PO8046: MSc Research Design A
Michaelmas Term 2020
Room LB08 (Lloyd Institute), Wednesday 16:00 – 18:00

Lecturer: Alexander Held
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Office hours: Tuesday 15:00 – 17:00 during teaching weeks
Office: Online. Please send me an email if you plan to talk to me during my office hours.

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 paper. You will review a paper which has been selected by the lecturer. The paper can be found on Blackboard. Guidelines on how to produce an effective peer-review report can also be found on Blackboard.
The required length of the peer-review report is between 1,000-1,500 words. The report should be submitted by 6pm on Friday, 4 December 2020 via Turnitin in Blackboard. Late submissions will not be accepted.

2.3 Research Proposal (5% + 22.5% + 40%)
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 (including a discussion of the causal logic – i.e. the different steps – that links the independent variable to the dependent variables) and significance of research. Submission is due by 6pm on Friday, 23 October 2020, via Turnitin in Blackboard. The paper should not exceed 800 words. The research question counts as 5% of your final grade.

2. Project outline: outline/summary of project including a more refined discussion of your research question, an indication of your causal explanatory variable (including a discussion of the causal logic that links your independent and dependent variables), 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 at 6pm on Monday, 16 November 2020. The length of the project outline should be between 1250-1750 words (including reference list, footnotes, and title page).

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 40% towards your overall grade. The final research design paper is due at 6pm on Tuesday, 5 January 2020. 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 Late work
All late work, unless excused in advance by the module lecturer, or justified by medical certificate, will be penalised at a rate of 5 marks per 24 hours. Under no circumstances will work be accepted after the set work has been marked and handed back to other students, or after the end of Michaelmas term. Make sure to save and back-up your work. Computer crashes or failure to back up your work will not count as acceptable excuses for late work!

2.5 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 (https://www.tcd.ie/Political_Science/assets/word/Plagiarism%20cover%20sheet.docx) should be filled out and included as the first page of all your submissions.
- All written assignments are to be submitted through Turnitin in Blackboard.
- 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).

2.6 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:

  - This book is available online through TCD Library.


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 on Blackboard.

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?; Research Questions  
Week 2 Concept Formation, Theory Development & Hypothesis Testing  
Week 3 The Logic of Statistical Analysis  
Week 4 Challenges of Causal Inference  
**23/10/20 Research question paper due, 6 PM**  
Week 5 Causal Mechanisms & Process Tracing  
Week 6 Case Studies & Case Selection  
Week 7 Reading Week (no class)  
**16/11/20 Project outline due, 6 PM**  
Week 8 The Nuts-and-Bolts of Process Tracing & Mixed Methods Design  
Week 9 Operationalization and Measurement  
Week 10 Methods of Data Collection  
**4/12/20 Academic peer-review report due, 6 PM**  
Week 11 Bias in Measurement and Research  
Week 12 Writing the Research Proposal  
**5/1/21 Final research design proposal due, 6 PM**

### 5 Course Schedule

**Week 1. Can we study politics scientifically?; Research Questions**

Introductory readings (optional):

Theoretical readings (**required**):

Mahoney, J. and Goertz, G., 2006. “A tale of two cultures: Contrasting quantitative and qualitative research.” Political analysis, 14(3), pp. 227-249. (skim this article)

Audiovisual (optional):


Week 2. Concept Formation, Theory Development & Hypothesis Testing

Introductory readings (optional):


Theoretical readings (required):


Theoretical readings (optional):


Research examples (required):


Audiovisual (optional):
- This American Life (8 April 2016) “Knock, Knock. Who's there? The Truth." [Podcast, 27:00]
  URL: https://www.thisamericanlife.org/584/for-your-reconsideration/act-one

Week 3. The Logic of Statistical Analysis

Theoretical readings (required):

Theoretical readings (optional):

Research examples (required):

Week 4. Challenges of Causal Inference

Introductory readings (optional):

Theoretical readings (required):

Research examples (required):

Real-world examples (required):
• Stephen Dubner and Steven Levitt (2011) “Correlation vs. Causality” [3:22] URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t8ADnyw5ou8

Theoretical readings (optional):

Research examples (optional):

**Week 5. Causal Mechanisms & Process Tracing**

Introductory readings (optional):
Theoretical readings **(required)**:

- Collier, David, Henry E. Brady, and Jason Seawright. "Toward an Alternative View of Methodology: Sources of Leverage in Causal Inference." in *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards*, edited by Henry E. Brady and David Collier, pages 244-266 only.

Theoretical readings **(optional)**:


Research examples **(required)**:


**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](http://www.journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S0003055404001182)

Theoretical readings (optional):
Theoretical readings (required):

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. The Nuts-and-Bolts of Process Tracing & Mixed Methods Design

Theoretical readings (required):

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):

- Aberbach, J.D. and Rockman, B.A., 2002. “Conducting and coding elite interviews.” *Political Science & Politics*, 35(04), pp. 673-676. URL: [http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S1049096502001142](http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S1049096502001142)

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):


Audiovisual (optional):


Week 12. Writing the Research Proposal

Introductory readings (optional):


Theoretical readings (required):