Research Design in International Relations

Teacher: Dr. Svanhildur Thorvaldsdottir, Email: thorvaldsdottir@gsi.lmu.de

Date/time: Thursdays, 10:00–12:00 (c.t.)

Office hours: I'm very flexible. Just email me at thorvaldsdottir@gsi.lmu.de.

Seminar Description

This course, designed for advanced BA students, prepares students for independent development of empirical research designs in International Relations (IR). Thus, the course is intended to prepare students for writing their BA-theses as well as further scientific work in a master's program.

The focus of the course will be on the following questions: What is a good research question and how do I find one? What is the literature review for and how do I put one together? How do I go from theory to testable hypotheses? How do I decide what kind of analysis is appropriate for my research question? What kinds of data and methods can I use for my analysis?

We will discuss the foundations and common standards of ("good") social science research to identify "best practices" and practical tips for dealing with problems in various stages of the research process. We will then examine some of the various approaches and methods of social scientific research and discuss their practical use and usability for questions in IR. Readings will comprise textbook chapters and journal articles and the focus throughout will be on understanding the particular design choices made by the authors as they work to answer their research questions.

Students are expected to develop their own research designs as part of this course. Students will be encouraged to start brainstorming and coming up with research ideas early on in the semester and we will devote substantial class time to discussing different ideas and how to develop them. As research is both a creative and iterative process, there will be no expectation that students pick a research question in the beginning and stick with it throughout. Part of the research process is learning when to refocus and students will be encouraged to try out different ideas or approaches as the course progresses. This course will be held in English and the final assignment should be submitted in English as well.

Structure of class

The course will meet on Zoom every week at the scheduled course time, so please make sure that you are regularly available at that time. If you have technological problems or do not have sufficient internet availability to attend class regularly, please let me know and I will work with you to enable you to participate.

Much of what you will learn will come from context, from participating in class conversation and other activities. As part of the learning experience is seeing how the different topics build on and relate to each other, regular attendance is vital.

Course Requirements

A final Hausarbeit, roughly equivalent to 20.000 characters in length, written in English. The Hausarbeit should be structured as follows:

1. 3-5 page exposé
2. Literature review summary table and memo
3. Data and method memo
4. Lessons learned memo

Due date is **March 7, 2021**. Please submit electronic versions only. More detailed information on the structure of the Hausarbeit will be provided separately.

In addition, completing the preparatory work ahead of class is required. Most weeks, this will entail reading, but on occasion there will be a different type of assignment.

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Much of what you will learn will come from context, from participating in class conversation and other activities. As part of the learning experience is seeing how the different topics build on and relate to each other, regular attendance is vital.

Flexibility and accommodations

I understand that your schedule this semester (as well as in any semester) can be unpredictable. I therefore expect that some of you will have to miss class on occasion, or are unable to sufficiently prepare from time to time. This is fine. All I ask is that you send me a quick email before class to let me know if you will be absent.

Deadlines: This course asks you to submit three memos over the course of the semester (Research Question memo, Lit Review memo, Data and methods memo). If you wish to get feedback from me on these memos, they need to be submitted by these deadlines. When this happens, I will give you a deadline which you need to keep if you wish to get feedback on your work. However, I will also give you a total of five days that you can use throughout the semester to submit late work and still get feedback (this includes the final assignment). You may use all five days at once, or only one or two days, all depending on your need. The only requirement for taking advantage of this is that you email me *before* the deadline (even a few minutes is fine) to let me know how much extra time you are taking. Hopefully this will help alleviate some pressure from you during the course of the semester and allow you to schedule your work around other important events in your life.

Changes to the syllabus and course Moodle

I reserve the right to make changes to this syllabus, depending on the needs of the class and other issues that may arise. Any changes will be announced with as much advance notice as possible.

All readings will be posted to our course Moodle and that is also where you will find links to important information about the course, as well as to our Zoom meetings. Please make sure that you sign yourself up for the Moodle course as soon as you get the information.

Course Schedule

The building blocks of IR research

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5 November 2020: Introduction and "What is social-scientific research?"
Preparation:

- Reading: Akutagawa, R. (1952). In a grove. In *Rashomon and other stories*. Liverlight Publishing Corporation, New York, NY

12 November 2020: Asking the right questions: How, What, Where, When, Why?
Preparation:

- Reading: Powner, L. C. (2019). *Empirical Research and Writing*. CQ Press, Washington, DC, Chapter 1 (pp 1–19).
- Reading: How to read in political science (4 pages)
- Assignment: Do the exercise on page 17 (Brainstorming Research Questions). Upload your questions through Moodle by noon on November 11, 2020. (max 30 minutes)

19 November 2020: Building and identifying theories
Preparation:

- Reading: Powner, L. C. (2019). *Empirical Research and Writing*. CQ Press, Washington, DC, Chapter 2 (pp 21–54).

26 November 2020: The role of causality in theories
Preparation:

- Reading: Kellstedt, P. M. and Whitten, G. D. (2013). *The Fundamentals of Political Science Research*. Cambridge University Press, Chapter 3 (pp 51–68).
- Reading: Malik, R. and Thorvaldsdottir, S. (2019). Are Goodwill Ambassadors Good for Business? The Impact of Celebrities on IO Fundraising. *Working Paper*
- Assignment: Submit your RQ memo through Moodle by Monday.

3 December 2020: The literature review: what is relevant and what isn't
Preparation:

- Reading: Vreeland, J. R. (2019). Corrupting International Organizations. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 22(1):205–222.
- Assignment: Identify five to ten academic journal articles that you think are relevant for your research question. Save them on your computer and be ready to work with them during class.

10 December 2020: Putting it all together and deciding what comes next?
Preparation:

- Powner, L. C. (2019). *Empirical Research and Writing*. CQ Press, Washington, DC, chapter 4 (pp 81–108)

17 December 2020: Measurement and data collection
Preparation:

- Reading: Kellstedt, P. M. and Whitten, G. D. (2013). *The Fundamentals of Political Science Research*. Cambridge University Press, Chapter 5 (pp 92–114 (until Section 5.8)).
- Reading: Paxton, P. (2000). Women's Suffrage in the Measurement of Democracy: Problems of Operationalization. *Studies in Comparative International Development*, 35:92–111

Qualitative and quantitative methods

7 January 2021: Case selection and comparative case studies
Preparation:

- Reading: Geddes, B. (1990). How the Cases You Choose Affect the Answers You Get: Selection Bias in Comparative Politics. *Political Analysis*, 2:131–150

- Reading: Panke, D. (2018). *Research Design & Method Selection: Making Good Choices in the Social Sciences.* Sage, chapter 5.

- Assignment: Submit Literature Review memo and grid

14 January 2021: Case studies: applications
Preparation:

- Reading: Bulutgil, H. Z. (2017). Ethnic Cleansing and its Alternatives in Wartime: A Comparison of the Austro-Hungarian, Ottoman, and Russian Empires. *International Security*, 41(4):169–201

- Reading: McAllister, J. R. (2020). Deterring Wartime Atrocities: Hard Lessons from the Yugoslav Tribunal. *International Security*, 44(3):84–128

21 January 2021: Quantitative analysis: data and where to find it
Preparation:

- Assignment: Upload dataset information to course Moodle from five pre-assigned journal articles

- Assignment: Submit your questions and requests for our final two sessions by Monday.

28 January 2021: Quantitative analysis: description and inference
Preparation:

- Reading: Kellstedt, P. M. and Whitten, G. D. (2013). *The Fundamentals of Political Science Research.* Cambridge University Press, Chapter 5 (pp 114–128 (from Section 5.9)).

- Reading: Kuziemko, I. and Werker, E. (2006). How Much is a Seat on the Security Council Worth? Foreign Aid and Bribery at the United Nations. *Journal of Political Economy*, 114(5):905–930

4 February 2021: Student choice!

- Assignment: Submit data and method memo

11 February 2021: Student choice!