

**Fundamentals of Political and Social Research**  
Universitat Pompeu Fabra  
Fall Quarter 2019

**Instructor:** Enrique Hernández ([enrique.hernandez@uab.cat](mailto:enrique.hernandez@uab.cat))

### **1. Course overview**

This course covers basic issues in epistemology and research design. We will ask the broader question of how one can generate useful knowledge in the social sciences. The first part of the course will focus on theory construction and the generation of causal arguments. The second part of the course will examine topics in empirical research design and hypothesis testing. Throughout the course, the students will work on the step-by-step formulation of their own research designs.

### **2. Objectives of the course**

The aims of the course are the following:

- To become acquainted with some basic debates in the history of social research
- To learn about the key issues in methodology and research design
- To write an initial research proposal
- To empower post-graduate students to choose their own approach to research

### **3. Evaluation**

The evaluation will consist of five elements:

- Two short written assignments (1-2 pages). Due in weeks 4 and 6 (15%).
- In class active participation (10%).
- Student-led discussions: Each class, two students will help the professor conduct the discussion. A sign-up sheet will be circulated in the first day of class (10%).
- Presentations: Each student will deliver two short presentations, in weeks 5 and 9/10 (15%).
- Final assignment: Students will write a short research proposal (8-10 pages) at the end of the course (50%). **Due on January 10<sup>th</sup>.**

### **4. General guidelines to write a research proposal**

Przeworski, Adam and Frank Salomon (1988/1995). "The Art of Writing Proposals: Some Candid Suggestions for Applicants to Social Science Research Council Competitions." Memo published by the Social Science Research Council. [Link](#)

Guidelines for writing a research proposal for a PhD in the Department of Political and Social Sciences. European University Institute. [Link](#)

### **5. Course organization**

The course is divided into two groups:

- Group 1 (Tuesdays from 9 to 12 at room 13.006): For those of you with limited prior experience with research design and research methods.
- Group 2 (Fridays from 9 to 12 at room 13.106): For those of you who have already taken courses on research design either at the undergraduate or post-graduate level

While the contents covered in each of the groups will be very similar and the assignments will be exactly the same, some of the readings will differ between the two groups.

Students are expected to read the readings assigned to each session. When different readings are assigned to each of the groups this is clearly specified in the syllabus. In any case, all students are encouraged to read all the readings.

## PART I: BUILDING THEORIES

### 1. On science: Paradigms, advance, and vocation.

Everyone: Hay, Colin. (2002). Political analysis. A critical introduction. Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke. Pp. 1-66

Everyone: Schwartz, Martin A. (2008). The importance of stupidity in scientific research. Journal of Cell Science 121, 1771–1771.

### 2. Selecting research questions.

Group 1: Toshkov, Dimiter. (2016). Research design in political science. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan. Chapter 2

Group 2: Geddes, Barbara (2003). *Paradigms and Sand Castles: Theory Building and Research Design in Comparative Politics*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. Chapter 2

Everyone: Gustafsson, Karl., Hagström, Linus. (2018). What is the point? Teaching graduate students how to construct political science research puzzles. European Political Science 17, 634–648

Everyone: Firebaugh, Glenn. (2007), *Seven Rules for Social Research*, Princeton: Princeton University Press. Chapter 1

**Assignment 1:** Formulate your own original research question. It must be related to a topic you have read about in political science or sociology. Write one page presenting a puzzle and making a convincing claim about why you think it is important. It is not necessary, but you can very briefly explain what is the main current view in the literature about this topic and discuss why this view may be wrong, incomplete or might need further development. **Due on: week 4.**

### 3. Building theories.

Group 1: Toshkov, Dimiter. (2016). Research design in political science. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan. Chapter 3

Group 2: Lave, Charles and James March (1975). *An Introduction to Models in the Social Sciences*, New York: Harper & Row. Chapters 1, 2, 3.

Everyone: Swedberg, Richard (2016). Before theory comes theorizing or how to make social science more interesting. The British Journal of Sociology 67, 5–22

#### Additional readings:

Kohli, A., Evans, P., Katzenstein, P.J., Przeworski, A., Rudolph, S.H., Scott, J.C., Skocpol, T., (1995). "The Role of Theory in Comparative Politics: A Symposium." World Politics 48, 1–49.

#### 4. Causality and the experimental benchmark.

Group 1: Toshkov, Dimiter. (2016). Research design in political science. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan. Chapters 6-7

Group 2: Angrist, Joshua and Jorn-Steffen Pischke (2009). *Mostly Harmless Econometrics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Chapters 1-2.

Everyone: Gelman, Andrew., Imbens, Guido., (2013) Why ask Why? Forward Causal Inference and Reverse Causal Questions. National Bureau of Economic Research, Cambridge, MA.

Everyone: OMFG Exogenous Variation! Or, Can You Find God Nails When You Find An Indonesian Politics Hammer [[Link to blogpost](#)]

Everyone: Is theory getting lost in the “identification revolution”? [[Link to blogpost](#)]

Additional readings:

Everyone: Kocher, M.A., Monteiro, N.P., (2016). Lines of Demarcation: Causation, Design-Based Inference, and Historical Research. *Perspectives on Politics* 14, 952–975

**Assignment 2**: Propose a hypothesis related to your research question. Specify what is the dependent variable, what is the main independent variable, what is the process linking the two and discuss alternative explanations for your outcome. The assignment should be no longer than one page. **Due on: week 6**

## PART II: TESTING THEORIES

#### 5. Conceptualization, operationalization and measurement.

Group 1: Toshkov, Dimiter. (2016). Research design in political science. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan. Pp. 83-122

Group 2: Goertz, G., Mahoney, J., (2012). A tale of two cultures: qualitative and quantitative research in the social sciences. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Pp. 127-177

Everyone: Adcock, R. (2001). “Measurement validity: A shared standard for qualitative and quantitative research.” *American Political Science Review*, 95(3): 529-546.

**Students presentations 1**: In pairs, pick one of the experimental articles of the list available in the Campus Global. Prepare a short (5-10) minutes presentation addressing the following questions: (i) what is the research question; (ii) why did the authors use an experiment?; (iii) which hypotheses did the authors test?; (iv) which type of experiment did the authors use (field, natural, lab, survey)?; (v) what was the treatment(s)?; What was the control group?; (vi) assess the internal and external validity of the experiment.

#### 6. The logic of large-N designs: Strengths and pitfalls.

Group 1: Toshkov, Dimiter. (2016). Research design in political science. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan. Chapter 8

Group 2: Keele, L., (2015). “The Statistics of Causal Inference: A View from Political

Methodology". *Political Analysis* 23, 313–335.

Everyone: Freedman, D.A., (1991). "Statistical Models and Shoe Leather." *Sociological Methodology* 21, 291–313.

Additional readings:

Bernardi, F., Chakhaia, L., Leopold, L., (2017). "Sing Me a Song with Social Significance: The (Mis)Use of Statistical Significance Testing in European Sociological Research." *European Sociological Review* 33, 1–15.

Keele, L., Stevenson, R.T., Elwert, F., (2019). The causal interpretation of estimated associations in regression models. *Political Science Research and Methods*.

**7. The logic of small-N comparative designs: Strengths and pitfalls.**

Everyone: Toshkov, Dimiter. (2016). *Research design in political science*. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan. Chapter 9

Everyone: Collier, David. (1993). The comparative Method. In Ada W. Finifter (editor). *Political Science: The State of the Discipline II*. Washington, D.C.: American Political Science Association

Everyone: Bartolini, Stefano. 1993. On Time and Comparative Research. *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 5, 131–167.

**8. The logic of single case studies: Strengths and pitfalls (+ Mixed methods)**

Everyone: Toshkov, Dimiter. (2016). *Research design in political science*. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan. Chapter 10

Everyone: Collier, David. (2011). "Understanding Process Tracing". *PS: Political Science & Politics* 44, 823–830

Everyone: Seawright, J., (2016). *Multi-method social science: combining qualitative and quantitative tools, Strategies for social inquiry*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press. Chapter 1

**9. Selection of cases.**

Everyone: Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, Sidney Verba (1994). *Designing Social Enquiry*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Chapter 4.

Everyone: Seawright, J., & Gerring, J. (2008). Case Selection Techniques in Case Study Research. A Menu of Qualitative and Quantitative Options. *Political Research Quarterly*, 61(2), 294–308.

Everyone: Geddes, Barbara (2003). *Paradigms and Sand Castles: Theory Building and Research Design in Comparative Politics*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press. Chapter 3

- **Start of student presentations** of research designs

**10. Presentations of research designs.**

- *Continuation of student presentations*

## Group 1 schedule

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Week	Tuesday (Group 1)	Important deadlines and tasks
1	01/10/2019: S1 On science: Paradigms...	
2	08/10/2019: S2 Selecting RQ	
3	15/10/2019: S3 Building theories	17/10/2019: Select and email experiment for 5th week presentation.
4	22/10/2019: S4 Causality and experimental benchmark	24/10/2019: Research question assignment (assignment 1)
5	29/10/2019: S5 Conceptualization, operationalization...	In class: Experiment presentations
6	05/11/2019: S6 Large-N designs	08/11/2019: Hypothesis assignment (assignment 2)
7	12/11/2019: S7 Small-N comparative	
8	19/11/2019: S8 Single case studies	
9	26/11/2019: S9 Selection of cases	In class: Design (final) presentations
10	03/12/2019: Presentation of research designs	In class: Design (final) presentations

Classroom: 13.006

## Group 2 schedule

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Week	Friday (Group 2)	Deadlines and tasks
1	27/09/2019: S1 On Science: Paradigms...	
2	04/10/2019: S2 Selecting RQ	
3	11/10/2019: S3 Building theories	12/10/2019: Select and email experiment for 5th week presentation.
4	18/10/2019: S4 Causality and experimental benchmark	20/10/2019: Research question assignment (assignment 1)
5	25/10/2019: S5 Conceptualization, operationalization...	In class: Experiment presentations
6	8/11/2019: S6 Large-N designs	11/11/2019: Hypothesis assignment (assignment 2)
7	15/11/2019: S7 Small-N comparative	
8	22/11/2019: S8 Single case studies	
9	29/11/2019: S9 Selection of cases	In class: Design (final) presentations
10	13/12/2019: Presentation of research designs.	In class: Design (final) presentations

Classroom: 13.106