There will be no oral presentation of the paper; students will receive written feedback alongside their grade at the end of the course.

3. **Master students only: Individual Analysis (60%):** Each student conducts an independent empirical analysis (data sets will be provided) and submits a write-up in the style of an empirical legal journal article (30–40 pages, 60'000–80'000 characters, with footnotes but not including spaces; plus cover sheet and indices). The papers must detail the research question, a brief literature review, the data and chosen methodology, the results (incl. visualization in the form of plots) and a discussion of the results in light of the research question. There will be no oral presentation of the paper; students will receive written feedback alongside their grade at the end of the course.

Course Structure

The seminar consists of four sessions ranging from 2–7 hours. A preparatory session will be held on Friday, 21 April 2023, 16:00-18:00, K02-D-54. The second session in September 2023 consists of an introduction to the course and a lecture on the components of an empirical legal research project. In the final two sessions in October and December 2023, student groups will present their research designs and final projects, respectively, followed by feedback from instructors and fellow students.

Seminar Dates

21 April 2023, 16:00 – 18:00	Preliminary info session
29 September 2023, 16:00 – 18:00	Introductory session
16 October 2023	Submission deadline: Bachelor Thesis (Critical Review Paper)
29 October 2023	Submission deadline: Research Design of Group Projects
31 October 2023, 09:00 – 17:00	In-class discussion and work on Research Design of Group Projects
5 December 2023	Submission deadline: Project Report of Group Projects
8 December 2023, 08:00 – 12:00	Presentations of Group Projects
8 December 2023, 12:00	Submission deadline: Master Thesis (Individual Analysis)

The seminar will be held in-person at the UZH City Campus (room details to follow). Attendance is mandatory for all sessions.

Participation

There are 20 seminar spots available, divided into 12 for Bachelor and 8 for Master students. For information on how to register, see https://www.ius.uzh.ch/de/studies/general/seminars.html.

Course Materials and Equipment

All necessary materials, including data sets for the empirical projects and journal articles for the review paper, will be provided on the OLAT course page. Students are required to bring their own device with a working installation of R and RStudio.

Contact

For further information, contact Una Schamberger (una.schamberger@rwi.uzh.ch) or Prof. Altwicker (tilmann.altwicker@rwi.uzh.ch).