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Methods of the Social Sciences: Crafting Social Science Research

Fall 2010

Time Tuesday, 12:00 – 13:30 h

Place B 6, A1.03

Office Hours Tue 13:30 – 14:30 h

Description: The goal of this course is to jump-start students with their dissertation proposal. Such a proposal is a research outline that delineates the doctoral thesis project, including the motivation for research question(s), the survey of the relevant theoretical and empirical contributions, the development of a theoretical framework, the specification of the methodology and planned empirical analysis. You should be prepared to address the following questions: What makes that an interesting question? Is it an important question? What contributions would this question and the answers make to the scholarly literature? What strategies are there to answer your research question(s)?

This course should help students to see the trade-offs involved in choosing a particular research design in their research projects. Consequently students are expected to develop own ideas about potential research questions and actively participate in those seminar-style meetings that are organized within this lecture course.

Requirements: There are three different requirements for this course.

- 1) Prepare the readings in advance so that you can come to class with particular questions in mind. You will learn primarily by reading and then discussing that material with your instructor and classmates. The more actively you participate in the discussions the easier it will be to comprehend the new material and the more fun we will have working on this together. The **readings** will be provided through the *Studierendenportal* (<https://portal.uni-mannheim.de/>) and by email well in advance.
- 2) There will be some **take-home assignments** that motivate you to put to work the material we discussed in class.
- 3) I expect you to come up with a first version of your **draft dissertation proposal**. This exercise should motivate you to start working on your proposal early on, help you to see what has and what has not sufficiently worked so far, and, finally helps you to

focus your efforts during the winter break on what has to be done next in order to write a successful dissertation proposal by the end of the next semester. Some of you might need to have a grant proposal ready even before the end of the second semester. Doing this should put less pressure on you during the second semester. For this class I will be looking for a project that is well-defined and feasible as well as methodologically sound. I suggest emphasizing methods and data more than the relevance of the research question which generally leads to long literature review and a substantive defense of the problem's importance.

Alternatively, instead of writing a draft dissertation proposal you could also prepare a stand-alone research paper (potentially the core of your MA thesis) you are currently working on, prepared as if you submit it to a scholarly journal.

A last, rather protestant, remark: No late assignments will be accepted, unless the lateness has been discussed with and cleared by me prior to or on the date that the assignment is originally due.

7 September Introduction: Dissertation Proposal – Formal requirement - Outline

14 September How to Come to New Research Questions and Other Core Issues of Research Design

Please find below the readings for next Tuesday. Typically I will come up with some questions that should help you digest the assigned readings more easily. Here they are:

- 1) Do you believe KKV (aka King, Gary et al. 1994) mantra that for all types of research design there is the same underlying logic of inference?
- 2) What are "observable implications" of a theory? Provide an example.
- 3) In the introduction of Gschwend/Schimmelfennig (2007) there is a 2x2-typology of research designs on page 14. Can you come up with exemplary research questions that would fit in each of these four cells?

- ☞ King, Gary et al. 1994. "The Science in Social Science." In *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*, eds. Gary King, Robert Owen Keohane and Sidney Verba. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 3-33.
- ☞ Gschwend, Thomas, and Frank Schimmelfennig. 2007. "Introduction: Designing Research in Political Science – A Dialogue." In *Research Design in Political Science: How to Practice What They Preach?* Eds. Thomas Gschwend and Frank Schimmelfennig. Houndmills: Palgrave MacMillan, 1-18.

21 September Conceptualization and Measurement

Last Tuesday we talked a lot about strategies to generate new researchable ideas. Let's practice it! As an assignment for this week, you should bring one new researchable idea to class. Prepare a very short (1 minute) but concise oral description. Also be ready to provide answers to the following questions:

- 1) How would you find an answer to this research question?
- 2) What makes that an interesting question?
- 3) What contributions would this question make to the scholarly literature

- ☞ Wonka, Arnd. 2007 "Concept Specification in Political Science Research." In *Research Design in Political Science. How to Practice What They Preach?* Eds. Thomas Gschwend and Frank Schimmelfennig. Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 41-61.
- ☞ Miller, Bernhard. 2007. "Making Measures Capture Concepts: Tools for Securing Correspondence between Theoretical Ideas and Observations". In *Research Design in Political Science. How to Practice What They Preach?* Eds. Thomas Gschwend and Frank Schimmelfennig. Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave, 83-102.

There is one chapter on concept specification and one on measurement.

Furthermore, please come up with an example of a fuzzy concept in your field. Any ideas about how to specify it further or how to devise a better measurement strategy for it?

28 September Case Selection

I would like you to get gradually more focused on a potential topic for your dissertation proposal. As an assignment please bring one researchable topic to class. As we have done before, prepare a short (really only 2 minutes) but concise oral description of it. It is not so important that we all understand exactly what is going on in your research. It is an exercise meant for you. Try also (within the 2 minutes) to say in one sentence on how you tackle your topic and what contribution this would make to which scholarly literature?

Attached are also two chapters and an article on case selection. Read carefully the KKV Chapter and skim the other two.

- 1) What are KKV's guidelines for case-selection?

2) What is the problem with selection on the dependent variable?

- ☞ Ebbinghaus, Bernhard. 2005. "When Less is More." *International Sociology* 20(2): 133-152.
- ☞ King et al. 1994. "Determining What to Observe." In *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*, eds. Gary King, Robert Owen Keohane and Sidney Verba. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 115-149.
- ☞ Collier, David; James Mahoney, and Jason Seawright. 2004. "Claiming Too Much: Warnings about Selection Bias." In *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse tools, Shared Standards*, eds. Henry E. Brady and David Collier. Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 85-102.

5 October

How to Write Scholarly Journal Articles and Successful Grant Proposals

Writing an article and a grant proposal require sufficiently similar techniques. Please start to look at the structure of articles that are published in the journals of the field you would like to submit your work sometime. How long are they? Be ready to describe their structure. Do they consist of similar sections or subsections? Are you able to delineate a structural blueprint of such an article? Bring a copy of one article you like to class.

We will read two small pieces (Hochschild, King) that are dealing with article writing and one (Przeworski/Salomon) about proposal writing. I also attach the DFG guidelines for research grants that provide you with some basic information about the DFG process of granting research money to scholars.

- ☞ Hochschild, Jennifer L. 2008. "Writing Introductions." In *Publishing in Political Science*, ed. Stephen Yoder. Washington, DC: American Political Science Association.
- ☞ King, Gary. 2006. "Publication, Publication." *Political Science and Politics* 39(1): 119-125.
- ☞ Przeworski, Adam, and Frank Salomon. 1995 rev. 1998. "On the Art of Writing Proposals. Some Candid Suggestions for Applicants to Social Science Research Council Competitions."

<http://www.ssrc.org/publications/view/7A9CB4F4-815F-DE11-BD80-001CC477EC70/>.

12 October

The Review Process

I would like to go back to rather practical issues this week and focus more on "Reviewing & Publishing". I will provide you with the paper

trail (e.g. original paper, its reviews and a memo documenting the revisions of the resubmitted version) of one of my successful journal submissions and a straight rejection as an example.

Take a look at all the reviews and the memo in particular and prepare some comments on them.

- 1) Are the reviews helpful?
- 2) What is particularly good or bad about them?
- 3) How could they be improved?

In order to give you some insights about the reviewing and publishing business I would like you to carefully read the following:

- ☞ Polsky, Andrew J. 2008. "Seeing Your Name in Print. Unpacking the Mysteries of the Review Process at Political Science Scholarly Journals." In *Publishing in Political Science*, ed. Stephen Yoder. Washington, DC: American Political Science Association.
- ☞ Roediger, Henry L. 2007. "Twelve Tips for Authors." *APS Observer* 20 (6).
- ☞ Chilton, Stephen. 1999. "The Good Reviewer." *Academe* 85 (6): 54-55.

19 October

Publish or Perish. On the Art of Fudging-up Your Manuscripts

As an assignment for this week I would like you to get started on your draft research proposal. Please send me per email until today (10am) a version that includes (1) working title and name, (2) two-paragraph project summary as an abstract of your dissertation proposal, and (3) the introduction in which you should state your research question or the puzzle you are going to address and argue why your chosen topic is relevant? Please do this on less than two pages (double-spaced).

Today we will do a last round of "2-minute oral presentation" of your dissertation topic. As before, also try (within the 2 minutes) to say something about your research design (something you need not to include in the written assignment for today).

We also will finish up the discussion about publication strategies. Therefore I would like you to read the following:

- ☞ Roediger, Henry L. 2007. "Twelve Tips for Reviewers." *APS Observer* 20 (4).
- ☞ Senturia, Stephen D. 2003. "How to Avoid the Reviewer's Axe:

One Editor's View." *Journal of Microelectromechanical Systems* 12(3): 229-232.

26 October

Causal Inference I

We will return to research design issues for the next weeks and will discuss research design issues related to causal inference. Please read carefully King et al as well as the De Vaus Chapter. Also closely read Winship & Morgan until page 674 and skim the rest. Those of you working with Stata might want to try out some of these methods. The Nichols 2007 text provides a hands-on description for some of them.

Remember, we care more about research design issues than about particular methods of causal modeling. Therefore, it is enough to get an intuition about these methods, their advantages and disadvantages. In order to demonstrate that you got the intuition right think about potential applications of those methods to questions that might be related to your research area. Be prepared to present those applications in class.

- 1) In what sense do different conceptions of causality differ from one another and what are the consequences in terms of research design?
- 2) What is the problem for causal inference with non-experimental data and which solutions are there?

- 📖 King et al. 1994. "Causality and Causal Inference." In *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*, eds. Gary King, Robert Owen Keohane and Sidney Verba. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- 📖 Nichols, Austin. 2007. "Causal Inference with Observational Data." *The Stata Journal* 7(4): 507-541.
- 📖 De Vaus, David. 2001. "Causation and the Logic of Research Design." In *Research Design in Social Research*, ed. David De Vaus. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- 📖 Winship & Morgan. 1999. "The Estimation of Causal Effects from Observational Data." *Annual Rev. Sociol.* 25: 659-706.

2 November

Causal Inference II

We have distinguished experimental research designs from observational and case studies. I would like to motivate you to think about "untypical" research designs in your field of interest. As an assignment for this week, please bring to class a research question for each design that can be addressed with such a research design. We will spend some time discussing potential implementations of

these research designs to get a sense of how to design a study to obtain an “estimate” of interesting causal effect.

Do you agree with Gerring and McDermott’s claim that “[a]ll case study research is ... quasi-experimental”?

- ☞ Gerring, John, and Rose Mc Dermott. 2007. “An Experimental Template for Case Study Research.” *American Journal of Political Science* 51(3): 688-701.
- ☞ Sekhon, Jasjeet S. 2004. “Quality Meets Quantity: Case Studies, Conditional Probability and Counterfactuals.” *Perspectives on Politics* 2(2): 281-293.

9 November

Improving Interpretation: Graphs vs. Tables

Will be talking about ways to improve interpretation of our estimates. I suggest reading closely Kastlelec & Leoni (definitely check out their project website at <http://tables2graphs.com/>) and try to get the gist of the argument in King et al. Also skim the Gelman et al piece. People working with experiments should also take a look at Cumming et al. For those of you working with Stata I suggest to take a closer look at Cox (for graphs) as well as Xu & Long (in addition to King et al).

What do you think about the plea: making graphs instead of tables?

- ☞ Cumming, Geoff, Fiona Fidler, and David L. Vaux. 2007. “Error bars in experimental biology.” *The Journal of Cell Biology* 177 (1): 7-11.
- ☞ Gelman, Andrew, Cristian Pasarica, and Rahul Dodhia. 2002. “Statistical Computing and Graphics.” *The American Statistician* 56 (2): 121-130.
- ☞ Cox, Nicholas J. 2008. “Speaking Stats: Between tables and graphs.” *The Stata Journal* 8 (2): 269-289.
- ☞ King et al. 2000. “Making the Most of Statistical Analyses: Improving Interpretation and Presentation.” *American Journal of Political Science* 44 (2): 347-361.
- ☞ Kastlelec, Jonathan P., and Eduardo L. Leoni. 2007. “Using Graphs Instead of Tables in Political Science.” *Perspectives on Politics* 5 (4): 755-771.
- ☞ Xu, Jun, and J. Scott Long. 2005. “Confidence intervals for predicted outcomes in regression models for categorical outcomes.” *The Stata Journal* 5 (4): 537-559.

16 November

One-day workshop: Presentation of Draft Dissertation Proposal Group 2 08:00 - 17:00 h

22 November

One-day workshop: Presentation of Draft Dissertation Proposal Group 1 08:00 - 17:00 h

7 December Semester Wrap-up,

**Please note: Draft Dissertation Proposal is due by end of this year (email and hardcopy)
to methods@uni-mannheim.de**