

PhD Research Design

Jos Elkind

School of Politics and International Relations
University College Dublin

jos.elkind@ucd.ie

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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 mostly based on group discussions, with in addition a few 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 9/10	15%
Assignment 2 (measurement)	Friday 23/10	15%
Assignment 3 (review)	Friday 20/11	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

Schedule overview

Week	Topic	Aside
	11/9	<i>no class due to conference</i>
1	18/9	Political science and research questions
2	25/9	Theories, models, and hypotheses
3	2/10	Conceptualisation and operationalisation
4	9/10	Measurement and data
5	16/10	Descriptive inference Presentation <i>Siobhan McPhee</i>
6	23/10	Causal inference I Presentation <i>Anne Fournier</i>
7	30/10	Causal inference II Presentation <i>Kevin Coffey</i>
8	6/11	Experiments Presentation <i>Jodi Zaffino</i>
9	13/11	Arguments and logic Presentation <i>Louise Deegan</i>
10	20/11	Surveys and questionnaire design Presentation <i>Jennifer Jackson</i>
11	27/11	Mixed methods Presentation <i>Chun Zhang</i>

All the last weeks - the number depending on the number of students in the course - will consist half of the student presentation and discussion and half of the listed lecture or seminar.

Assignments

Assignment 1: Select one concepts relevant for your research and find at least two conceptualisations in the literature. Using the assigned literature for the class, critically analyse these two conceptualisations. To put the conceptualisation in context, I need a brief description of the research question the conceptualisation relates to, but this is not part of the assignment per se. *Approximately 1500 words. Due: Friday 9/10*

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. To put the measurement in context, I need a brief description of

the research question the measurement relates to, but this is not part of the assignment per se. *Approximately 1500 words. Due: Friday 23/10*

Assignment 3: Select a published article or a conference paper in your field and provide a critical review, paying particular attention to methodological issues. The article should concern an *empirical* or *normative* analysis. An article that is more conceptual in nature, or that provides a general review of a particular literature is not suitable. In case of doubt, discuss with me in advance. Include the article itself in the submission (in PDF). *Approximately 4000 words. Due: Friday 20/11*

In addition to the readings described below and assignments above, the “aside” topics imply the following (small) homework assignments:

Aside	Homework
questions	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 will be. Make sure it is worded as an actual question (not a statement or topic).
tools	<i>no additional homework</i>
presentations	Find at least two websites that you think provide useful advice on how to create presentation slides or how to give a good presentation.
summer schools	Find at least two summer school courses that are of particular interest to your substantive area, or the methods you apply in your thesis.
funding	Find at least two sources of funding you might use to finance participation in a summer school or conference.
conferences	Find at least two international conferences that are relevant to your area of study.

Readings

Week 1: Political Science

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

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).

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).

Week 6: Causal Inference I (concept and mechanisms)

Gerring (2001: ch 7); Faletti and Lynch (2009).

Optional reading: Mahoney (2008); Scriven (1966); Shively (1997: ch 6).

Week 7: Causal Inference II (counterfactuals)

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

Optional reading: Morgan and Winship (2007: ch 1, 3, 8); King, Keohane and Verba (1994: ch 4).

Week 8: Experiments

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

Optional reading: Green and Gerber (2003).

Week 9: Arguments and Logic

McDermott (2008); Tomassi (1999: ch 1); Laver (1997: ch 1,2).

Optional reading: Parsons (2007).

Week 10: Surveys and Questionnaire Design

Schaeffer and Presser (2003); Zaller and Feldman (1992).

Optional reading: Bryman (2008: ch 7-10); Converse and Presser (1991).

Week 11: Mixed Methods

Creswell et al. (2003); Gerring (2001: ch 8,10).

Optional reading: Gerring (2001: ch 9).

Suggested Additional Readings

King (2006) provides a very good manual for writing publishable papers in political science; Dunleavy (2003) provides a good book length manual for writing a PhD thesis.

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