Research Design in Political Science
790:532, Rutgers University, Spring 2016
Tuesdays, 3-5:40pm, Hickman 313

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Office hours: M & W 3-5:30; Th 1-3; and immediately following class

This class is for incoming graduate students and is designed to guide students through some of the theoretical, methodological, and practical issues associated with the development of research design in the discipline of political science (and social sciences more broadly). We will focus on two related questions throughout the course: how do we, as social scientists, know what we know? And, how do scholars distinguish between more and less convincing research?

The first question invokes some understanding of philosophy of science but, more importantly for our purposes, the practicalities of how scholars decide which theories, tools, methods, and approaches to employ in researching specific phenomena. The second question involves developing a broad understanding of rigor in research design and a sympathetic skepticism about research conclusions – skepticism because of the challenges all researchers face in knowledge-production, and sympathy because even the best research designs have limitations.

Upon completion of the course, you should be more comfortable reading and assessing the research design of published work, and have an enhanced ability to develop your own research design.

The readings are broad and varied and my expectation is that you will come to class well prepared to discuss, ask questions and contribute to advancing the collective wisdom of the class.

Requirements:
Class participation (25%): This is not a lecture course. Seminar time will primarily involve a group effort to understand the class material and engage in lively and, I hope, productive discussion. Every student should be prepared to state the primary questions that the readings are addressing, to identify any contradictions or controversies raised by them, and to share any key questions or observations that emerged for you as you read. You should be familiar with all of the required readings.

Presentation of the recommended readings and discussion leaders (25%): I have divided the class into three groups. Every third week, your group will be responsible for presenting the main issues raised by the recommended readings, and for posing questions to the class that help guide our discussion on the most important issues posed by the required readings that week (each group will be responsible for four weeks). When it is your week to present, you can divide up the recommended readings however your group chooses (in other words, you don’t all have to be prepared to present everything). I will usually begin with the general discussion of the readings and leave the presentation of the recommended readings for the last part of class.
Final paper (50%): The final paper for this class should be related to your (current) research interests. You should identify a limited area of the discipline (preferably within the subfield that interests you most) and identify a question or set of questions for which there exists a body of empirical work. Your task is to identify three or four works from that area that make use of three to four different research designs. You then will then assess the benefits and drawbacks of each research approach, using the terms and concepts covered in this course. Finally, you will lay out a plan for what you would see as an ideal research design, along with an argument for how this project would better advance our knowledge about this area of scholarship.

Required texts:


Recommended:


Week-by-Week Schedule

Week 1, January 19: Introduction and course overview


**Recommended:**


Week 2, Jan. 26: Research Design Basics


**Recommended:**


Week 3, Feb. 2: Philosophical foundations of social science, building knowledge (Group 1)

Logical Positivism:

Falsificationism:

Naturalism and Anti-naturalism:

Critical Theory:


Recommended:
Week 4, Feb. 9: Consensus and conflict in research cultures (Group 2)

Goertz and Mahoney, *A Tale of Two Cultures*, Chapters 1-9


Recommended:


Week 5, Feb. 16: Concepts and concept formation (Group 3)


Recommended:

DUE FEB 23: PAPER TOPIC

Week 6, Feb. 23: Description and Interpretation in the Social Sciences (Group 1)


Kubik, Jan. 2009. “Introducing Rigor to the Teaching of Interpretive Methods.” In Qualitative and Multi-Method Research, Spring, pp. 11-17 (Also read the introduction and skim the rest of the articles in this symposium).

Recommended:


Week 7, March 1: Explanation and Causality (Group 2)


Recommended:


Campbell, Donald T., and Julian C. Stanley. 1963. Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Designs for Research, pp. 5-22 (especially 5-13) & 34-42 & 64-68.


Week 8, March 8: Experiments, Causality and Mechanisms (Group 3)


Campbell, Donald T., and Julian C. Stanley. 1963. Experimental and Quasi-Experimental Designs for Research, pp. 5-22 (especially 5-13) & 34-42 & 64-68.


Recommended:


March 16: Spring Break, No Class

Week 9, March 22: Case Studies (Group 1)


**Recommended:**


Rihoux, Benoit, and Giselle De Meur. 2009. “Crisp-Set Qualitative Comparative Analysis (csQCA).” In Configurational Comparative Methods. Qualitative
Comparative Analysis (QCA) and Related Techniques, Benoit Rihoux and Charles Ragin, eds. London: Sage, pp. 33-68.


**DUE MARCH 29: BIBLIOGRAPHY OF STUDIES TO EXAMINE**
(Although I highly recommend turning this in earlier)

**Week 10, March 29: Historical Approaches and Process Tracing (Group 2)**


**Recommended:**


Hall, Peter. 2003. “Aligning Ontology and Methodology in Comparative Research.” In *Comparative Historical Analysis and Social Sciences*, James Mahoney and


**Week 11, April 5: Field Research Part I, Surveys and Sampling (Group 3)**


**Recommended:**


**Week 12, April 12: Field Research Part II, Interviews, Group 1**


**Recommended:**


**DUE APRIL 19: FIRST DRAFT OF PAPER**

**Week 13, April 19: Field Research, Part III: Ethnography, Group 2**


**Recommended:**


**Week 14, April 26: Field Research, Part IV: Archival and content analysis (Group 3)**


**Recommended:**


DUE MAY 10: FINAL PAPER