

Research Design

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Introduction

In this course we will discuss the design of social science research and provide a brief overview of the various methods that are commonly in use. Because of severe time constraints, the focus will be on the overall design of social science research and the overview of particular methods will not be exhaustive, nor very extensive. An immediate goal of the course will be to write the research proposal for your MA thesis.

The course makes use of articles and occasional book chapters rather than a textbook. If you would prefer to have a textbook handy for future reference, two books are well worth considering. An excellent, albeit expensive, introduction to research design in the social sciences is Babbie (2006). In recent years, the 'bible' of research design has become King, Keohane and Verba (1994). This book attempts to combine quantitative and qualitative approaches in a unified methodology, with limited success. A useful, constructive critique on their book is Brady and Collier (2004). An excellent textbook with more attention to in particular conceptual issues in research design is Gerring (2001). A nice, short introduction to social science research methods is Shively (2004).

Schedule

Date	Group	Lecturer	Location
23 January	Development Studies	Andy Storey	L532
	European Studies & MEcon	Sebastian Dellepiane	B101
	all other students	Jos Elkind	G317
30 January	all groups	Sebastian Dellepiane	Theatre Q (Newman)
6 February		<i>Essay 1 due</i>	
	Development Studies	Andy Storey	L532
	European Studies & MEcon all other students	Sebastian Dellepiane Jos Elkind	B101 G317
13 February	all groups	Jos Elkind	Theatre Q (Newman)
20 February		<i>Essay 2 due</i>	
	all groups	Andy Storey	Theatre Q (Newman)
27 February	Development Studies	Andy Storey	L532
	European Studies & MEcon	Sebastian Dellepiane	B101
	all other students	Jos Elkind	G317
6 March		<i>Essay 3 due</i>	
27 March		<i>Research proposal due</i>	

Grading

During the course you will be expected to write three essays, which together will count for 45 percent of the final grade (15 percent each), and one research proposal, which will count for the other 55 percent. All assignments have to be emailed to all three instructors on the course as well as submitted in hardcopy to the School office, including a signed Declaration of Authorship form.

Essay 1: Critical review

Due: 6 February 2008, 10 AM

The aim of this assignment is to familiarize you with the logic and components of research design.

You should proceed as follows. Choose an academic article/book, preferably related to the topic of your MA dissertation (if you prefer, you can choose instead one work from the list provided below). Write a short evaluation of the article/book's research design (no more than 3 pages). This evaluation should consist of:

1. a brief description of the article/book's research design (1 page); and
2. an assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the research from a design perspective

Your report may consider the following issues: the research question; the research strategy; theories, concepts and hypotheses; case selection; data and sources of evidence; methods

of data collection and analysis. Note that some of the criteria for evaluating research designs are discussed in King, Keohane and Verba (1994: ch 1) and George and Bennett (2005: ch 4).

Articles/books you can choose from if you do not have one in your own field: Baum and Lake (2003); Coakley (2002); Fearon and Laitin (2000); Gabel and Palmer (1995); Garrett and Michell (2001); Inglehart and Norris (2003); Laitin (1998); Li and Reuveny (2002); Luedtke (2005); Lyon (2000); Mahler (2004); Norval (1996); Putnam, Leonardi and Nanetti (1993); Steinmo (1993); Tsai (1997).

Essay 2: Conceptualisation and operationalisation

Due: 20 February 2008, 10 AM

Briefly, in one sentence, formulate the preliminary research question for your MA thesis. Select one concept relevant for this question and find at least two conceptualisations in the literature. Critically discuss these two conceptualisations and suggest how these could be measured or observed in empirical research. The essay should be between 600 and 700 words.

Essay 3: Tools and techniques

Due: 6 March 2008, 10 AM

For a research hypothesis of your choice, describe what data are required to test this hypothesis and identify **how** the required data could be collected. Explain why the data collection technique(s) you have chosen is/are appropriate for this particular task. In addition, identify at least one other data collection technique that would **not** be appropriate for the task and, again, explain **why** it would be inappropriate. The length of this essay should be between 600 and 700 words.

Research proposal

Due: 27 March 2008, 10 AM

The main assignment of this course is the research proposal for your MA thesis. The course will help you develop your proposal. The final proposal should be at least 2000 words, in which you outline the research questions underlying your thesis, the argument that you will defend, and the methodological approach that you will use. Focus this research design on the methodological concerns - theory, hypotheses, concepts, measurement, case selection, selection of technique, etc. - and leave the discussion of the substantive topic and substantive literature to a minimum.

Plagiarism

Although this should be obvious, plagiarism - copying someone else's text without acknowledgement or beyond "fair use" quantities - is not allowed. UCD policies concerning plagiarism can be found at http://www.ucd.ie/regist/documents/plagiarism_policy_and_procedures.pdf. A more extensive description of what is plagiarism and what is not can be found at http://www.ucd.ie/library/students/information_skills/plagiari.html.

Readings

23 January - Introduction: Research questions and research design

Seminar

Logical fallacies; persuasion and argumentation; replicability; scientific method; elements of a research design; research questions.

A very brief introduction to positivist and post-positivist approaches to research; divisions in political science.

Required reading: King, Keohane and Verba (1994: ch 1); Shively (1997: ch 1); George and Bennett (2005: ch 4).

30 January - Case studies and comparative methods

Lecture by Sebastian Dellepiane

Required reading: Landman (2003: ch 2); Gerring (2004); Bennett (2004).

6 February - Theories and concepts

Seminar

Literature reviews; methods of citation; conceptualisation; formal models; models as abstraction; Occam's Razor; causation; necessary and sufficient conditions

Required reading: Gerring (2001: chs 3, 5); Shively (1997: ch 2).

13 February - Quantitative research methods

Lecture by Jos Elkink

Required reading: King (1991); Shively (1997: ch 7-9).

20 February - Interpretative methods, fieldwork and interviews

Lecture by Andy Storey

Required reading: Beazley and Ennew (2006); Sumner and Tribe (2008: ch 6).

Recommended reading: Michael (2005).

27 February - Measurement and data

Seminar

Reliability and validity; construct / measurement validity; operationalisation and measurement; types of data

Required reading: King, Keohane and Verba (1994: ch 4, §5.1); Shively (1997: chs 4-6).

Optional readings in specific methodological fields

When you apply a method to your MA thesis or possibly future research, you might want to dive a little deeper into that particular method than is possible in this short course. This section provides you with a list of possible material you could read, mostly collected from the syllabi of existing courses in research design.

General research methods

Brady and Collier (2004); Geddes (2000); Desai and Potter (2006); Denscombe (2007); Kane and Brún (2001); Klees (2008); May (2001); Robson (2002); Munck (1998); Munck and Verkuilen (2005).

Case studies

Many textbooks have a section on case studies, including: George and Bennett (2005); Johnson and Reynolds (2005: ch 7); Gerring (2007a: ch 5); King, Keohane and Verba (1994: ch 4,6); Frankfort-Nachmias and Nachmias (2000: ch 9,12); Przeworski and Teune (1970); Geddes (2003: ch 3); Sprinz and Wolinsky-Nahmias (2004: ch 2-5); van Evera (1997: ch 2).

On case selection, check: Shively (2004: ch 7); Geddes (1990).

For useful articles and monographs, check: Eckstein (1975); Ragin and Becker (1992); Achen and Snidal (1989); Gerring (2007*b*); Dion (1998); Mahoney and Goertz (2004); Campbell (1975); Collier and Mahoney (1996); Fearon (1991); Yin (2003); Ebbinghaus (2005); Bennett and Elman (2006); Alston (2005).

An interesting example is: Lijphart (1968).

Comparative method

For textbook reading, check: King, Keohane and Verba (1994: ch 4,6).

Further useful references: Mahoney and Rueschemeyer (2003); Lijphart (1971, 1975); Coppedge (1999); Ebbinghaus (2005); Dogan and Kazancigil (1994).

Survey research

For textbook chapters, check: Johnson and Reynolds (2005: ch 10).

Elite interviewing

For textbook chapters, check: Johnson and Reynolds (2005: ch 10).

Field research

For textbook chapters, check: Desai and Potter (2006: ch 2, 5).

Interpretative methods

Examples: Geertz (2005).

Content analysis

For textbook chapters, check: Johnson and Reynolds (2005: ch 8).

See also: Laver, Benoit and Garry (2003).

Statistics

There are many books available on this subjects, generally with titles like “introduction to (multivariate) statistics”, or “introduction to econometrics”. From beginner to advanced,

you could consider: Shively (2004: ch 8-10); Verzani (2005); Gujarati (2003); Greene (2003); Amemiya (1985).

Formal models

Green and Shapiro (1994); Morrow (1994*b,a*); Levi (2004); Sprinz and Wolinsky-Nahmias (2004: ch 10-14).

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