Overview

This is a course in how to do good research on international development and complex emergencies. And doing good research means knowing about methods, theory, design and – yes – even philosophy. To this end, it will both introduce you to key concepts and terms – say, critical theory or case studies – and show how they work in practice. During the first part of the course (weeks #1-6), class sessions will be divided in two – a conceptual introduction and overview that is then followed by specific examples drawn from the fields of development and complex emergencies. In the course’s second part (weeks #7-13), all this knowledge will be put into practice as student’s present and receive feedback on research proposals.

Objectives

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

- A basic understanding of the relation among meta-theory, theory, method and empirical research
- A basic understanding of key research tools for students of international studies, at both the conceptual and applied/practical levels
- A critical sense for how to evaluate the methodologies used and arguments made by scholars and practitioners
- An ability to present and defend – in oral and written forms – a research proposal.

Teaching Method

There will be 13 class sessions, each lasting 3 hours and 50 minutes.

- Part I (Weeks #1-6): I will take the lead, lecturing for approximately three hours per session. This will leave 45-50 minutes for debate and discussion.
- Part II (Weeks #7-13): Students take the lead, presenting draft research proposals. We will hear four per week. Oral presentations may be a maximum of 15 minutes, which will then leave – per student - approximately 45 minutes for discussion and feedback.

Requirements

There are three requirements.
• **Research Proposal** – This will be written in superior English and present all the basic elements of the research the student plans to conduct for his/her major project. It will be 13-15 pages long (not including references). A 5-8 page first draft is due one week before a student’s oral presentation. The final version is due April 20, 2009, by 1600.

• **Presentation of Research Proposal** – Each student will be assigned a one hour slot for presentation of his/her proposal. This will consist of a 15 minute presentation, which must be polished, intelligent and engaging, and 45 minutes of Q & A.

• **Class Participation** – Active, intelligent and articulate participation in all discussions, reacting to lectures or student presentations, is mandatory.

Final course grades will be calculated as follows: Research Proposal – 60%; Presentation of Research Proposal – 20%; Class Participation – 20%.

**Reading**

The following four books (all paperback) are available for purchase at the SFU Book Store.


All other required reading will be available via SFU’s Custom Courseware.

Course reading averages 205 pages per class during weeks #1-6; however, please be aware that the load for the first two weeks is especially heavy. Beginning with week #7, the reading consists of a careful and critical scrutiny of fellow students’ proposals. Students are required to have done the reading for any given week prior to our meeting; if you have not done so, do not bother coming to class.

**Academic Integrity**

All students taking courses in International Studies are expected to read and understand the university’s policies with regard to academic dishonesty (T10.02 and T10.03). The School for International Studies takes academic dishonesty very seriously, and expects that you understand the policies. These policies are available at the following URL.

[http://www.sfu.ca/policies/teaching/index.htm](http://www.sfu.ca/policies/teaching/index.htm)

Forms of academic dishonesty include but are not limited to the following.

• Submitting all of 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. This includes purchasing or representing other students’ papers, in whole or part; or hiring someone to write your paper for you.
• Failure to acknowledge sources of facts, information, analyses, interpretations, and arguments you incorporate in your work, whether the source is written, spoken communication, or the internet and whether it is published and unpublished. Appropriate documentation of your sources is necessary when you quote, paraphrase or incorporate information and ideas generated by others.

Below are two useful links for understanding and avoiding plagiarism.

Identifying and avoiding plagiarism
http://www.lib.sfu.ca/researchhelp/writing/plagiarism.htm

Understanding and Avoiding Plagiarism: A Self-Directed Tutorial
http://www.lib.sfu.ca/researchhelp/tutorials/interactive/plagiarism/tutorial/introduction.htm

Lecture Plan

Part I – The Foundations: Philosophy of Social Science, Theory and Method

• Week #1: Philosophies of Social Science, Theory and Empirical Research
• Week #2: Comparative Method and Research Design
• Week #3: Case Studies and Process Tracing
• Week #4: Textual and Discourse Analysis
• Week #5: Ethnography and Fieldwork
• Week #6: Interviewing

Part II – From Social Science Abstractions to Empirical Reality

• Week #7: Student Presentations
• Week #8: Student Presentations
• Week #9: Student Presentations
• Week #10: Student Presentations
• Week #11: Student Presentations
• Week #12: Student Presentations
• Week #13: Student Presentations

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Detailed Syllabus

Part I – The Foundations: Philosophy of Social Science, Theory and Method

WEEK #1 – JANUARY 5: Philosophies of Social Science, Theory and Empirical Research

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? How does it differ from interpretivism?
• How do these philosophical starting points shape the questions we ask and the methods we use in international studies?

Nuts & Bolts


Applications & Discussion


Objectives

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

THEORY

Key Questions

• What roles does theory play – explicitly or implicitly - in international studies research?
• What is the difference between problem-solving theory, critical theory and policy-oriented theory?
• Are these different kinds of theories mutually incompatible, or can their differences be bridged? If the latter, how?
• What is the relation between theory and method?

Nuts & Bolts


Applications & Discussion


Objectives

- Understand the crucial role theory plays in all empirical research
- Learn the different types of theory and their possible applications in international studies

WEEK #2 – JANUARY 12: Comparative Method & Research Design

Key Questions

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

Nuts & Bolts

Mahoney, James and Dietrich Rueschemeyer, Editors. 2003. Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press – Chapters 1, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10.


Applications & Discussion

**Objectives**

- Understand the basics of research design, and how to distinguish good designs from bad ones
- Learn about the differing ways to think about causation in the social sciences, and how to measure it

**WEEK #3 – JANUARY 19: Case Studies and Process Tracing**

**Key Questions**

- 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 - Case Studies**


**Nuts & Bolts - Process Tracing**


**Applications & Discussion**


**Objectives**
• Understand the strengths and weaknesses of case studies
• Learn how to capture and measure process and dynamics in empirical research

WEEK #4 – JANUARY 26: 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 discourse analysis and how might it be useful for students of international studies?
• Is there a method to discourse analysis?

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

WEEK #5 – FEBRUARY 2: Ethnography and Fieldwork

Key Questions
• What is ethnography and how does it differ from preparing 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 he/she is in the field?

Nuts & Bolts


Applications & Discussion


Objectives

• Understand the practical and methodological challenges of ‘going to the field’
• Learn the crucial importance of ethics in field work

WEEK #6 – FEBRUARY 9: Interviewing

Key Questions

• What are the main types of interview techniques?
• What is triangulation and how does it increase confidence in one’s interview findings?
• How does one deal with lies and strategic 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
- Learn how to make better use of interviews by combining them with other types of data

No class on 16 or 23 February due to Olympic break!

Part II – From Social Science Abstractions to Empirical Reality

WEEK #7 – MARCH 2: Student Presentations

WEEK #8 – MARCH 9: Student Presentations

WEEK #9 – MARCH 16: Student Presentations

WEEK #10 – MARCH 23: Student Presentations

WEEK #11 – MARCH 30: Student Presentations

WEEK #12 – APRIL 6: Student Presentations

WEEK #13 – APRIL 13: Student Presentations