Introduction to Research Design & Methods

Course no. 4460
Winter 2012

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R223

Monday/Wednesday
0800-0950 or 1300-1450
ING-323 or ING-263

1 Goals
The goal of this course is to aid you in designing your thesis project. You will come out of this class with a finished and approved proposal for your thesis. The readings and assignments for this class are all geared towards that one goal. The readings will help give you a solid grounding in some basic principles of social science methodology, and provide you as well with some examples of applied research methods. The written assignments are designed as ‘building blocks’ for your thesis proposal. Doing the readings, participating in discussions and working hard on the written assignments will all help a great deal as you start your thesis research. At the end of the course, you will all present your research proposals to the rest of the class.

2 Grading
This course is graded Pass/Fail. Whether you pass depends on the following:

1. Doing the reading and participating in discussion
2. Written Assignments
3. Presentation of Thesis Proposal

In the end, how much effort you devote to this course will have a much bigger impact than the grade alone, since putting in work now will make the thesis process much, much easier.

3 Assignments
All readings are available by clicking on the links in this syllabus. Updates to the syllabus and other relevant announcements will be posted at [http://jonathanrenshon.com/Site/Teaching](http://jonathanrenshon.com/Site/Teaching)

All written assignments should be turned in in hard copy in my mailbox by 3pm the day that they are due. Obviously, there will be a wide range of theses, on different topics, for different audiences, etc. Your goal should be to write in the style and format that is appropriate (this is something you should be discussing with your advisors) for your audience, but will stand up to scrutiny from academics (i.e., other professors).
1. Thesis Proposal (beta version)

- **Due:** 28 January
- **Length:** 1-2 pages
- **Description:** This is due quite early in the quarter, so the goal is simple: write a short paper describing your proposed thesis topic (or your best idea, if you haven’t yet decided on a topic). Every paper should include a discussion of:
  (a) Question- what question are you attempting to answer?
  (b) Significance- why should readers care about this question or topic?
  Note that you do not need to know the ‘answer’ yet, so please do not focus on what the thesis will conclude. This is a preliminary record of your thoughts, in organized form. There will be plenty of time to revise and improve your proposal over the course of the quarter.

2. Literature Review + Research Design

- **Due:** 20 February
- **Length:** 2-4 pages
- **Description:** This paper should have three sections:
  (a) Overview: A few sentences giving the reader an overview of your project. What are you going to be writing about?
  (b) Literature Review: Identify and discuss the key bodies of knowledge and scholarship relevant to your research topic. We will talk in class about resources that might be useful, but I would also suggest getting an early start in meeting with your advisors and other faculty members who may be able to point you in the right directions.
  (c) Research Design: This section should propose a ‘plan of attack’ for the methodology you plan to use in your thesis. Which method will you use? What about that method is well-suited towards your research goals and questions? Are there alternative methods that might be useful? Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of that methodology as it relates to your research.

3. Completed Thesis Proposal (signed and approved by your two advisors)

- **Due:** 13 March
- **Description:** You will be working closely with your advisors by this point, who will tell you the format they prefer for thesis proposals. However, samples of some previous proposals can be seen here, here, here, here, & here.

4 Background Readings

**Writing**


Writing it Up (2006), Marc Trachtenberg, *The Craft of International History*, pp. 183-197

### Visualizing and Presenting Data


How to Display Data Badly (1984), Howard Wainer, *The American Statistician* 38/2: 137-147


### 5 Schedule

7 January
Intro class (no readings)

9 January
Research Design I


14 January
Research Design II


- The Levels of Analysis Problem in International Relations (1961), J. David Singer, *World Politics* 14/1: 77-92

16 January
Research Design III

- Symposium on Designing Social Inquiry


Bridging the Quantitative-Qualitative Divide in Political Science (1995), Sidney Tarrow, *American Political Science Review* 89/2: 457-460


21 January
NO CLASS

22 January (Shift Day Schedule. Note that this class takes place on a Tuesday)
Case Studies I

- How Not to Lie Without Statistics (2008), Gary King and Eleanor Powell

23 January
Case Studies II

- Process Tracing and Causal Inference (2010), Andrew Bennett, in *Rethinking Social Inquiry*, pp. 207-219

28 January
Case Studies III

- Audience Costs: An Historical Analysis (2012), Marc Trachtenberg, *Security Studies* 21/1: 3-42

30 January
Counterfactuals

• Counterfactual Thought Experiments in World Politics (1996), Philip Tetlock & Aaron Belkin, *Counterfactual Thought Experiments in World Politics: Logical, Methodological and Psychological Perspectives*, pp. 3-38

4 February
Formal Theory I


  + responses:


6 February
Formal Theory II


• Formal Models of International Politics (2004), Duncan Snidal, in *Models, Numbers and Cases*, pp. 227-264


11 February
Quantitative Methods I


• The Promise and Peril of Statistics in International Relations (2004), Bear Braumoeller and Anne Sartori, in *Models, Numbers and Cases*, pp. 129-151

• The Difference Between “Significant” and “Not Significant” is Not Itself Statistically Significant (2006), Andrew Gelman and Hal Stern, *The American Statistician* 60/4: 328-331

13 February
Quantitative Methods II

• Autocratic Audience Costs: Regime Type and Signaling Resolve (2008), Jessica Weeks, *International Organization* 62/1: 35-64
18 February
NO CLASS (President’s Day)
Starting a Project

• Starting a Project (2006), Marc Trachtenberg, *The Craft of International History*, pp. 169-182

• Identifying the Scholarly Literature (2006), Marc Trachtenberg, *The Craft of International History*, pp. 199-216


Optional:

20 February
Experiments

• Lab Experiments are a Major Source of Knowledge in the Social Sciences (2009), Armin Falk and James Heckman, *Science* 326: 535-538


25 February
Natural Experiments


• From Ancién Regime to Capitalism: The Spread of the French Revolution as a Natural Experiment (2011), Daron Acemoglu, Davide Cantoni, Simon Johnson & James Robinson, in *Natural Experiments of History*, pp. 221-256


27 February
Threats to Inference I

• Seeing What We Want to See: Motivational Determinants of Belief (1993), Thomas Gilovich, *How We Know What Isn’t So*, pp. 75-87


4 March  
Threats to Inference II

• Complexity and the Analysis of Political and Social Life (1997), Robert Jervis, *Political Science Quarterly* 112/4: 569-593

• How the Cases You Choose Affect the Answers You Get: Selection Bias in Comparative Politics (1990), Barbara Geddes, *Political Analysis* 2/1: 131-150

6 March  
Threats to Inference III

• Selection Bias in Qualitative Research (1996), David Collier and James Mahoney, *World Politics* 49/1: 56-91

• A Pragmatic Guide to Qualitative Historical Analysis in the Study of International Relations (2002), Cameron Thies, *International Studies Perspectives* 3: 351-372

11 March  
Presentations I

13 March  
Presentations II

18 March  
Presentations III