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. While the assignments can be written from different points of view and while debate is encouraged, the course does provide a somewhat more positivist perspective on social science.

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 a textbook (Gerring 2001), supplemented with articles and individual book chapters.
The grade will consist of the following components:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Due date</th>
<th>Weight</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance &amp; participation</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assignment 1 (concepts)</td>
<td>11/2</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<td>Assignment 2 (measurement)</td>
<td>25/3</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assignment 3 (review)</td>
<td>22/4</td>
<td>40%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Presentation</td>
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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.\(^2\)

### 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).

### Schedule overview

Classes take place in room G109, Fridays, 9-11 am.

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\(^2\) [http://www.ucd.ie/library/students/information_skills/plagiari.html](http://www.ucd.ie/library/students/information_skills/plagiari.html)
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. The “aside” topics are small topics that will be briefly discussed in class, but that do not entail either homework or readings.

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 11/2, 5 pm

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 25/3, 5 pm

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. The article needs to be approved by me in advance. Include the article itself in the submission (in PDF). Approximately 4000 words. Due: Friday 22/4, 5 pm

Readings

Week 1: Social science and research questions

Gerring (2001: ch 1, 2); Geddes (2003: ch 2).

**Week 2: Conceptualisation**


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


**Week 4: Formal theory**


**Week 5: Descriptive inference**


**Week 6: Operationalisation and measurement**

King, Keohane and Verba (1994: §5.1); Adcock and Collier (2001); Goertz (2006: ch 4).


**Week 7: Causal inference**

Gerring (2001: ch 7); Héestrom and Swedberg (1996); Morgan and Winship (2007: ch 1).

Week 8: Case selection and sampling


Week 9: Comparative methods

Lieberson (1991); Ragin (1997); Mahoney (2000).


Week 10: Experiments


Optional reading: Green and Gerber (2003); Campbell and Stanley (1963); Druckman et al. (2006); Humphreys and Weinstein (2009).

Week 12: Mixed methods

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


Suggested Additional Readings


References


