

POL 50160

PhD Research Design

Johan A. Elkink

School of Politics & International Relations
University College Dublin

jos.elkink@ucd.ie
Newman Building, Rm F304
<http://www.joselkink.net/teaching>

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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, Monday 9–12 pm at G316 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>

To stay up to date with developments in the UCD School of Politics and International Relations, also keep an eye on the following social media:

Web: <http://www.ucd.ie/politics/>

Blog: <http://politicalscience.ie/>

Twitter: <http://twitter.com/ucdpolitics>

Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/ucdspire>

Schedule overview

		Part I: Theory
1	28/9	Political science and research questions
2	5/10	Conceptualisation
	8/10	<i>Conceptualisation proposal due</i>
3	12/10	Paradigms, theories, models, and hypotheses
4	19/10	Descriptive inference, operationalisation and measurement
	19/10	<i>Conceptualisation essay due</i>
5	2/11	Formal and computational models
	2/11	<i>Review essay proposal due</i>
		Part II: Causality
6	9/11	Causal inference: counterfactuals and mechanisms
	9/11	<i>Grant proposal due</i>
7	16/11	Experiments and observational studies
8	23/11	Social mechanisms and complexity
	25/11	<i>Panel feedback due</i>
	21/12	<i>Review essay due</i>

The last weeks—the number of weeks depending on the number of students in the course—students will be asked to present their own research.

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 four formal assignments that will together determine the module grade. All assignments should be submitted electronically to jos.elkink@ucd.ie, the formal ones **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: Submit one discussion question that occurs to you when reading the assigned material—ideally critical of one (or several) of the readings, or alternatively because you find something confusing. These are to be submitted electronically to jos.elkink@ucd.ie. Beware that questions might well be used in class, with proper attribution. *Due: 36 hours before class (except week 1).*

Formal assignments

Conceptualisation (20%): Select one concept relevant for your research and find two conceptualisations (i.e. social scientific definitions) in the literature. Using the assigned literature for the class, critically evaluate these two conceptualisations. *Approximately 1200 words. Due: Monday 19/10, 5 pm.* The concept and the two conceptualisations (definitions) need to be submitted for approval *Monday 8/10, 9 am.*

Grant proposal (25%): Based on your own MLitt / PhD project, write a full grant application. A form will be distributed that emulates the 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 in writing up the proposal, but also “sell” the research as one would for a real grant applications and note that grant reviewers tend to look closely at the feasibility of the research. The proposal will go through in-class peer review, but will also be graded in a regular manner by the module coordinator. *Approximately 2500 words. Due: Monday 9/11, 5 pm.*

Grant proposal feedback (25%): You will receive three of the submitted grant proposals and will be asked to write a review on each, as if you are on a the board of a grant awarding agency (e.g. the Irish Research Council). You will be provided with a scoring sheet. The feedback will be returned to the author of the proposal and will be graded by the module coordinator. The feedback will not impact the grade of the proposal. *Approximately 700 words each. Due: Wednesday 25/11, 5 pm.*

Article review (30%): 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, the choice depending on the approach of your own thesis. An article that is more conceptual in nature, or that provides a general review of a particular literature, or a policy report, is

not suitable. *Approximately 3000 words. Due: Monday 21/12, 5 pm.* The article itself needs to be submitted for approval *Monday 2/11, 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

Note that late submission of the research proposal assignment creates problems for your classmates in the peer review assignment!

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

What is social science? What makes for a good research question?

Gerring (2001: ch 1-2); King, Keohane and Verba (1994: ch 1); Geddes (2003: ch 2).

Optional reading: Przeworski and Salomon (1995); Chalmers (1999); Watts, Bowen and Rudenstein (2001); Kiparsky (2006); Rothman (2008); Gerring (2012: ch 1-2).

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 2: Conceptualisation

What is a concept? How to define social science concepts? What makes for a good conceptualisation? – Note that this is on the definition of concepts for empirical research, not conceptual analysis.

Gerring (2001: ch 3); Sartori (1970); Choi et al. (2005: 24–33).

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), Laudan (1977: ch 2); Johnson (2003); McIntyre (1993); ?: 1-18); Jones (1974).

Week 3: Paradigms, theories, models, and hypotheses

What is the role of theory in social science? What is the difference between a paradigm, theory, model, hypothesis?

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

Optional reading: Little (1991: ch 1); Kuhn (1970); Gerring (2012: ch 3-4); Lave and March (1975: ch 3); Ball (1976).

Week 4: Descriptive inference, operationalisation and measurement

What is the relation between concept, theory, operationalisation, and measurement?

Gerring (2001: ch 6); King, Keohane and Verba (1994: ch 2, §5.1); Adcock and Collier (2001).

Optional reading: Goertz (2006: ch 4); Gerring (2012: ch 6-7); Shively (1997: ch 4-5).

Week 5: Formal and computational models

What are formal models? What is the use of formalization in theory formation? When are computational models useful? How do formal models and empirical research relate?

Guest lecture by James Cross

Fiorina (1975); Morton (1999: ch 2, 4); Signorino (2003).

Optional reading: Chick (1998); Schrodt (2001); Laver (1997: ch 1-2); Little (1991: ch 3, 7, 9); Osborne (2004); Tomassi (1999: ch 1); Morton (1999: ch 3); Scharpf (1994); Geddes (1999); Golden (1999); Levi (1999); Friedman (1962: 3–43); Dion (1992); de Mesquita and Lalman (1990); McCubbins and Thies (1996).

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

Week 6: Causal inference: counterfactuals and mechanisms

How to go from descriptive to causal inference? What is the counterfactual model of causal inference? What is the "Fundamental Problem of Causal Inference"? What role to causal mechanisms play?

Gerring (2001: ch 7); Morgan and Winship (2007: ch 2, 10); King, Keohane and Verba (1994: ch 3).

Optional reading: Gerring (2007, 2010); 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); Schelling (1998); Elster (1998); Petersen (1999); Tilly (2001); Goertz and Starr (2003: ch 1); Talbo (2003); Hill (1987); Brady (2002); Goldthorpe (2001); Braumoeller (2006); Weingast (1996); de Mesquita (1996); Tetlock and Belkin (1996); Tetlock (1998).

Week 7: Experiments and observational studies

What place do experiments have in social science? What are different types of experimental design? What is the relation between experimental design and observational studies?

Christensen (1997: ch 8-9); Dunning (2008a); McDermott (2002); Druckman et al. (2006).

Optional reading: Moses and Knutsen (2007: ch 3); Green and Gerber (2003); Campbell and Stanley (1963); 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); Camerer (2003); Kagel and Roth (1995); Kinder and Palfrey (1993); Friedman (1992).

Week 8: Social mechanisms and complexity

What are social mechanisms? What role do recent conceptions of complexity theory play in social science? How do social mechanisms and complexity relate?

Hédstrom and Swedberg (1996) Elster (2007: ch 1-2). Vicsek (2002).

Option reading: Boudon (1991), Miller and Page (2004); Schrodt (2001); Laver (1997: ch 1-2); Little (1991: ch 3, 7, 9); Osborne (2004); Tomassi (1999: ch 1); Morton (1999: ch 2-3).

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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