

International Relation and Political Sciences (IRPS)

Academic year 2019 - 2020

Research Design in International Relations and Political Science

RI-SP017- Spring- 6 ECTS

Course Description

Hands-on introduction on the design and execution of empirical research in international relations/political science, applicable both to qualitative and to quantitative methods: how to ask a question, think about causality and theory development, select data, define concepts, and operationalize them in the specific empirical scope of the research.

> PROFESSOR

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THE FINAL VERSION OF THE SYLLABUS WILL BE MADE AVAILABLE ON THE FIRST DAY OF CLASS

Syllabus

The course will meet every Wednesday from 16:15 – 18:00 in Room S4, unless otherwise stated in the syllabus.

Course Books

There are many helpful books or textbooks on how to conduct social science research, each with its own tropism and biases. This course relies extensively on the following ones. Each of them is a good investment and I recommend, but do not require, that you buy one or two of them. They are all on reserve at the library and copies of the relevant chapters will be available on Moodle.

Gerring, John. 2012. *Social Science Methodology: A Unified Framework*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Goertz, Gary and James Mahoney. 2012. *A Tale of Two Cultures. Qualitative and Quantitative Research in the Social Sciences*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Goertz, Gary. 2017. *Multimethod Research, Causal Mechanisms, and Case Studies*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Course Objectives

The primary goal of this course is to provide students with a hands-on approach to a series of key issues when one is designing and carrying out research. The course explicitly aims at contrasting different “cultures” of research, in particular the debate between qualitative and quantitative research. Upon completion of this course, students should be able to:

- Design an original research project using a social scientific approach;
- Have an open mind about different approaches;
- Effectively engage in methodological discussions of their own and others' work;

Requirements

a) *Research Design Paper* (60% of the course grade)

The main output of the class is a research design paper that every student will progressively develop in three cumulative steps, each step being graded:

1. First paper: presentation, discussion, & justification of a research question; due on March 3 by 9am; (10% of final grade);
2. Second paper: add to the first paper a presentation, discussion and justification of arguments, and alternative explanations, together with data selection; due on April 6, 9am; (30% of final grade);
3. Third (full) paper: add to the second paper a presentation, discussion and justification of operationalization and measurement issues; due on May 12, 9am (20% of final grade);

The total length of the full paper should not exceed 20 pages. For those students following Professor Kolbe's Comparative Politics class, the topic of the paper MUST be different from the one used in the Comparative Politics class.

b) In-class assignment (20% of the course grade)

Every student will be randomly assigned another student's full paper and asked to produce a short feedback (2-3 pages) on selected parts of that paper. This exercise will be done under the form of an in-class assignment during the last session of the course. The aim is to evaluate students' assimilation of the various steps in research design as well as their ability to critically reflect on others' choices.

c) Class participation (20% of the grade)

Participation is an essential and mandatory component of this course. Students should come to class having read the assigned material and contribute meaningfully to class discussions. The participation grade will reflect the amount and quality of participation (this includes the short assignments for sessions 4 and 11), as well as attendance.

Tentative Schedule and Reading Assignments

All readings listed below are mandatory readings focusing on methodological issues. The list will be supplemented by additional entries with selected applications in IR by the beginning of class on Feb. 19. For further readings, please refer to Goertz & Mahoney (2012) as well as Goertz (2017).

February 19 (Session 1): **Introduction: diversity and integration in social science research**

Goertz, Gary and James Mahoney. 2012. *A Tale of Two Cultures. Qualitative and Quantitative Research in the Social Sciences*. Princeton: Princeton University Press (chap. 1)

Goertz, Gary. 2017. *Multimethod Research, Causal Mechanisms, and Case Studies*. Princeton: Princeton University Press (chap. 1)

February 26 (Session 2): **Research question and puzzle**

Becker, Howard. 1998. *Tricks of the Trade. How to Think About Your Research While You Are Doing it*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press (Chap.2).

Gerring, John. 2012. *Social Science Methodology: A Unified Framework*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 37-57.

Gustafsson, Karl and Linus Hagstrom. 2018. "What is the point? Teaching Graduate Students how to Construct Political Science Research Puzzles." *European Political Science* 17(4): 634-648.

Zinnes, Dina A. 1980. Three Puzzles in Search of a Researcher. *International Studies Quarterly* 24 (September): 315-342.

*****First paper due on Tuesday March 3 by 9 am *****

March 4 (Session 3): **Discussion/debrief of first paper**

March 11 (Session 4): **Arguments: description and causation**

Preparatory assignment: Pick one descriptive argument and one causal argument from the recent (post-2000s) IR literature and evaluate them with the lists of criteria provided by Gerring (2012) in Table 3.1 and 8.1. Come in class with one page summary of your thinking.

Gerring, John. 2012. *Social Science Methodology: A Unified Framework*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, chap. 3, 6 and 8.

March 18 (Session 5): **Causal strategies and mechanisms**

Gerring, John. 2012. *Social Science Methodology: A Unified Framework*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, chap. 9 and 10.

Goertz, Gary. 2017. *Multimethod Research, Causal Mechanisms, and Case Studies*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, chap. 2 and 3.

Goertz, Gary and James Mahoney. 2012. *A Tale of Two Cultures. Qualitative and Quantitative Research in the Social Sciences*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, chap. 2 and 14.

March 25 (session 6): **Causal mechanisms and multi-method research**

Goertz, Gary. 2017. *Multimethod Research, Causal Mechanisms, and Case Studies*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, chap.5, 6 and 7.

April 1 (Session 7): **QCA analysis: special session with Dr. Manuel Fischer (EAWAG and University of Bern)**

Gerring, John. 2012. *Social Science Methodology: A Unified Framework*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.342-358.

Goertz, Gary. 2017. *Multimethod Research, Causal Mechanisms, and Case Studies*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, chap. 4.

*****Second paper due on Monday April 6 by 9 am *****

April 8 (Session 8): **Debrief/ discussion on second paper**

April 15: **No class – Easter Break**

April 22 (Session 9): **Concepts and measurement: a broad sweep**

Goertz, Gary and James Mahoney. 2012. *A Tale of Two Cultures. Qualitative and Quantitative Research in the Social Sciences*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, chap. 10, 11, 12 and 13.

Johnson, Janet B. and H.T. Reynolds. 2005. *Political Science Research Methods*. Washington: CQ Press, chap. 6.

April 29 (Session 10): **Data set construction: the example of the Design of Trade Agreements (DESTA) data base with Prof. Manfred Elsig (Univ. of Bern)**

<https://www.designoftradeagreements.org/>

May 6 (Session 11): **Index construction**

Preparatory assignment: Think of one issue / topic / domain in international affairs that would benefit from the existence of an index and where none already exists. How would you proceed to fill the gap? Come in class with one page summary of your thinking.

De Sousa, Luis 2019. Measuring the enforcement capacity of political financing supervisory bodies. *European Political Science* 18: 189-204.

May 13 (Session 12): **No class**

*****Third (full) paper due on Tuesday May 12 by 9am *****

May 20 (Session 13): **In class assignment**

May 27 (Session 14): **Conclusion: debriefs of papers and exams**

CD, January 2020