IS 300 – Research Methods in International Studies (Fall Term 2018)

Simon Fraser University
School for International Studies
Tuesdays, 0830-1220

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Office – HCC 7248
Class Room – HCC 1505

Overview

This is a course about how to evaluate and conduct good research - and doing good research means knowing about methods. It will both introduce you to key concepts and terms – say, case studies or correlation – and show how they work in practice. All class sessions will be divided in two – a conceptual introduction and overview that is then followed by examples drawn from key topics and sub-fields within international studies. The goal is not for you to become methodologists, but to be smart consumers and users of methods in your own studies and reading.

The course has two parts. We begin – Part I - with foundational issues. At a basic level, methods can flow from very different philosophical starting points, with regression analysis and discourse approaches – for example - being quite distinct techniques for gathering and evaluating data. They draw upon contrasting epistemologies that attune them to certain types of research questions, while limiting their ability to shed light on other questions. In this first part, we also consider causation, theory, ethics and research design in a similar way, tracing how differing philosophical assumptions shape their understanding and use – and relation to method.

The bulk of the course – Part II – is then an introduction to a number of qualitative and quantitative methods useful for students of international studies. Each class introduces a particular technique, provides a critical net assessment (what are its strengths and weaknesses), and shows how the method works in practice. The latter is accomplished by drawing upon empirical research in contemporary international studies.

Objectives

The course will introduce students to key methods in international studies, critically assessing them as tools for helping understand the world around us. Students will finish with the following knowledge and skills.

- A basic understanding of the relation between differing philosophical starting points and cause, theory, research ethics, research design and method
- An understanding of key research tools for students of international studies, at both the conceptual and applied/practical levels
- An ability to evaluate the methodologies used and arguments made by scholars and analysts

Teaching Method
There will be 12 class sessions, each lasting 3 hours and 50 minutes. Each class will consist of lectures, as well as a seminar component. The latter will take two forms. In Part I, key questions drawn from the readings will form the basis for discussion and debate; in Part II, students will discuss, debate and apply various methods to real-world problems drawn from the work of prominent scholars of international studies.

Requirements

There are four requirements.

- **In-Class Midterm Exam (25%)** – This is a 2 hour and 30 minute test, given during lecture on 16 October 2018. It will consist of short answers and one essay question.

- **Critical Review (25%)** – Of the various philosophical, theoretical, ethical, design issues and methods covered in Parts I & II, students choose one for in-depth exploration. The critical review will be 10 pages long, be written in superior English, and will assess the strengths and weaknesses and cutting-edge challenges of the chosen topic. It will be due on 13 November 2018, in class. Your grade will be based on both the quality of the analysis and the quality of your writing.

  (Additional information on the critical review – how to research it, SFU resources, the Student Learning Commons – and how to write it well – style, grammar, sentence/paragraph structure - will be provided during the first weeks of the semester.)

- **Participation (15%)** – Active participation in the seminar part of each class is mandatory. ‘Participation’ is defined as regular attendance and involvement in seminar discussions on class readings and other topics.

- **Take-Home Final Exam (35%)** – This essay exam covers the entire course, will be 12-15 pages in length, and be written in superior English. The exam will be handed out on 27 November 2018, during our last class. It will be due on 5 December 2018, when a hard copy of the exam must be delivered to the International Studies Secretary in HCC 7200 between 1000 and 1600. Your grade will be based on both the quality of the analysis and the quality of your writing.

Final course grades will be calculated as follows: Midterm (25%), Critical Review Essay (25%); Participation (15%); Final Exam (35%).

Reading

The following books should be purchased at the SFU Book Store.

All other required reading will be available via SFU’s Custom Courseware or on reserve at the library. Students are required to have done the reading for any given week prior to lecture; if you have not done so, do not bother coming to class.

Reading averages 110 pages per week. However, please be aware that much of it is challenging. Thus, while every week begins with one or two chapters from the Bryman/Bell or Van Evera textbooks, this is supplemented with the kind of social-science literature that defines international studies at a more advanced level.

Grading

Grades in the A range are reserved for truly exceptional performance, which means you will show a mastery of the relevant course material, and your writing and grammar will be superior (no typos, no awkward constructions, no page-long paragraphs). Grades in the C range will be awarded for average efforts, where engagement with course material is minimal and the writing is sloppy. Grades of D and F are reserved for poor performance – that is, spotty attendance, little or no engagement with assigned readings, and weak writing. Bottom Line: Exceptional performance will be rewarded, while poor performance will be punished.

Policy on Make-Ups and Late Submissions

- Midterm Exam – No make-up exam will be offered. The only possible exception is in the case of a well-documented medical or family emergency.
- Critical Review and Take-Home Final Exam – They are due on the days and times indicated above; late essays or exams will not be accepted. The only possible exception is in the case of a well-documented medical or family emergency.

Prerequisites

The prerequisites for this course are IS 101 and 45 units.

Academic Integrity

All students taking courses in International Studies are expected to read and understand the university’s policies with regard to academic dishonesty (S10.01 - S10.03). Forms of academic dishonesty include but are not limited to the following.

- Submitting all or a portion of the same work for credit in more than one course.
- Representing another person’s work as your own for course assignments.
- Failure to acknowledge sources of facts, information, analyses, interpretations, and arguments that you incorporate in your work, whether from a source that is written, spoken, or on the internet, and whether or not it is published or unpublished. Appropriate documentation of your sources is necessary when you quote, paraphrase or incorporate information and ideas generated by others.
In addition, all students in IS classes are expected to read the SFU Library lesson on “Avoiding Plagiarism” and take the interactive “Plagiarism Tutorial.”

Lecture Plan

Part I – The Foundations: Philosophies of Social Science, Causation, Theory, Research Ethics and Research Design

- 4 September: Philosophies of Social Science
- 11 September: No Class
- 18 September: Causation & Theory
- 25 September: Research Ethics
- 2 October: Research Design

Part II – Qualitative & Quantitative Methods: In Theory and Practice

- 9 October: Qualitative Methods I – Key Concepts, Case Studies and Process Tracing
- 16 October: Midterm Exam
- 23 October: Qualitative Methods II - Textual and Discourse Analysis
- 30 October: Qualitative Methods III - Ethnography and Fieldwork
- 6 November: Qualitative Methods IV – Interviewing
- 13 November: Quantitative Methods I – Correlation, Measurement, Reliability & Validity
- 20 November: Quantitative Methods II – Data Sampling, Survey Research
- 27 November: Quantitative Methods III – Quantitative Analysis & Statistical Procedures

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Detailed Syllabus

Part I – The Foundations: Philosophies of Social Science, Causation, Theory, Research Ethics and Research Design

4 September: Philosophies of Social Science

Key Questions

- What is philosophy of social science and why does it matter for students of international studies?
- What is positivism? What is interpretivism? How do they differ?
- How do these philosophical starting points shape the questions we ask and the theories we use in international studies?
• How do philosophical starting points influence our choice of methods in international studies?

Nuts & Bolts


Applications & Discussion


Objectives

• Understand the connections between philosophy and how we do research
• Learn the multiple ways one can operationalize the ‘science’ in social science

11 September: No Class

18 September: Causation & Theory

Key Questions

• What is cause?
• How do situated understanding, causal mechanisms, cause-effect, and correlation play (differing) roles in helping us explain and understand the social world?
• What are the roles of deduction and induction in theory development?
• What is the difference between problem-solving theory and critical theory?
• What is the relation between theory and method?

Nuts & Bolts


**Applications & Discussion**


**Objectives**

- Appreciate the differing ways explanations are constructed in the social sciences
- Appreciate that cause is a multi-dimensional concept that can be used to measure the social world in very different ways
- Understand the crucial role theory plays in all empirical research
- Learn the different ways in which theory is constructed and their characteristic strengths and weaknesses
- Learn the different types of theory in international studies and their strengths and weaknesses

**25 September: Research Ethics**

**Key Questions**

- What are ethics and what roles do they play at different points in the research process?
- What are the generally accepted ethical standards that social scientists must observe when producing and collecting data for their research?

**Nuts & Bolts**


Applications & Discussion


Objectives

- Understand the role of ethics in the research process
- Appreciate the institutional and normative basis for conducting ethical social science research

2 October: Research Design

Key Questions

- What is research design?
- What is the relation between research design and choice of method?
- Do positivist and interpretive students of international studies view the role of research design differently? If so, why?

Nuts & Bolts


Applications & Discussion


Objectives
• Understand the basics of research design, and how to distinguish strong designs from weak ones
• Appreciate that operationalizing ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ designs may differ depending upon one’s philosophical-epistemological starting point
• Learn the nuts and bolts of a well-crafted literature review

Part II – Qualitative & Quantitative Methods: In Theory and Practice

9 October: Qualitative Methods I – Key Concepts, Case Studies and Process Tracing

Key Questions

• What does it mean to speak of validity and transparency in qualitative research?
• What is a case study? What kinds of questions and puzzles in international studies is it especially helpful in answering?
• Are quantitative techniques incompatible with case studies?
• What is process tracing and how does it differ from historical chronologies?

Nuts & Bolts


Applications & Discussion


Objectives

• Appreciate what can be measured qualitatively and the limitations of such approaches
• Appreciate the (differing) roles of research ethics in different kinds of qualitative methods
• Understand the strengths and weaknesses of case studies
• Learn how to measure process and dynamics in empirical research

16 October: Midterm Exam

23 October: Qualitative Methods II - Textual and Discourse Analysis

Key Questions

• What is the difference between ‘why’ and ‘how possible’ questions in international studies?
• Do historians and other social scientists work with texts and documents in characteristically different ways?
• What is content analysis?
• What is discourse analysis and how might it be useful for students of international studies?

Nuts & Bolts


Applications & Discussion


Objectives

• Understand the multiple roles language can play in international studies
• Learn how to use language as a practical research tool
• Appreciate how different philosophical starting points lead researchers to measure language and its role in characteristically different ways - as historical narrative, as content analysis, or as discourse analysis

30 October: Qualitative Methods III - Ethnography and Fieldwork
Key Questions

- What is ethnography and how does it differ from conducting a case study?
- Can ethnography be combined with other methods? If so, how?
- Are field work and quantitative methods incompatible?
- How does a researcher decide what is ethical when she is in the field?

Nuts & Bolts


Applications & Discussion


Objectives

- Understand the practical and methodological challenges of ‘going to the field’
- Appreciate the differing kinds of ethnography - as immersion or as data collection – and their relation to differing philosophical-epistemological starting points
- Learn the crucial importance of ethics in field work

6 November: Qualitative Methods IV - Interviewing

Key Questions

- What are the main types of interview techniques?
- In what ways are positivist and interpretive interviewing different?
- What is triangulation and how does it increase confidence in one’s interview findings?
- How does one deal with lies and dissimulation when interviewing?

Nuts & Bolts
Applications & Discussion


Objectives

- Understand the basics of interview techniques and the crucial role played by everything one does before the first interview
- Appreciate how philosophical/epistemological starting points shape interview methods
- Learn how to make better use of interviews by combining them with other types of data

13 November: Quantitative Methods I – Correlation, Measurement, Reliability & Validity

Key Questions

- What role do philosophy and epistemology play in quantitative methods? Is it different than in qualitative techniques?
- What are the roles of theory and ethics in quantitative analysis?
- What is a correlation?
- What are reliability and validity?
- What is quantitative replication and why is it important?

Nuts & Bolts


Applications & Discussion


Objectives

- Understand the basic differences between quantitative and qualitative methods
- Appreciate what can be measured quantitatively and the limitations of such approaches
• Learn the meanings of correlation, reliability and validity, and how quantitative methods address such issues

20 November: *Quantitative Methods II - Data Sampling, Survey Research*

**Key Questions**

• What is a sample and the difference between a probability and non-probability sample?
• What needs to be considered when constructing a sample?
• What is a survey?
• What are the strengths and limitations of survey research?

**Nuts & Bolts**


**Applications & Discussion**


**Objectives**

• Understand the meaning of sample and differing sampling strategies
• Learn the basics of constructing a survey
• Appreciate how the construction and size of a survey are both its greatest strength and weakness

27 November: *Quantitative Methods III – Quantitative Analysis & Statistical Procedures*

**Key Questions**

• What are the differences among univariate, bivariate and multivariate analysis?
• What is statistical significance?
• What does it mean to use a software program for statistical analysis?
• What are the strengths of such programming? What might be its inherent limitations?

**Nuts & Bolts**

Applications & Discussion


Objectives

- Understand the differing kinds of analyses (uni-, bi-, multi-) and what they can and cannot reveal about relationships and causality
- Learn to read and interpret tests of statistical significance
- Acquire a basic understanding of statistical analysis carried out via software packages