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Seminar: *Empirical Legal Project*

Fall Semester 2026

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 and/or Python. 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. Upon successful completion of the course, students will:

- have acquired basic 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

While the seminar does not require any prior knowledge of R/Python and statistics, the seminar is primarily designed for students who have previously completed the lectures *Introduction to Empirical Legal Studies, Recht und Statistik* and/or the *Online Course II: Introduction to Legal Data Science*, or students who are taking one of these courses concurrently with the seminar in the Fall Semester 2026. Students without prior knowledge of R/Python and statistics are expected to acquire the necessary (basic) skills. The Chair provides information on various sources and learning paths.

Assessment

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

for Bachelor students:

1. **Group Project (40%):** Students will work in groups 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 on **16 October 2026** and their results on **27 November 2026**.
2. **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. The submission deadline for the Critical Review Paper is **27 September 2026**.

for Master students:

Individual Analysis (100%): Each student conducts an empirical analysis (topics and 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. Students will present their research design on **16 October 2026** and their results on **27 November 2026**. The deadline for handing in the final version of the Master thesis is **31 December 2026**.

Please note that if you are unable to submit your Master's Thesis within the deadline, the Seminar will be counted as a "failed attempt."

Course Structure

The seminar sessions will be held in-person at Pestalozzistrasse 24, 8032 Zurich (PES 205). Attendance is mandatory for all sessions.

Seminar Dates

10 April 2026, 15:00-17:00	Preliminary session: Administrative Information and Revision Unit on Research Designs
15 May 2026, 14:00-17:00	Introductory session: Revision Units on Descriptive Statistics and Hypothesis Testing
26 September 2026, 23:59	Submission deadline: Bachelor's Thesis (Critical Review Paper)
15 October 2026, 23:59	Submission deadline: Research Design of Group Projects / Research Design of Master's Thesis
16 October 2026, 09:30-17:00	In-class Presentation and Discussion of Research Design of Group Projects / Research Design of Master's Thesis and Revision Unit on Regression Analysis
23 November 2026, 23:59	Submission deadline: Project Report of Group Projects
27 November 2026, 14:00-17:00	Presentations of Group Projects / Presentation of Master's Thesis
31 December 2026, 23:59	Submission Deadline: Master's Thesis (Individual Analysis)

Participation

There are 15 seminar spots available, divided into 12 for Bachelor and 3 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. Students are required to bring their own device with a working installation of R and RStudio and/or Python and Visual Studio Code (VS Code).

Contact

For further information, contact Giulia Schradt (lst.altwicker@ius.uzh.ch).