

RESEARCH SEMINAR

2018

Instructor:

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PLAN OF THE COURSE

Work schedule

This course is aimed at helping students develop research and writing skills. For this purpose, the attention will focus on the two main phases of the dissertation process: designing the research and writing the manuscript. We will focus on the nuts and bolts of dissertation research design from topic choice to the development of theory and data collection. In the last part, the students will present their research and receive feedback.

1. Introduction (October)

Introduction to the basic concepts of research design: Defining research question and problem, specifying concepts and theory, operationalization and measurement, selecting cases and observations, controlling for alternative explanations, drawing theoretical conclusions from empirical analysis.

Reading:

- * Silbergh, chapters 1 and 2 (pp. 1-49).
- * Van Evera, pages 89-96.
- * King, Keohane, and Verba, pages 3-28.

2. Choosing a dissertation topic (October)

How can we choose the research topic? What is the difference between a topic and a question? What is a good research question? What is a puzzle? How do we come up with questions/puzzles? How do we search and relate to the relevant literature? What is generalizability? Why is it important?

Reading:

- * Bert Useem, "Choosing a dissertation topic", (PS, Jun 1997), available at http://www.apsanet.org/content_12965.cfm
- * Van Evera, pages 97-99.
- * Thomas and Brubaker, chapter 4 (pp. 47-62).

3. Theory building (November)

This class focuses on defining key concepts, specifying theory, identifying variables, operationalization and measurement. What is the difference between descriptive and causal inference? What is a causal argument? What is a theory in social sciences?

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What are the dependent and independent variables? What is operationalization? How do we define and measure our variables?

Reading:

- * Van Evera, chapter 1 (pp 7-48).
- * Thomas and Brubaker, chapters 5 and 6 (pp. 63-88).
- * King, Keohane and Verba, pp. 34-90.
- * Colin Elman. "Explanatory Typologies in Qualitative Studies of International Politics." *International Organization* 59, 2 (2005): 293-326.

4. Data analysis and refining the theory (November 20th)

How do we process our data? What is a theoretical conclusion? How do we draw theoretical conclusions from the data? How can we develop our theory further? What do we mean by 'controlling for alternative explanations'? Why does it matter?

Reading:

*Thomas and Brubaker, pp. 221-240.

*Silbergh, pp. 89-152.

5. Writing the chapters and stylistic points (November)

What to keep in mind when writing the remaining chapters, how to present the findings, proper citation and presentation styles.

a. Literature review

b. Introduction

c. Conclusion

d. Abstract

e. Bibliography, citations, footnotes, tables, figures, etc.

Reading:

*Silbergh, pp. 73-89.

*Phil Race, *The Student's Guide to Preparing Dissertations and Theses*, RoutledgeFalmer, New York, 2004.

6. Academic presentation (December)

This portion of the research seminar focuses on the role of case study method in developing valuable policy advice. Students will be introduced into the strategies of case selection, the typology of research designs and the means of collecting evidence within the framework of single-case and comparative case study method. There will be several 'building blocks' of the seminar. The first section will include the discussion of theory and methodology of case study research in policy analysis. The second portion will consist of developing and implementing single and multiple-case analyses with the goal of generating valuable policy advice.

The structure of each seminar will consist of live discussions with the course instructor where methodological issues of case selection and case analysis will be addressed. The remaining time of each seminar will be devoted to group discussion and presentations, where students will receive an extended feedback on their ongoing research. Additional feedback will be provided by the course instructor no later than one week after the due date of written assignments. Students will be free to request additional feedback both in class and via email.

7 RESEARCH PROPOSAL

These part will be in the format of student thesis presentations. Every week, 1-2 students will present their ongoing thesis work. We will discuss in class what needs to be done to improve the research projects and how to proceed.

The recommended structure of your research proposal.

1. The proposed title of your thesis.
2. Your research question. Please, formulate it in the form of a question with an open answer. As we discussed it several times it is a key to your success. Short rendering of the research question into the topic of your research. If necessary, short expose of your puzzle and/or the state of expertise in your field.
3. Proper conceptualization of your subject matter and its aspects. Key concepts of your study.
4. Operationalization of your key concepts.
5. Establishment of the units of research.

6. Selection of a case or cases. Spatial and temporal dimensions of your cases. Please, clarify requirements of time and space in your research.
 7. Clarification of the context. Probability of passing over the context or the need to undertake contextual analysis.
 8. Formulation of the hypothesis or hypotheses.
 9. Selection of your research instruments.
 10. Your units of observation and analysis. Selection of variables. Separation of variables into dependent and independent ones. Likely interdependence of variables.
 11. Transforming operationalized concepts into units of measurement. Your instruments of measurement, analysis or interpretation.
 12. Your research strategy. Sequencing of the main stages of research.
 13. Expected complications in the course of research.
 14. Expected outcomes. Types and degrees of their validity.
- If you feel you have to add or skip anything, please, justify.

GRADING

The final grade for this course will be jointly calculated by the grades of both instructors in the following manner:

Thesis presentations: 50%

Proposal development: 12,5 %

Case analysis: 15%

Policy brief: 10%

Attendance: 12,5 %

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Essential reading:

* George, Alexander, and Andrew Bennett. *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*. MIT Press, 2005.

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* King, Gary; Robert Keohane and Sidney Verba. *Designing Social Inquiry*. Princeton University Press, 1994.

* Silbergh, David M. *Doing Dissertations in Politics: A Student Guide*. Routledge, 2001.

* Thomas, Murray R. and Dale L. Brubaker. *Theses and Dissertations: A Guide to Planning, Research, and Writing*. Bergin & Garvey, 2000.

* Van Evera, Stephen. *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science*. Cornell University Press, 1997.

Additional reading:

*Becker, Howard S., *Writing for Social Scientists: How to Start and Finish Your Thesis, Book, or Article*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986.

*Booth, Wayne C., Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams. *The Craft of Research*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.

- *Hall, Peter A. "Helpful Hints for Writing Dissertations in Comparative Politics." *PS: Political Science and Politics* (December 1990): 596-98.
- *Krathwohl, David R. *How to Prepare a Research Proposal: Guidelines for Funding and Dissertations in the Social and Behavioral Sciences*. 3d ed. Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1988.
- *Madsen, David. *Successful Dissertations and Theses: A Guide to Graduate Student Research from Proposal to Completion*. San Francisco: Jossey- Bass, 1992.
- *Mauch, James E., and Jack W. Birch. *Guide to the Successful Thesis and Dissertation: Conception to Publication: A Handbook for Students and Faculty*. 3d ed. New York: M. Dekker, 1993.
- *Meloy, Judith M. *Writing the Qualitative Dissertation: Understanding by Doing*. Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum, 1994.
- *Miller, Joan I., and Bruce J. Taylor, *The Thesis Writer's Handbook: A Complete One-Source Guide for Writers of Research Papers*. West Linn, Oregon: Alcove, 1987.
- *Rudestam, Kjell, Erik Newton, and Rae R. Newton. *Surviving Your Dissertation: A Comprehensive Guide to Content and Process*. Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage, 1992.
- *Sternberg, David. *How to Complete and Survive a Doctoral Dissertation*. New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 1981.
- *Watson, George. *Writing a Thesis: A Guide to Long Essays and Dissertations*. New York: Longman, 1987.