

# 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, on qualitative methods and on quantitative methods.

Many of the topics discussed in this course are controversial - practitioners of social 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) and Gerring (2001), which is an excellent, slightly more philosophical introduction to key issues in research design.

## Grading

The grade will consist of the following components:

| Component                  | Due date    | Weight |
|----------------------------|-------------|--------|
| Attendance & participation | -           | 10%    |
| Assignment 1 (concepts)    | Friday 19/2 | 15%    |
| Assignment 2 (measurement) | Friday 26/3 | 15%    |
| Assignment 3 (review)      | Friday 30/4 | 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.<sup>1</sup> A more extensive description of what is plagiarism and what is not can be found at the UCD Library website.<sup>2</sup>

## Contact

If you need to contact me outside class hours, you can find me in room F304 in the Newman Building. I do not have fixed office hours, so if you want to make sure I am present, you can make an appointment by email ([jos.elkink@ucd.ie](mailto:jos.elkink@ucd.ie)).

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<sup>1</sup>[http://www.ucd.ie/regist/documents/plagiarism\\_policy\\_and\\_procedures.pdf](http://www.ucd.ie/regist/documents/plagiarism_policy_and_procedures.pdf)

<sup>2</sup>[http://www.ucd.ie/library/students/information\\_skills/plagiari.html](http://www.ucd.ie/library/students/information_skills/plagiari.html)

## Schedule overview

| Week | Topic | Aside                                 |                |
|------|-------|---------------------------------------|----------------|
| 1    | 22/1  | Social science and research questions | questions      |
| 2    | 29/1  | Conceptualisation                     |                |
| 3    | 5/2   | Theories, models, and hypotheses      | tools          |
| 4    | 12/2  | Descriptive inference                 | presentations  |
| 5    | 19/2  | Operationalisation and measurement    |                |
| 6    | 26/2  | Questions and questionnaires          | summer schools |
| 7    | 5/3   | Case selection and sampling           |                |
| 8    | 26/3  | Causal inference I                    | funding        |
| 9    | 9/4   | Causal inference II                   |                |
| 10   | 16/4  | Experiments                           | conferences    |
| 11   | 23/4  | Mixed methods                         |                |

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 19/2*

**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 26/3*

**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 30/4

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

| <b>Aside</b>   | <b>Homework</b>  |
|----------------|--|
| 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.   |

The aside homework should be sent to a mailinglist that will be set up for the duration of the course, so that all participating students will receive it.

## Readings

### Week 1: Social science and research questions

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

### Week 2: Conceptualisation

Gerring (2001: ch 3, 4); Sartori (1970); Shively (1997: ch 3).

### Week 3: Theories, models, and hypotheses

Gerring (2001: ch 5); Popper (1962: ch 1); Kuhn (1970: ch 2); Boudon (1991).

Optional reading: Little (1991: ch 1); Kuhn (1970).

#### **Week 4: Descriptive inference**

King, Keohane and Verba (1994: ch 2); Gerring (2001: ch 6); Tomassi (1999: ch 1).

#### **Week 5: Operationalisation and measurement**

King, Keohane and Verba (1994: §5.1); Shively (1997: ch 4-5); Adcock and Collier (2001).

#### **Week 6: Questions and questionnaires**

Schaeffer and Presser (2003); Zaller and Feldman (1992); Bryman (2008: ch 10).

Optional reading: Bryman (2008: ch 8-9); Converse and Presser (1991).

#### **Week 7: Case selection and sampling**

Gerring (2001: ch 8); King, Keohane and Verba (1994: ch 4); Bryman (2008: ch 7).

Optional reading: Geddes (1990).

#### **Week 8: Causal inference I (concept and mechanisms)**

Gerring (2001: ch 7); Hédstrom and Swedberg (1996).

Optional reading: Mahoney (2008); Scriven (1966); Shively (1997: ch 6); Little (1991: ch 2); Faletti and Lynch (2009).

#### **Week 9: 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); Holland (1986); Fearon (1991).

### **Week 10: Experiments**

Moses and Knutsen (2007: ch 3); Gerber, Green and Larimer (2008).

Optional reading: Green and Gerber (2003); Campbell and Stanley (1963); Druckman et al. (2006).

### **Week 11: Mixed methods**

Gerring (2001: ch 10); Alexander et al. (2008); Creswell et al. (2003).

Optional reading: Lieberman (2005); Gerring (2001: ch 8-9).

### **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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