POP88051: Research Design MT 2023

Wednesday 12:00-14:00, 4050B Arts Block, Trinity College
During Teaching Weeks at Trinity College (excluding Reading Week)

Instructor: Emanuel Coman
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This course introduces students to the theoretical and practical issues they will need to conduct research on politics. To be successful, political science research must identify a variation to be explained, offer a new argument about reasons for actors’ behaviours, and be integrated into existing research, falsifiable and tested. The requirement that research claims should explain variation, be falsifiable and tested against observable evidence of the implications of their claims, is demanding, and one that many students will initially find difficult. Nevertheless, it is the essential feature of successful political science research. The particular approach of this course emphasises leading with the ‘dependent variable’ and ‘disaggregation’ of the various aspects of research design, isolated in some degree from each other.

Requirements and Grading

Reading
All course participants are expected to come to class each week having completed all the assigned readings, having thought about them carefully, ready to contribute to discussion. To better encourage attention and participation in class discussion, all laptops and screens etc should be turned off throughout the seminar.

The readings assigned fall into two categories: (i) theoretical discussions of the issues covered in that week. These are chapters from methodology textbooks or reflection papers written by some of the best names in the field; (ii) empirical journal articles with applications of the theoretical concepts discussed.

Response papers (20%)
FOUR short response papers (each equal value).

- Response papers are not summaries, but demonstrate an understanding and provide a critique of, or reasoned assessment of, the week’s readings. Assume the reader of your response paper knows the readings well, so keep the summary of the readings terse, and focus on developing an argument about or from them. Remember that for this particular module, we are focussing on issues of research design, rather than substance. Response papers can be written about the week’s required readings. Response papers should be at least two but no more than four double-spaced pages long
- Before our second meeting I will create a schedule with the weeks in which each of you will write the response papers based on your declared preferences.

Class Participation (10%)
This is mostly a discussion class, not a lecture class. You will be expected to discuss – both talk and listen to each other – on the subject of some difficult material. 10 per cent of the total mark will be attributed to class participation.

Class participation requires contributing to class discussion, including listening to others, and having questions for discussion, demonstrating that contributions are based on a thorough understanding and detailed knowledge of all the required readings for the week, and on-time attendance. Where a student is falling behind in class participation, the lecturer may require additional response papers, or other written materials, to be submitted.

Each meeting we will have a discussion leader whose role is to energize the crowd and come up with at least three questions for discussion per each reading.

**Written Research Proposal**

This assignment asks course participants to submit a proposal for a research project. I will evaluate this proposal according to the standards for research design that we cover in class. For this class, you will particularly emphasise the issues of research puzzle, theory development and research design. The project will miss the empirical part present in a research paper. The class requires a project which is well-defined and specific, feasible, and methodologically sound. The project can be based on your dissertation topic.

You may wish to use this iterated development of a research design to develop the project that you may wish to pursue for your dissertation, or just a conference paper. However, there is no obligation to do so, and you are not at all required to write your dissertation on the topic you choose to pursue for this particular module.

[A Reminder: Nothing submitted for this module should contain material submitted to any other course, either at your current or previous universities].

The research design will happen in three stages:

1. **Research question:** Due on Friday at end of the Fourth Week, 29 September 2023, should outline a broad research question you are interested in. The question must be causal in nature. The paper, not to exceed two double-spaced pages, will include a research question i.e. a variation to be explained, an indication of the proposed causal explanation, and a brief explanation of why this is an important question. This assignment is required, but will not receive a grade. These papers will be made available to class colleagues so that everyone can see how others are approaching the problems of research design.

2. **Project outline:** Due on Friday at the end of Seventh Week (TCD Reading Week). This short paper will provide a brief sketch of the project will propose in fuller form at the end of the term. It will include:
   a. a variation to be explained, in detail, and with clarity:
      1. the conceptual variation
      2. how that variation is measured/ scored
   b. an outline of the proposed causal explanation
   c. a discussion of observable implications of that causal explanation
   d. and a justification for the project. This paper should be no more than five double-spaced pages in length. **It counts for 20% of the final grade.** Again, papers will be made available to all students in the module. The projects will be further presented in front of the class on weeks 8 and 9.

3. **Project presentation in class.** Weeks 8 and 9 meetings
4. **Full Research Design**: Due on Monday 8th January 2024.

The full proposal will include:

a. a very brief 1-2 page introduction
b. a puzzle, the main question to be answered
c. an assessment of previous scholarship that might offer explanations of this puzzle
   
   1. previous scholarship attempting to explain *exactly* that puzzle
   2. and/or relevant previous scholarship on closely related topics
   3. making sure to distinguish your contribution from the most similar previous scholarship.
d. elaborate a new argument (or a development / application of an old argument) that provides an explanation for the puzzle
e. explain how the argument can be tested / potentially falsified
   
   i. elaborate the observable implications of the argument
   ii. address how data can be collected and analysed
   iii. in effect, get as far as possible without actually conducting a full test (running the data on a statistical analysis, conducting interviews, going to an archive etc).

Please produce the paper with sections written in the order outlined above. This full research design should be **double-spaced** and no more than 6000 words of text (excluding bibliography, but including *everything* which is not the bibliography). You have time to produce a polished and thoughtful piece of writing, drawing on the materials of the course as a whole. You will want to look at the checklist at the end of this syllabus.

Summary of Grading:
10% Class Participation
20% Reaction Papers (four papers of equal value)
20% Project Outline
50% Full Research Design
**Reading List**

There are two books that you should purchase:


**Week 1: Introduction**

**Week 2: A science of politics?**


Week 3: Variation to be explained, finding a puzzle


Gerring (2011) ch. 2

KKV: pp. 107-112


Two short interviews with Peter Higgs and Orson Welles: 
https://www.theguardian.com/science/2013/dec/06/peter-higgs-boson-academic-system
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xKra6_NAey8

Examples:


Week 4: Developing a theory, generating and testing hypotheses


Gerring (2011) chapter 3


KKV pp. 100-105 on falsifiability.

Example (only the theoretical part):

Week 5: Measurement and concepts

Gerring (2011) chs 5-7

KKV, ch 5.

Examples:


Week 6: The Qualitative and Quantitative traditions

KKV, chs. 1 and 6


Examples:


Week 7: Reading Week

Week 8: Presentations I

Week 9: Presentations II
Week 10 (Oct 20): Causal Inference I: process tracing, granger causality, matching


Examples:


- Focus primarily on the qualitative part, from page 530 on

Week 11: Causal Inference II: Instrumental variables, Differences-in-Differences, Regression Discontinuity Design


- Focus on the concepts rather than the mathematics behind estimators

Examples:


Week 12: Transparency, reproducibility, pre-registration


*Examples:*

