Introduction

The focus of this course will be on the logic of inquiry in the social sciences in general. General elements of research design and philosophy of social science will be debated, while details of the various specific methods one can apply will be discussed in separate courses, on qualitative methods and on quantitative methods.

Many of the topics discussed in this course are controversial—practitioners of social science research disagree on fundamental issues of research methods, design, interpretation, epistemology, inferences, etc. The course will stimulate a critical view towards methods and you are encouraged to be critical in your writings for the course and your participation during the course meetings. While the assignments can be written from different points of view and while debate is encouraged, the course does provide a somewhat more positivist perspective on social science.

The course will be mostly based on group discussions and small group exercises. Many of you will have their own ideas about what makes good social science research and most topics we discuss do not have one clear answer. Through group discussions we can sharpen our sensitivities for the most important methodological issues, without fixating too much on one particular perspective on social science.

The course will make use of a textbook by Gerring (2001)\(^1\) and to a lesser extent Risjord (2014), supplemented with articles and individual book chapters.

\(^1\)Note that a new version of Gerring’s book is available, Gerring (2012), but for the required reading we only use the 2001 version.
Classes

Classes take place once a week, Thursdays 2–4 pm in E003 of the Newman Building at UCD. Since classes will primarily consist of seminar-style discussion and work in small groups, it will be essential that all the readings are carefully studied in advance of the class.

Contact

We do not have fixed office hours, so if you want to make sure the person you want to meet is present, you can make an appointment by email. If a personal visit is not necessary, the easiest way to reach us is by email.

Schedule overview

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Assignments

Short assignments

Research question: In the first class, you will be asked for a formulation of the main research question of your MLitt / PhD research. Note that this should be a question – not a set of questions,
not a topic description, and not a statement. *Due: in class week 1.*

**Discussion questions**: For all classes taught by Markus Schlosser, submit one discussion question that occurs to you when reading the assigned material – ideally critical of one (or several) of the readings, or alternatively because you find something confusing. These are to be submitted by email (not in attachment) to the lecturer of that week’s class. Beware that questions might well be used in class, with proper attribution. *Due: 24 hours before class.*

**Formal assignments**

*Please note that nearly all deadlines are in a tight sequence towards the end of the semester. Plan accordingly and start working on the assignments early!*

**Presentation** (10%): You are required to give one short presentation (about 10 minutes) in class in which you present and discuss one of the seminar readings. The presentation should try to identify points that seemed particularly important or problematic, and it should aim to offer some constructive analysis or critique that facilitates discussion. Please let me know (markus.schlosser@ucd.ie) if you are willing to present in the first session (Week 5). The remaining slots will be assigned as we go along.

**Article review** (40%): elect a published article (or book chapter) and provide a critical review. This article should be on a topic that is closely related to one (or some) of the issues discussed in class. You may focus on empirical, normative, conceptual, methodological, or purely philosophical questions. This review should not be a mere summary, in the style of a literature review, but a critical review: it should offer reasons, arguments, and a critical analysis. *Approximately 3000 words. Due: Monday 9 April, 5 pm.* The article (or chapter) itself needs to be submitted for approval, before April. Submit to markus.schlosser@ucd.ie in PDF format and one hard copy to Margaret Brady (D504).

**Grant proposal** (30%): Based on your own MLitt / PhD project, write a full grant application. A form will be distributed that emulates the form used by grant agencies such as the Irish Research Council, with specific details on contents and required word length. Pay particular attention to using the contents of the course in writing up the proposal, but also “sell” the research as one would for a real grant applications and note that grant reviewers tend to look closely at the feasibility of the research. The proposal will go through in-class peer review, but will also be graded in a regular manner by the module coordinator. *Approximately 2500 words. Due: Monday 23 April, 5 pm.* Submit to jos.elkink@ucd.ie in PDF format.

**Grant proposal feedback** (20%): You will receive three of the submitted grant proposals and will be asked to write a review on each, as if you are on a the board of a grant awarding agency (e.g. the Irish Research Council). You will be provided with a scoring sheet. The feedback will be returned to the author of the proposal and will be graded by the module coordinator. The feedback will not impact the grade of the proposal. *Approximately 700 words each. Due: Monday 14 May, 5 pm.* Submit to jos.elkink@ucd.ie in PDF format.
Late submission policy

All written work must be submitted on or before the due dates. Students will lose one point of a grade per working day late or part thereof (taking B+, B and B to be “points” of a grade), and receive an NG (no grade) for essays over 1 week late. Exemptions will only be made in extenuating circumstances and need to be requested in writing. Note that “bad planning” and “work commitments” do not count as extenuating circumstances.²

Note that late submission of the research proposal homework creates problems for your classmates in the peer review assignment!

Plagiarism

Although this should be obvious, plagiarism – copying someone else’s text without acknowledgement or beyond “fair use” quantities – is not allowed, including self-plagiarism. UCD policies concerning plagiarism can be found online.³ A more extensive description of what is plagiarism and what is not can be found at the UCD Library website.⁴

Week 1: Research questions in social science

Jos Elkink

What is social science? What makes for a good research question?

Prior to class, be prepared to be asked what your research question is.


Optional reading: King, Keohane and Verba (1994, ch 1); Przeworski and Salomon (1995); Chalmers (1999); Watts, Bowen and Rudenstein (2001); Kiparsky (2006); Rothman (2008); Gerring (2012, ch 1-2).

Week 2: Concepts and conceptualisation

Jos Elkink

What is a concept? How to define social science concepts? What makes for a good conceptualisation? – Note that this is on the definition of concepts for empirical research, not conceptual analysis.


²See http://www.ucd.ie/registry/academicsecretariat/docs/extcstudent_g.pdf for more details on extenuating circumstances.
⁴http://www.ucd.ie/library/students/information_skills/plagiar.html
Week 3: Theories, models, and hypotheses

Jos Elkink

What is the role of theory in social science? What is the difference between a paradigm, theory, model, hypothesis?

Gerring (2001, ch 5); Popper (1962, ch 1).


Week 4: Descriptive inference and measurement

Jos Elkink

What is the relation between concept, theory, operationalisation, and measurement?

Gerring (2001, ch 6); Adcock and Collier (2001); Shively (1997, ch 4-5).

Optional reading: Goertz (2006, ch 4); Shively (1997, ch 4-5); Gerring (2012, ch 6-7); King, Keohane and Verba (1994, ch 2, §5.1).

Week 5: Philosophy of science and social science

Markus Schlosser

Why philosophy of science (and social science)? Is there a fundamental difference between the natural and the social sciences?

Rosenberg (2012, ch 1–2); Popper (excerpt 1963); Kuhn (1970, excerpt).

Optional reading: Risjord (2014, ch 1); Bortolotti (2008, ch 1).

Week 6: Human agency: naturalism

Markus Schlosser

What is human agency? Can human actions be explained in the same way as natural phenomena?

Rosenberg (2012, ch 3); Goertz (2012).
Week 7: Human agency: interpretation

Markus Schlosser

Is the explanation of human agency necessarily interpretive? Does this preclude naturalistic explanations?

Risjord (2014, ch 4); Grimm (2016); Roth (2003).


Week 8: Critiques of rational choice theory

What are the uses and limits of rational choice theory? Does rational choice theory sacrifice plausibility and predictive power for mathematical precision?

Steele (2014); Rosenberg (2012, ch 6); Kahneman (2003)

Optional: Risjord (2014, ch 5); Sen (1977)

Week 9: Collective agency and social ontology

Markus Schlosser

Can collective agency be reduced to the interaction of individual agents? Are groups real entities?

Risjord (2014, ch 6); Pettit and Schweikard (2006).


Week 10: Causal inference and counterfactuals

Jos Elkink
How to go from descriptive to causal inference? What is the counterfactual model of causal inference? What is the “Fundamental Problem of Causal Inference”? What role do causal mechanisms play?

Gerring (2001, ch 7); Morgan and Winship (2007, ch 2, 10); King, Keohane and Verba (1994, ch 3).

Optional reading: Gerring (2007, 2010); Gerring (2012, 8); Mahoney (2008); Scriven (1966); Shively (1997, ch 6); Little (1991, ch 2); Faletti and Lynch (2009); Goldthorpe (2001); Morgan and Winship (2007); Holland (1986); Fearon (1991); Gerring (2012, ch 8-11).

**Week 11: Experiments in social science**

*Jos Elkink*

What place do experiments have in social science? What are different types of experimental design? What is the relation between experimental design and observational studies?

Christensen (1997, ch 8-9); Dunning (2008a); McDermott (2002).

Optional reading: Moses and Knutsen (2007, ch 3); Green and Gerber (2003); Campbell and Stanley (1963); Druckman et al. (2006); Humphreys and Weinstein (2009); Gerring (2012, ch 10-11); Moses and Knutsen (2007, ch 3); Gerber, Green and Larimer (2008); Dunning (2008b); Camerer (2003); Kagel and Roth (1995); Kinder and Palfrey (1993); Gomm (2004, ch 2-3, 5-5).

**Week 12: Science, value, and objectivity**

Can science be free from political and ethical values? Should science be free from such values? What does it mean to say that science is (or should be) objective?

Risjord (2014: ch 2); Rosenberg (2012: ch 14)


**Week 12: Science, value, and objectivity**

*Markus Schlosser*

Can science be free from political and ethical values? Should science be free from such values? What does it mean to say that science is (or should be) objective?

Risjord (2014, ch 2); Rosenberg (2012, ch 14).

Suggested Additional Readings


References


URL: http://www.maxwell.syr.edu/uploadedFiles/moynihan/cqrm/Newsletter3.2.pdf


URL: http://gking.harvard.edu/files/paperspub.pdf


PhD PROFICIENCY EXAM. Recommended readings in sociological theory and methodology. The readings given below are intended to serve the PhD candidates as a guideline for their preparation for the PhD proficiency exam. Max Weber on the Methodology of the Social Sciences, ed. by Edward A. Shils and Henry A. Finch, Glencoe: Free Press, 1949, 188 pages. The Myth of the Framework — In Defense of Science and Rationality, Routledge, London and New York, 1997, pp. 1-64, 185-209, 89 pages (The Rationality of Scientific Revolutions; The Myth of the Framework; Epistemology and Industrialization). Robert King Merton (1910-2003). Social sciences methodology. Mrigendra Bahadur Karki. Modern social science, which pursues Western/American education system. Movements methodology in particular and social sciences methodology in general. Total five articles are included in the journal. T.K. Oommen distinguishes between methods and methodological issues in the analysis of social movements methodology through a paper on Methods and Methodological Issues in the Analysis of Social Movements: An Overview. This distinction, according to Oommen, is necessary in the study of social. PhD Complex Systems and Computational Social Science — Programme Structure. The CSCS PhD Programme is a thematic, structured programme. CSCS PhD students may register as full-time (4 years) or part-time students (6 years). CSSL50020 Social Science Methodology. In addition, all students take at least 3 modules, totalling to at least 15 credits, from a list of relevant modules. Students with a technical background (computer science, engineering, statistics) take these modules from relevant offerings in the social sciences, while students with a social science background (incl business and law) take these modules from relevant offerings in computer science, mathematics, and/or statistics. We believe that social science must never become prisoner of any orthodoxy and must continually renew itself by learning from other disciplines and from new developments, and by revisiting its own past. This is not to say that we believe that ‘anything goes’ or that researchers can mix and match any idea, approach, theory or method according to whim. Methodology is important, intellectual rigour is essential within all approaches, and clarity and consistency are vital. We are grateful to Yves Mény, president of the EUI, for support in this project, to Sarah Tarrow for editing the contributions... This book is an introduction to approaches and methodologies in the social sciences. ‘Approaches’ is a general term, wider than theory or methodology. My research deals with social science research methods and substantive social research. My methodological research involves particularly measurement and measurement models, research design, and the analysis of large and complex (multi-dimensional) data structures. My teaching mainly focuses on research methods training for empirical social scientists, including academic staff and PhD students. Professor Cees van der Eijk, course leader for Social Science Research Methods. Related courses: Politics and International Relations PhD.