

GSHS 50070

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 and small group exercises. 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 textbooks King, Keohane and Verba (1994) and Gerring (2001),¹ supplemented with articles and individual book chapters.

¹Note that a new version of Gerring's book is available, Gerring (2012), but for the required reading we only use the 2001 version.

Classes

Classes take place once a week, Friday 9–11 am at E005 of the Newman building at UCD. 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>.

Schedule overview

Week	Topic
1	24/1 Social science and research questions
	Theories
2	31/1 Conceptualisation
	3/2 <i>Conceptualisation proposal due</i>
3	7/2 Theories, models, and hypotheses
4	14/2 Formal and computational models
	17/2 <i>Conceptualisation essay due</i>
	Inference
5	21/2 Descriptive inference and measurement
	24/2 <i>Review essay proposal due</i>
6	28/2 Causal inference: mechanisms
7	7/3 Causal inference: counterfactuals
	<i>Study break</i>
	31/3 <i>Review essay due</i>
	Design
8	4/4 Experiments and observational studies
9	11/4 Surveys, questionnaires and interviews
	<i>Good Friday</i>
10	25/4 Comparative methods and case selection
	28/4 <i>Grant proposal due</i>

Optionally an extra day will be added to the course where all students will present their research design, around the time of the submission of the grant proposals.

Assignments

There are two types of assignments, namely weekly discussion questions that will not be graded, but that are an essential part of the module, and three formal assignments that will together determine the module grade. All assignments should be submitted electronically to jos.elkink@ucd.ie, in **PDF format**.

Short assignments

Research question: In the first class, you will be asked for a formulation of the main research question of your MLitt / PhD research. Note that this should be a question – not a set of questions, not a topic description, and not a statement. *Due: in class week 1.*

Discussion questions: Write down at least two questions that occur to you when reading the assigned material, either because you find it confusing, or because you have some critique on the material. These are to be submitted electronically to jos.elkink@ucd.ie. Beware that questions might well be used in class, with proper attribution. *Due: 24 hours before class (except week 1).*

Main assignments

Conceptualisation (20%): Select one concept relevant for your research and find at least two conceptualisations (i.e. social scientific definitions) in the literature. Using the assigned literature for the class, critically analyse these two conceptualisations. *Approximately 1500 words. Due: Monday 17/2, 5 pm.* The concept and the two conceptualisations (definitions) need to be submitted for approval *Monday 3/2, 5 pm.*

Article review (40%): 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. *Approximately 4000 words. Due: Monday 31/3, 5 pm.* The article itself needs to be submitted for approval *Monday 24/2, 5 pm.*

Grant proposal (40%): Based on your own MLitt / 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, with specific details on contents and required word length. Pay particular attention to using the contents of the course as a whole in writing up the proposal, but also “sell” the research as one would for a real grant applications. *Due: Monday 28/4, 5 pm.*

Late submission policy

All written work must be submitted on or before the due dates. Students will lose one point of a grade per working day late or part thereof (taking B+, B and B to be “points” of a grade), and receive an NG (no grade) for essays over 1 week late. Exemptions will only be made in extenuating circumstances

and need to be requested in writing. Note that “bad planning” and “work commitments” do not count as extenuating circumstances.²

Plagiarism

Although this should be obvious, plagiarism – copying someone else’s text without acknowledgement or beyond “fair use” quantities – is not allowed, including self-plagiarism. UCD policies concerning plagiarism can be found online.³ A more extensive description of what is plagiarism and what is not can be found at the UCD Library website.⁴

Readings

If from your own work you have examples of useful readings on below topics, do let me know for future revisions of the syllabus.

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 (2001: 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); Gerring (2012: ch 1-2).

Week 2: Conceptualisation

Gerring (2001: ch 3); Sartori (1970); Choi et al. (2005).

Optional reading: Collier and Levitsky (1997); Shively (1997: ch 3); Collier and Mahoney (1993); Collier (1999); Collier, Hidalgo and Maciuceanu (2006); Gerring (2012: ch 5).

²See http://www.ucd.ie/registry/academicsecretariat/docs/extcstudent_g.pdf for more details on extenuating circumstances.

³http://www.ucd.ie/regist/documents/plagiarism_policy_and_procedures.pdf

⁴http://www.ucd.ie/library/students/information_skills/plagiari.html

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); Gerring (2012: ch 3-4).

Week 4: Formal and computational models

Guest lecture by Sarah Parlane

Chick (1998); Fiorina (1975); Miller and Page (2004); Vicsek (2002).

Optional reading: Schrodtt (2001); Laver (1997: ch 1-2); Little (1991: ch 3, 7, 9); Osborne (2004); Tomassi (1999: ch 1); Morton (1999: ch 2-3).

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

Week 5: Descriptive inference and measurement

Gerring (2001: ch 6); Adcock and Collier (2001); Shively (1997: ch 4-5).

Optional reading: Goertz (2006: ch 4); Shively (1997: ch 4-5); Gerring (2012: ch 6-7); King, Keohane and Verba (1994: ch 2, §5.1); Goertz (2006: ch 4).

Week 6: Causal inference: mechanisms

Gerring (2001: ch 7); Hédstrom and Swedberg (1996); Elster (2007: ch 1-2).

Optional reading: Gerring (2007, 2010); Gerring (2012: 8).

Week 7: Causal inference: counterfactuals

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); Gerring (2012: ch 8-11).

Week 8: Experiments and observational studies

Christensen (1997: ch 8-9); Dunning (2008a); McDermott (2002).

Optional reading: Moses and Knutsen (2007: ch 3); Green and Gerber (2003); Campbell and Stanley (1963); Druckman et al. (2006); Humphreys and Weinstein (2009); Gerring (2012: ch 10-11); Moses and Knutsen (2007: ch 3); Gerber, Green and Larimer (2008); Dunning (2008b); Camerer (2003); Kagel and Roth (1995); Kinder and Palfrey (1993); Gomm (2004: ch 2-3, 5-5).

Week 9: Surveys, questionnaires and interviews

Guest lecture by Sara O'Sullivan

Kvale and Brinkmann (2009: ch 9); Baker and Edwards (2012).

Optional reading: Bryman (2008: ch 8-10); Converse and Presser (1991); Schaeffer and Presser (2003); Zaller and Feldman (1992); King et al. (2004). Optional reading, on sampling: Bryman (2008: ch 7); Eltinge and Sribney (1996).

Week 10: Comparative methods and case selection

Little (1991: ch 2); Gerring (2001: ch 8); Geddes (1990).

Optional reading: Ragin (1987, 1997); Lijphart (1971, 1975); Gerring (2004); Mahoney (2000); Lieber-son (1991); King, Keohane and Verba (1994: ch 4); Goertz (2012).

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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