

Introduction to Research

Master in Political Science

Academic year 2023-2024, Fall semester

10 ECTS

Mondays and Wednesdays, 11.30 to 14.00

Coordinator

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Faculty

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Introduction

The module introduces students to the principles of research design in mainstream political science. We begin with a brief introduction to the social science. We pay especial attention to quality standards and elements of a research and an article. We devote several sessions to conducting and writing a literature review. We examine the purpose of theories, approaches to generating theories and ways of evaluating their validity. We discuss the purpose and nature of testable hypotheses; how to derive hypotheses from theories; how to test competing hypotheses; how to measure theoretical constructs; and what to do (and not to do) with empirical evidence. We devote a session to academic writing with a focus on research proposals. Finally, we explore how different styles of testing hypotheses may be used to help us make valid causal inferences.

The course will not cover interpretive methods in the discipline. If you're interested in exploring this approach to research, a good place to start is Yanow & Schwarz-Shea, *Interpretation and Method: Empirical Research Methods and the Interpretive Turn* (2015, Routledge).

Course objectives

The module strives to provide students with the methodological tools required to design research projects in political science. In more practical terms, the module's goal is that each student prepares an original research proposal for their Master's thesis.

The module provides an overview of the different stages of research (e.g., defining a research problem; reviewing the literature; operationalizing concepts), anticipates potential obstacles in

the research process and offers possible workarounds as discussed in the literature. Within the module, faculty members will present their ongoing projects, with an emphasis on linking important research questions to adequate research strategies.

The module is non-substantive in nature; in other words, we are not directly concerned with specific substantive areas of research in political science. Instead, the focus is epistemological, and the examples of research employed throughout the module are directed at methodological rather than substantive issues.

The module is the precursor to Research Methods (spring semester) which is focused on applied research techniques, both quantitative and qualitative.

Prerequisites

Students enrolled in this module are expected to hold a degree in political science or a social science discipline.

Reference handbook:

- Toshkov, D. (2016). Research design in political science. Bloomsbury Publishing.

Skills

- Generate innovative research ideas.
- Write an original research proposal for your MA thesis.
- Identify the main methodological difficulties that arise in political analysis and be able to deal with them using existing tools.
- Evaluate reports, documents and research carried out by third parties.
- Demonstrate reading comprehension of scientific texts in English.

Assessment

To be assessed, you need to attend 80% of the sessions. It is at the discretion of professors to call the roll or not.

Your participation during the classes and in the tutorial sessions accounts for **10%** of your final grade

For this course, you need to submit 3 written assignments.

-Assignment 1: first research proposal outline: research question and hypotheses. **20%** Due on **October 30**. Extension: about 500-800 words.

-Assignment 2: Essay on qualitative methodology. **20%**. Due on **November 29**. Extension: about 2000 words.

-Assignment 3. Students will write a research proposal at the end of the course (**50%**). Due on **January 1**. Extension: about 3000 words.

Program and contents

You may also consult the course schedule on the Calendar of the Master's program.

1. 02/10/2023 Monday . Introduction: What is science, what is a social science research. General quality principles and good practices. *Carol Galais*.
 - Recommended readings:
 - Mirya Holman's pre-submission checklist.
2. 04/10/2023 Wednesday. Anatomy of a paper. *Carol Galais*.
 - Recommended readings:
 - Baglione, L. (2008). Doing good and doing well: Teaching research-paper writing by unpacking the paper. PS: Political Science & Politics, 41(3), 595-602.
3. 09/10/2023 Monday . Research questions. *Carol Galais*.
 - Recommended readings:
 - Firebaugh, G. (2008). Seven rules for social research. Princeton University Press. Chapter 1.
4. 11/10/2023 Wednesday. Literature review. *Carol Galais*.
 - Recommended readings:
 - Pacheco-Vega (2018): Writing theoretical frameworks, analytical frameworks and conceptual frameworks.
5. 16/10/2023 Monday. From theories to hypotheses. *Carol Galais*.
 - Recommended readings:
 - Syed Imran Ali (2012) What is hypothesis and how to prepare it?
6. 18/10/2023 Wednesday. Conceptualization & operationalization (I). *Eva Anduiza*.
7. 23/10/2023 Monday. Conceptualization & operationalization (II). *Eva Anduiza*.
8. 25/10/2023 Wednesday. Principles of Research Design. *Carol Galais*.
 - Recommended readings:
 - Unal, Murat. (2022). Identification. The key to credible causal inference
9. 30/10/2023 Monday. Quantitative research designs (I). Observational research. *Carol Galais*
 - Recommended readings:
 - Angrist, J. D., & Pischke, J. S. (2014). *Mastering'metrics: The path from cause to effect*. Princeton university press. Chapter 5, "Differences-in-differences."

10. 06/11/2023 Monday. Quantitative research designs (II). Quasi-experimental methods. *Carol Galais*

- Recommended readings:
 - Cattaneo, M. D., Idrobo, N., & Titiunik, R. (2019). *A practical introduction to regression discontinuity designs: Foundations*. Cambridge University Press. Draft of Cambridge Elements text, available [here](#)

11. 08/11/2023 Wednesday. Social media data and political research . *Roger Soler*

- Recommended readings:
 - Barberá, P., & Steinert-Threlkeld, Z. (2020). How to use social media data for political science research. In L. Curini & R. Franzese (eds.) *The SAGE Handbook of Research Methods in Political Science and International Relations*. Sage.
 - Foster, I., Ghani, R., Jarmin, R. S., Kreuter, F., & Lane, J. (Eds.). (2020). *Big data and social science: data science methods and tools for research and practice*. CRC Press. Chapter 1 "Introduction".

12. 13/11/2023 Monday. Introduction to qualitative research. *Roger Soler*

- Recommended readings:
 - Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 105–117). Sage.
 - John Gerring (2017) *Qualitative Methods*. *Annual Review of Political Science* 20(1), 15-36. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-092415-024158>
 - Pierson, P. (2007). The Costs of Marginalization: Qualitative Methods in the Study of American Politics. *Comparative Political Studies*, 40(2), 146–169. <https://doi-org.are.uab.cat/10.1177/0010414006296347>

13. 15/11/2023 Wednesday. The ethnographic approach in political science. *Roger Soler*

- Recommended readings:
 - Boswell, J., Corbett, J., Dommett, K., Jennings, W., Flinders, M., Rhodes, R.A.W. and Wood, M. (2019), State of the field: What can political ethnography tell us about anti-politics and democratic disaffection?. *European Journal of Political Research*, 58: 56-71. <https://doi-org.are.uab.cat/10.1111/1475-6765.12270>
 - Kwame Harrison, A. (2018). *Ethnography, Understanding Qualitative Research*. Oxford Academic. Chapter 1 'Introduction to Ethnography' <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780199371785.003.0001>

14. 20/11/2023 Monday. Participatory action research. *Roger Soler*

- Recommended readings:

- Martí, J., Villasante, T.R. Quality in Action Research: Reflections for Second-Order Inquiry. *Systemic Practice and Action Research*, 22, 383–396 (2009). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11213-009-9136-x>
 - Vaughn, L. M., & Jacquez, F. (2020). Participatory Research Methods – Choice Points in the Research Process. *Journal of Participatory Research Methods*, 1(1). <https://doi.org/10.35844/001c.13244>
15. 22/11/2023 Wednesday. Mixed-Methods research designs. *Roger Soler*
- Recommended readings:
 - Small, M. (2011). How to Conduct a Mixed Methods Study: Recent Trends in a Rapidly Growing Literature. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 37, 57-86. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.soc.012809.102657>
 - Tzagkarakis, S.I., Kritas, D. (2023) Mixed research methods in political science and governance: approaches and applications. *Quality & Quantity*, 57 (S1), 39–53. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-022-01384-y>
16. 27/11/2023 Monday. Experimental research (I). *Eva Anduiza*.
17. 29/11/2023.Wednesday. Experimental research (II). *Eva Anduiza*.
18. 04/12/2023 Monday. Tutorial Session (I). *Carol Galais*.
19. 11/12/2023 Monday. Tutorial Session (II) *Carol Galais*.
20. 13/12/2023 Wednesday. Tutorial Session (III) *Carol Galais*.
21. 18/12/2023 Monday. Getting started with STATA (I) *Dani Marinova*
22. 20/12/2023 Wednesday. Getting started with STATA (II) *Dani Marinova*