1 Description & Objectives

This graduate seminar provides an introduction to the scientific inquiry of the political world. Students will learn how to identify compelling research questions and how to structure a study so as to contribute to an existing body of research. The emphasis of the module will be on the development of novel, falsifiable, and empirically testable explanations of political phenomena.

2 Module Requirements and Policies

2.1 Participation (10%)

Student participation in class discussion and debate on the readings is a central element of the seminar. Students are expected to have read all required readings and to have acquired detailed knowledge and developed informed critiques of the readings prior to the class meeting. This means active engagement in class discussion: listening to your peers’ views and constructively engaging with them, while also demonstrating a clear understanding of the weekly readings. Students will be evaluated on the quality of their input in class discussion and debate—merely attending class is not a sufficient condition for achieving a passing participation mark. Seminar attendance is mandatory and absence may result in a lowered overall module grade if no medical certificate or similar documentation is provided.

2.2 Response Papers (22.5%)

Students will be required to engage critically with the readings in the form of short response papers. Response papers are not mere descriptions or summaries of the readings, but rather offer original insight and commentary on the weeks readings. Assume that the reader is familiar with the content of the reading so as to keep your arguments concise. The focus here is on the quality of your argumentation, not your position on the issue per se. Effective response papers typically consists of the following elements:

- Critical engagement with the arguments presented in the readings. Note that good response papers engage with multiple readings to support your main point.
- Contrast of arguments from different readings to explain your own position (with coherent and logically valid arguments).
- A review of the research design of one or more of the required or optional research examples from the reading list, with a focus on the issues relevant to the week. This means that you may bring in research examples assigned before and after the current week.
- A delineation of steps forward for a given body of work, based on the critical review of readings. What new research questions can you derive from your assessment?

Students are required to submit three (3) short response papers over the duration of the module. The required length of the response paper is between 600-800 words, with each
one counting 7.5% to your overall grade. Submission of response papers must comply with the following schedule:

- One paper due in week 2 or 3
- One paper due between weeks 4-6
- One paper due between weeks 8-11

Response papers should be submitted by Thursday 11:59 AM, prior to class via Turnitin.

2.3 Research Proposal (22.5% + 45%)

The main course objective is to submit a research proposal at the end of Michaelmas Term based on principles of comparative research design as discussed in the weekly seminars. The focus should be on emphasizing the issues of research design rather than the substantive importance of the research project. That is, the focus of the proposal is not on providing a lengthy literature review (although some knowledge of academic work is in the area should be demonstrated), but rather on writing a research proposal that specifies a well-defined research question which is grounded in theory and methodologically feasible. Although you may use this paper as a first attempt for your M.Sc. dissertation project, there is no need to do so, and you are not at all required to write your M.Sc. dissertation on the topic you choose to pursue for this particular module. However, you should not submit a proposal that overlaps with material submitted to another M.Sc. module.

Three-step approach to writing your research proposal

1. **The research question**: (1) must be *causal* in nature and should outline a broad question you are interested in exploring further; and (2) should include a short discussion of the variation to be explained, proposed causal explanation and significance of research. You will receive (and provide) peer feedback on each other’s research question paper. Submission is due by 6pm on Friday 21 October 2016, via Turnitin. The paper should not exceed 800 words.

   - After the assignments have been submitted, you provide peer comments to two (2) papers via Turnitin. You are assigned one paper and you can select another yourself. Please provide helpful comments to your fellow students; you will also depend on their input to develop your own proposal! Login to Turnitin to fulfil this part of the assignment between 22-25 October. Peer review comments should be at least 300 words.

   - The research question and peer review are not graded, but they are a required part of the coursework. If you fail to hand in a serious attempt at this, your marks for the project outline and final research design will be penalized.

2. **Project outline**: outline/summary of project including a more refined discussion of your research question, an indication of your causal explanatory variable, a discussion of observable implications of your key causal variable and the importance/significance of the project. This paper will count 22.5% towards your overall grade. The project outline is due during Research Week at 6pm on Tuesday 8 November 2016. The length of the project outline should be between 1250-1750 words (including reference list, footnotes, and title page). We will discuss some of these papers in class after Reading Week.

3. **Final research design**: the final proposal will include a precise definition of your dependent variable, an outline of alternative explanations and observable implications of your key causal variable, address issues of testing and measurement, data collection and analysis. It essentially covers all the topics discussed throughout the course. This paper will count 45% towards your overall grade. The final research design paper is due at 6pm on Sunday 18 December 2016. The length of the paper should be between 2,750 and 3,250 words (including reference list, footnotes, and title page).
2.4 Written Work Submission Guidelines

- **Academic & Professional Ethics**: Please do not plagiarize. Academic dishonesty is a serious matter, with serious consequences that can result in receiving no credit for an assignment, a failing grade for the module, and even expulsion from the programme. It is never permissible to turn in any work that contains others’ ideas without proper acknowledgment. It is your responsibility to make sure that your work meets the standard of academic honesty set forth in the College Calendar (see http://tcd-ie.libguides.com/plagiarism/calendar). Useful information is available at http://tcd-ie.libguides.com/plagiarism. If you are paraphrasing, cite the source. If you are quoting, use quotation marks and appropriate citation. Remember that academic integrity is a reflection of one’s character. In addition, we strongly recommend that you visit http://www.plagiarism.org/ for more information on what is and is not plagiarism. Lastly, students are required to only submit “new work” in each module, which means work that has not been submitted previously in any other university module. Students who wish to use previously submitted work as part of a new project will need the approval of the lecturer.

- The Assignment Submission Form available from the Departmental website should be filled out and included as the first page of all your submissions.

- All written assignments are to be submitted through turnitin.com. The class ID is 13617831 and the password is po8003 (case-sensitive). Also, you will be required to register for turnitin.com by Friday, 30 September 2016.

- All papers should be typeset in a 12 point font, using 1.5pt spacing. When in doubt follow usual practices for academic work, as exemplified by articles in major political science journals. Use a consistent reference style throughout the paper (author-year is preferred).

2.5 Syllabus Modification Rights

I reserve the right to reasonably alter the elements of the syllabus at any time. More often than not this will mean adjusting the reading list to keep pace with the course schedule, although I may add reading assignments as well.

3 Readings

The main texts for this module are:


We will also read a selection of articles and chapters as detailed in the module schedule below.

For those with a limited social science methods background, it might be helpful to start by reading chapters from an introductory text, such as:


4 Course Outline

Week 1. Can we study politics scientifically? p. 4
30/9/16 Turinitin.com registration

Week 2. Descriptive Inference & Concept Formation p. 5
Week 3. Theory Development p. 6
21/10/16 Research question paper due, 6 PM
22-25/10/16 Research question paper peer-review
Week 5. Falsifiability & Hypothesis Testing p. 8
Week 6. Case Studies & Case Selection p. 9
Week 7. Reading Week (no class)
8/11/16 Project outline due, 6 PM
Week 8. Mixed Methods Design p. 10
Week 9. Operationalization and Measurement p. 11
Week 10. Methods of Data Collection p. 12
Week 11. Bias in Measurement and Research p. 13
Week 12. Writing the Research Proposal p. 14
18/12/16 Final research design proposal due, 6 PM

5 Course Schedule

Week 1. Can we study politics scientifically?

Introductory readings (optional):


Theoretical readings (required):


Audiovisual (optional):


Week 2. Descriptive Inference & Concept Formation

Introductory readings (optional):


Theoretical readings (required):


Theoretical readings (optional):


Research examples (required):

Week 3. Theory Development

Introductory readings (optional):


Theoretical readings (required):


Research examples (required):

Week 4. Causal Inference & Causal Mechanisms

Introductory readings (optional):


Theoretical readings (required):


Theoretical readings (optional):


Research examples (required):


Real-world examples (required):

Week 5. Falsifiability and Hypothesis Testing

Introductory readings (optional):


Theoretical readings (required):


Theoretical readings (optional):


Research examples (required):


Week 6. Case Studies and Case Selection

Introductory readings (optional):


Theoretical readings (required):


Theoretical readings (optional):


Research examples (required):

- Posner, D.N., 2004. The political salience of cultural difference: Why Chewas and Tumbukas are allies in Zambia and adversaries in Malawi. *American Political Science Review*, 98(04), pp. 529-545. URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0003055404041334
Week 8. Mixed Methods Design

Theoretical readings (required):


Theoretical readings (optional):


Research examples (required):


Week 9. Operationalization and Measurement

Introductory readings (optional):


Theoretical readings (required):


Research examples (required):


Week 10. Methods of Data Collection

Introductory readings (optional):


Theoretical readings (required):


Theoretical readings (optional):


Research examples (required):

Week 11. Bias in Measurement and Research

Introductory readings (optional):


Theoretical readings (required):


Research examples (required):


Week 12. Writing the Research Proposal

Introductory readings (optional):


Theoretical readings (required):