Methods of Inquiry and Research Design

Political Science 6802
Columbia University
Spring 2007
Mondays, 2:10-4:00

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Course Description

This course will cover research methods and research design in political science. We will focus on concrete issues of conducting research: picking a topic, generating hypotheses, case selection, measurement issues, combining quantitative and qualitative methods, designing and conducting experiments, working with data sets, and archival research, etc.

The course is designed primarily for students in their third or fourth years working on dissertation proposals or early stages of dissertation research, but may be helpful for students at other stages as well.

Requirements and Grading

50% Five short papers (posted to Courseworks and hard copies delivered to Fazal and Fortna the Friday before class)
- 600 word (or fewer) research design ‘book review’  Sept 28
- Replicate statistical results from a published work (3-5pp)  Oct 12
- Interview (3-5pp)  Oct 26
- Archival Research (3-5 pp)  Nov 9
- The Ideal Experiment (3-5pp)  Nov 16
(Note: some of these assignments require legwork in advance; plan accordingly)

25% Final Paper. Due December 17
The final paper for the class should take the form of an actual or practice dissertation prospectus that meets departmental guidelines for content, length, and form. Students who have already successfully defended their prospectus should submit the research design chapter of their dissertation as their final paper.

10% Presentation of final paper

15% Class Participation
- Come to class prepared to discuss the week’s reading, and each others’ short papers, where applicable
- Discussion of concept measurement assignment (Oct 8)
Policy on Late Assignments

- One-third of a grade will be deducted for every day an assignment is late.
- Assignments will not be accepted more than one week late.
- No incompletes except in cases of documented family or medical emergency.

Course Materials

The following books are available for purchase at Labyrinth Bookstore:


Recommended:

CLASS SCHEDULE

Readings are available at the following locations:
R = Lehman Reserves
EJ = Electronic Journal
    (through Courseworks or at www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/eresources/ejournals/)
L = Labyrinth Books
CW = file posted on Courseworks

Week 1. September 10  Finding a Research Topic

What to read if you haven’t already:

2. Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*. [R]

Week 2. September 17  General Research Design

4. Sample dissertation proposals [CW]
Week 3. September 24  Case Studies: What are the options?

1. George, Alexander L. and Bennett, Andrew. *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences.* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005), Chs. 3-6, 8-10. [L]


Recommended:


Week 4. October 1  Case Studies: What are the pitfalls?

Assignment: Pick a book or article on a topic of interest to you and write a 600 word (or fewer) book review that reviews the research design

3. Reiter, Dan. “Fighting to an End: Information, Commitment, and War Termination.” Book Manuscript, Emory University. Ch. 4. [CW]

Recommended:

Geddes, Barbara. “How the Cases You Choose Affect the Answers You Get: Selection Bias in Comparative Politics.” Political Analysis 2 (1990), 131-150. [R]

Week 5. October 8  Measurement Issues and Quantitative Analysis: Options and Innovations

Assignment: Choose a concept of interest to you (e.g., democracy, interdependence, civil wars, war outcomes, statehood, etc.) that is measured in at least two existing data sets. Examine, and come to class prepared to discuss, differences (and potential problems) in the ways each data set codes this concept. May be done collaboratively with classmates. If you choose to collaborate on this assignment, each collaborator must recode the same case from one of the data sets you examine.

3. Survey of major data sets in IR and comparative – look at codebooks from:
   Correlates of War: [http://cow2.la.psu.edu/](http://cow2.la.psu.edu/)
   Militarized Interstate Disputes: [http://cow2.la.psu.edu/](http://cow2.la.psu.edu/)
   A useful source that links to these and other data sets is:
   [http://garnet.acns.fsu.edu/~phensel/data.html](http://garnet.acns.fsu.edu/~phensel/data.html)

   *International Interactions* 26:179-204. [R]
   Also browse EUGene at [http://www.eugenesoftware.org](http://www.eugenesoftware.org)

Week 6. October 15  
Quantitative Analysis: Pitfalls and Sandtraps

Guest Professor: Robert Shapiro

**Assignment**: Replicate someone else’s (published) quantitative results (3-5pp).


2. ReLogit: King, Gary and Zeng Langche “Explaining Rare Events in International Relations” *International Organization* 55:3 (Summer 2001), 693-715. [EJ]


4. Replication Symposium: King, Gary “Replication, Replication” and ensuing debate in *PS: Political Science and Politics* [Vol:No (date)], 444-499. [EJ]


See Gary King’s website, particularly the section on software, for additional information: [http://gking.harvard.edu/stats.shtml](http://gking.harvard.edu/stats.shtml)
**Week 7. October 22  Constructivism and Research Design**


**Recommended:**


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**Practical Issues**

**Week 8. October 29  Ethical and Practical Issues in Field Research**

**Guest Appearances:** Gretchen Borges, IRB representative  
Mona El-Ghobashy, Barnard College

**Assignment:** Conduct an interview with a political actor and write up results of the interview (3-5 pp.)


7. Barrett, Christopher B. and Jeffrey W. Cason *Overseas Research: A Practical Guide*. Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997. [L] (This is an easy read, just skim it, but remember to read it again before you do any actual fieldwork)


11. APSA Collaboration Report, available at: [http://www.apsanet.org/content_43659.cfm](http://www.apsanet.org/content_43659.cfm)


**Recommended:**

Vidich, Arthur J. “Participant Observation and the Collection and Interpretation of Data.” *American Journal of Sociology* 60:4 (January 1955), 354-60. [EJ]


Williams, Christine L. and Heikes, E. Joel. “The Importance of Researcher’s Gender in the In-Depth Interview: Evidence from Two Case Studies of Male Nurses.” *Gender & Society* 7:2 (June 1993), 280-91. [EJ]
Devereux, Stephen and John Hoddinott, eds. *Fieldwork in Developing Countries* Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992. [R]

Burgess, Robert G. *In the Field: An Introduction to Field Research* London: George Allen & Unwin, 1984. [R]

**Week 9. November 5 No Class – Election Day Holiday**

**Week 10. November 12 Archival Research**

Guest Professor: Adam McKeown

**Assignment:** Visit an archive to research a specific question and write up results. (3-5pp)


3. Harrison, Hope M. “Inside the SED Archives: A Researcher’s Diary.” *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*. [R]


Week 11. November 19  Experiments

Assignment: What would be the ideal experiment for your research question? (3-5pp)

Guest Professor: Macartan Humphreys


Note: those interested in learning more about field experiments should check out the ICPSR summer workshop held at Yale. see www.icpsr.umich.edu/sumprog or www.yale.edu/isps/conferences

Weeks 12-14  Class Presentations

November 26

December 3

December 10

Final Paper is due December 17th by 5pm.