

PhD Research Design

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Introduction

In this course we will discuss the logic of social science research and provide a brief overview of the various methods that are commonly in use. The focus will be on the logic of inquiry in the social sciences in general, while the details of the various specific methods one can apply will be discussed in separate courses, one on qualitative methods and one on quantitative methods.

Many of the topics discussed in this course are controversial - practitioners of political science research disagree on fundamental issues of research methods, design, interpretation, inferences, etc. The course will stimulate a critical view towards methods and you are encouraged to be critical in your writings for the course and your participation during the course meetings.

The course will be very much based on group discussions as opposed to lectures. Many of you will have their own ideas about what makes good social science research and most topics we discuss do not have one clear answer. Through group discussions we can sharpen our sensitivities for the most important methodological issues, without fixating too much on one particular perspective on social science.

The course will make use of two textbooks, supplemented with articles and individual book chapters. The textbooks are King, Keohane and Verba (1994), which has become a standard in political science research methods

courses, and Gerring (2001), which is an excellent, slightly more philosophical introduction to key issues in research design. For a nice, very short and clear introduction to political science research methods, see Shively (2004).

Grading

The grade will consist of the following components:

Component	Due date	Weight
Attendance & participation	-	10%
Assignment 1 (concepts)	Friday 3/10	15%
Assignment 2 (measurement)	Friday 17/10	15%
Assignment 3 (review)	Friday 28/11	40%
Presentation	-	20%

Each of you will have to provide a presentation on the current state of the research question and design for your PhD thesis. Most of you will have only a very preliminary idea of where to go, but this will be a good exercise in giving such a presentation, of which many will follow, and it will provide you with some useful initial feedback on your ideas from your fellow students. Often during the process of writing a PhD, feedback from fellow students is as important as that from academic staff.

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 online.¹ A more extensive description of what is plagiarism and what is not can be found at the UCD Library website.²

¹http://www.ucd.ie/regist/documents/plagiarism_policy_and_procedures.pdf

²http://www.ucd.ie/library/students/information_skills/plagiari.html

Readings

Week 1: Political Science

Gerring (2001: ch 1, 2); King, Keohane and Verba (1994: ch 1); Shively (1997: ch 1-2).

Additional homework: write down the tentative research question of your PhD thesis. If you do not have one yet, make one up as closely as possible to what you think it might be.

Week 2: Theories, Models and Hypotheses

Gerring (2001: ch 5); Popper (1962: ch 1); Little (1991: ch 1).

Week 3: Conceptualisation and Operationalisation

Gerring (2001: ch 3, 4); Hanson and Kopstein (2005); Shively (1997: ch 3).

Brief aside: word processors and bibliography managers

Assignment 1: Describe your thesis research question or any research question in your field that interests you. Select one concepts relevant for this question and find at least two conceptualisations in the literature. Using the assigned literature for the class, critically analyse these two conceptualisations. *Max. 1000 words.*

Week 4: Measurement and Data

King, Keohane and Verba (1994: §5.1); Shively (1997: ch 4-5); Treier and Jackman (2008).

Week 5: Descriptive Inference

King, Keohane and Verba (1994: ch 2); Gerring (2001: ch 6).

Additional homework: find at least two websites that you think provide useful advice in how to create presentation slides and email the links to

jos.elkink@ucd.ie at least 24 hours before class.

Brief aside: presentations and slides

Assignment 2: Use either the concept from assignment 1, or introduce a new research question and related concept, and discuss how you would go about operationalising and measuring this concept. Critically discuss all relevant issues, in particular concerns of validity and reliability of your measures. Describe your thesis research question or any research question in your field that interests you. *Max. 1000 words.*

Week 6: Causal Inference I

Gerring (2001: ch 7); Mahoney (2008); Scriven (1966).

Week 7: Causal Inference II

Morgan and Winship (2007: ch 2, 10) (optional: Morgan and Winship (2007: ch 1, 3, 8)); King, Keohane and Verba (1994: ch 3).

Week 8: Sampling, Surveys and Questionnaire Design

Schaeffer and Presser (2003); Eltinge and Sribney (1996).

Additional homework: find at least two sources of funding you can use you might use to attend an international conference.

Brief aside: funding

Week 9: Formal Models and Game Theory

Green and Shapiro (1994: ch 2, 3); Little (1991: ch 3).

Week 10: Experiments

Green and Gerber (2003); Druckman et al. (2006); Morton and Williams (2008: pp. 1-12, 19-29); and example application (optional reading): Gerber, Green and Larimer (2008).

Additional homework: find at least two summer school courses that are of particular interest to your field of study or to the methods you apply.

Brief aside: summer schools

Week 11: Research Designs and Mixed Methods

Gerring (2001: ch 8,10).

Gerring (2001: ch 9) and King, Keohane and Verba (1994: ch 4) are interesting to check, but not core reading for this class. They build a bridge to the course on qualitative methods, however.

Assignment 3: Select a published article or a conference paper in your field and provide a critical review, paying particular attention to methodological issues. *Max. 3000 words.*

Week 12: Academic Writing

King (2006); (recommended) Dunleavy (2003) (no need to finish the latter before class!).

Additional homework: find at least two international conferences that are relevant to your particular field of study.

Brief aside: conferences

References

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