

GSHS 50060

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. 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. 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 2012), supplemented with articles and individual book chapters.

Grading

The grade will consist of the following components:

Component	Due date	Weight
Assignment 1 (conceptualisation)	22/2 at 5 pm	20%
Assignment 2 (grant proposal)	19/4 at 5 pm	40%
Assignment 3 (article review)	10/5 at 5 pm	40%

In addition, 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.¹

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.² A more extensive description of what is plagiarism and what is not can be found at the UCD Library website.³

Classes

Classes take place once a week, Friday 9-11 am at E005 of the Newman building at UCD, except for the March 8 class, which will take place in room E003. Since classes will primarily consist of seminar-style discussion and work in small groups, it will be essential that all the readings are carefully studied in advance of the class.

Contact

I do not have fixed office hours, so if you want to make sure I am present, you can make an appointment by email. If a personal visit is not necessary, the easiest way to reach me is by email (jos.elkink@ucd.ie).

Course materials will be uploaded to <http://www.joselkink.net/teaching>.

¹If the number of students in the class is too large, this might be changed to presentations to subsets of the class, or this might be dropped altogether.

²http://www.ucd.ie/regist/documents/plagiarism_policy_and_procedures.pdf

³http://www.ucd.ie/library/students/information_skills/plagiari.html

Schedule overview

Week	Topic	Aside
1	25/1	Social science and research questions
2	1/2	Conceptualisation
3	8/2	Theories, models, and hypotheses
4	15/2	Descriptive inference
5	22/2	Operationalisation and measurement
6	1/3	Causal inference: mechanisms
7	8/3	Causal inference: counterfactuals <i>Study break and Good Friday</i>
8	5/4	Experiments and observational studies
9	12/4	Comparative methods and case selection
10	19/4	Interpretation and explanation
11	26/4	Social science and complexity

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

Assignments should be submitted electronically to jos.elkink@ucd.ie, in PDF format.

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 22/2, 5 pm.*

Assignment 2: Based on your own PhD project, write a full grant application. A form will be distributed that emulates the kind of form used by grant agencies such as the Irish Research Council for Humanities and Social Sciences, with specific details on contents and required word length. *Due: Friday 19/4, 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 10/5, 5 pm.*

Readings

Week 1: Social science and research questions

In this class, you will be asked for the precise formulation of your research question for your PhD, so regardless of how far you are progressed with your thesis, think about this formulation in advance of the class.

Gerring (2012: ch 1-2); Geddes (2003: ch 2).

Optional reading: King, Keohane and Verba (1994: ch 1); Przeworski and Salomon (1995); Chalmers (1999); Watts, Bowen and Rudenstein (2001); Kiparsky (2006); Rothman (2008).

Week 2: Conceptualisation

Gerring (2012: ch 5); Sartori (1970); Collier and Levitsky (1997).

Optional reading: Shively (1997: ch 3); Collier and Mahoney (1993); Collier (1999); Collier, Hidalgo and Maciuceanu (2006).

Week 3: Theories, models, and hypotheses

Gerring (2012: ch 3-4); Popper (1962: ch 1); Kuhn (1970: ch 2); Boudon (1991).

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

Optional, on formal modeling: Schrodtt (2001); Morton (1999: ch 2-3); Chick (1998); Laver (1997: ch 1-2); Fiorina (1975); Little (1991: ch 3, 7, 9); Osborne (2004).

Week 4: Descriptive inference

Gerring (2012: ch 6); King, Keohane and Verba (1994: ch 2); Tomassi (1999: ch 1).

Week 5: Operationalisation and measurement

Gerring (2012: ch 7); King, Keohane and Verba (1994: §5.1); Adcock and Collier (2001); Goertz (2006: ch 4).

Optional reading: Shively (1997: ch 4-5).

Week 6: Causal inference: mechanisms

Gerring (2012: ch 8); Hédstrom and Swedberg (1996).

Week 7: Causal inference: counterfactuals

Gerring (2012: ch 9); Morgan and Winship (2007: ch 2, 10); King, Keohane and Verba (1994: ch 3).

Optional reading: Mahoney (2008); Scriven (1966); Shively (1997: ch 6); Little (1991: ch 2); Faletti and Lynch (2009); Goldthorpe (2001); Morgan and Winship (2007); Holland (1986); Fearon (1991).

Week 8: Experiments and observational studies

Gerring (2012: ch 10-11); Moses and Knutsen (2007: ch 3); Gerber, Green and Larimer (2008); Dunning (2008).

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

Week 9: Comparative methods and case selection

Lieberson (1991); Mahoney (2000); King, Keohane and Verba (1994: ch 4).

Optional reading: Gerring (2001: ch 8); Geddes (1990); Bryman (2008: ch 7); Ragin (1997); Lijphart (1971, 1975); Gerring (2004).

Week 10: Interpretation and explanation

Gerring (2012: ch 13); Geertz (1973); Little (1991: ch 4).

Highly recommended (pleasant reading): Geertz (2005).

Optional reading: Wendt (1998); Wedeen (2002).

Week 11: Social science and complexity

Vicsek (2002); Miller and Page (2004); Kurzban (2004).

Optional reading: Almond and Genco (1977); Lewin (1993); Johnson (2001); Lieberson and Lynn (2002); Macy and Willer (2002); Gilbert (2004).

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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