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 Academic Peer-Review Report (22.5%)

For a scientific study to be published in a peer-reviewed journal, it must pass the scrutiny of anonymous expert reviewers. These reviewers are tasked with closely reading the paper, providing a thorough assessment of the quality and impact of the research, and offering to the journal editor a recommendation on publication (1. accept; 2. revise & resubmit; 3. reject).

Students will be required to submit a peer-review report of a recent political science conference paper. You will choose to review one paper out of a set of five conference papers which have been selected by the lecturer. These papers can be found in the module Dropbox directory. Guidelines on how to produce an effective peer-review report can also be found in the folder.

The required length of the peer-review report is between 1,000-1,500 words. The report should be submitted by 6pm on Friday, 23 November 2018 via Turnitin. Late submissions will not be accepted.

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 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 eachother’s
research question paper. Submission is due by **6pm on Friday, 5 October 2018**,
via Turnitin. The paper should not exceed 800 words.

   • After the you have submitted your research question paper, you will be required
to provide peer comments to two (2) papers via Turnitin. You will be 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 fulfill this part of the assignment between
**6-9th October 2018**. 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 at **6pm on Friday, 26 October 2018**. 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 the following 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 Friday, 7 December 2018**. The length of the
paper should be between 2,750 and 3,500 words (including footnotes, references and
title page). You may find a handout with guidelines for the final research design
paper on Blackboard.

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 18956728 and the password is po8003 (case-sensitive). Also, you will be required to register for turnitin.com by Friday, 15 September 2017.

- 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. Most readings and other relevant materials are available in the module Dropbox folder found at https://goo.gl/dsCtoC.

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


- Shively, W.P., 2016. The craft of political research. Routledge
4 Course Outline

Week 1 Can we study politics scientifically? p. 4
14/9/18 Turnitin.com registration
Week 2 Descriptive Inference & Concept Formation p. 5
Week 3 Theory Development p. 6
Week 4 Causal Inference & Causal Mechanisms p. 7
5/10/18 Research question paper due, 6 PM
6-9/10/18 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)
26/10/18 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
23/11/18 Academic peer-review report due, 6 PM
Week 12 Writing the Research Proposal p. 14
7/12/18 Final research design proposal due, 6 PM

5 Course Schedule

Week 1. Can we study politics scientifically?

Introductory readings (optional):


Theoretical readings (required):

  URL: http://pan.oxfordjournals.org/content/14/3/227.short

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):


Research examples (optional):

Week 4. Causal Inference & Causal Mechanisms

Introductory readings (optional):


Theoretical readings (required):


Theoretical readings (optional):


Research examples (required):


Research examples (optional):

Real-world examples (required):

  URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8B271L3NtAw

  URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t8ADnyw5ou8
Week 5. Falsifiability and Hypothesis Testing

Introductory readings (optional):


Theoretical readings (required):


Theoretical readings (optional):


Research examples (required):


Audiovisual (optional):

Week 6. Case Studies and Case Selection

Introductory readings (optional):


Theoretical readings (required):

- Gerring, J., 2004. What is a case study and what is it good for? American political science review, 98(02), pp. 341-354. URL: http://www.journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0003055404001182

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):


Audiovisual (optional):

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):


Theoretical readings (optional):


Research examples (required):


- The Conversation (22 April 2013) “The Reinhart-Rogoff error – or how not to Excel at economics” http://theconversation.com/the-reinhart-rogoff-error-or-how-not-to-excel-at-economics-13646


Audiovisual (optional):

Week 12. Writing the Research Proposal

Introductory readings (optional):


Theoretical readings (required):
