Overview

This is a course in how to do good research. And doing good research means knowing about methods; one might thus call this a course in applied methods. To this end, it will both introduce you to key concepts and terms – say, case studies or regression analysis – 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 and lab exercises drawn from the social sciences, with particular emphasis on global politics. The goal is not for you to become methodologists, but to become accomplished and smart users of methods in your own research and reading.

The course has three parts. We begin – Part I - with the foundational issues of philosophy, theory and research design. Methods are typically used to gather information in support of or to test a theoretical argument. However, there are different kinds of theories, and one needs to know which type is in play to evaluate properly the methods employed. At a more basic level, methods can flow from very different philosophical starting points. For example, regression analysis and discourse analysis are quite distinct techniques for gathering and evaluating data. They serve different purposes that can only be understood if they are situated in relation to their underlying philosophical foundations.

The bulk of the course – Parts II & III – is then an introduction to an array of qualitative and quantitative methods useful for students of international studies. Each lecture 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 a wide range of empirical research in contemporary international studies.

Objectives

The course will introduce students to key 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 and method
- 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

Teaching Method

There will be 12 class sessions, each lasting 3 hours and 50 minutes. Each class will consist of lectures, as well as an interactive component. The latter will take two forms.
• In Parts I and II, students will discuss and debate the application of various methods to real-world problems drawn from contemporary international studies.
• In Part III, classes will include a two hour lab session where students work with social science data sets on computers.

Requirements

There are four requirements.

• **Quantitative Homework Exercises (Two)** – Students will be assigned two short research projects to be completed using one or more quantitative data sets. Through these exercises, students will learn how to use data to develop and test multivariate explanations and come to understand the advantages and limitations of empirical work.

• **Qualitative Critical Reviews (Two)** – Of the various philosophical, theoretical and research design themes, and qualitative methods covered in Parts I & II (Class #1 – Class #6), students choose two for in-depth exploration. Each critical review will be 8-10 pages long, will be written in superior English, and will assess the strengths and weaknesses of the chosen topic/technique. Review #1 is due on 3 October 2011, and Review #2 is due 31 October 2011.

• **Class Participation** – Active, intelligent and articulate participation in all discussions is mandatory.

• **Comprehensive Final Take-Home Exam** – The exam will cover all parts of the course and students will have 10 days to complete it. It will be distributed in our last class on 5 December 2011, and be due on 15 December 2011 by 1600.

Final course grades will be calculated as follows: Participation – 10%; Quantitative Exercises – 30%; Qualitative Reviews – 30%; Take-Home Final Exam – 30%.

Reading

The following books are available for purchase 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.

**Prerequisites**

Undergraduate course work in methods is highly recommended. For students with little or no background in such topics, there are a number of good books that should be consulted prior to our first class session. These include the following.


**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). The School for International Studies takes academic dishonesty very seriously, and expects that you understand the policies, which are available at the following URL.

http://www.sfu.ca/policies/gazette/student.html

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 is a useful link for understanding and avoiding plagiarism.

http://www.lib.sfu.ca/researchhelp/tutorials/interactive/plagiarism/tutorial/introduction.htm

**Lecture Plan**

*Part I – The Foundations: Philosophy of Social Science, Theory and Research Design*

- Class #1: Philosophies of Social Science and Method; Theories and Method
- Class #2: Comparative Method and Research Design
Part II – Qualitative Methods: In Theory and Practice

- Class #3: Case Studies and Process Tracing
- Class #4: Textual and Discourse Analysis
- Class #5: Ethnography and Fieldwork
- Class #6: Interviewing

Part III – Quantitative Methods: In Theory and Practice

- Class #7: Cross-tabulating Variables
- Class #8: Statistical Inference
- Class #9: The Basics of Regression
- Class #10: Multiple Regression Analysis I
- Class #11: Multiple Regression Analysis II
- Class #12: Relaxing the Assumptions of the Classical Model

Detailed Syllabus

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

CLASS #1: Philosophies of Social Science and Method; Theory and Method

PHILOSOPHIES OF SOCIAL SCIENCE AND METHOD

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

**THEORIES AND METHOD**

**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
CLASS #2: 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


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
Part II – Qualitative Methods: In Theory and Practice

CLASS #3: 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

CLASS #4: 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

CLASS #5: 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

**CLASS #6: 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

**Part III – Quantitative Methods: In Theory and Practice**

**CLASS #7: Cross-tabulating Variables**

**Key Questions**

- How do we analyse data with SPSS?
- How do we read and interpret cross-tabulations?
- How do we know if our results are representative?

**Nuts & Bolts**


**Objectives**

- Getting familiar with SPSS
- Understanding simple bivariate relationships

**CLASS #8: Statistical Inference**

**Key Questions**

- What are the main elementary descriptive statistics?
- What is a statistical distribution?
- How do we compare means across groups?

**Nuts & Bolts**


**Objectives**

- Becoming familiar with inference at the interval level
- Learning how to compare means across groups
CLASS #9: The Basics of Regression

Key Questions

- How do we measure the nature of relationships at the interval level?
- How do we measure the strength of relationships at the interval level?
- How do we know which relationships are statistically significant?
- What are the limits of regression analysis?

Nuts & Bolts


Objectives

- Learning the nuts and bolts of correlation and regression
- Learning the limits of the classical model

CLASS #10: Multiple Regression Analysis I

Key Questions

- How do we control for other influences in regression analysis?
- How do we create multivariate analyses?
- Can we include categorical independent variables?

Nuts & Bolts


Objectives

- Understanding elementary multivariate analysis
- Learning how to include non-interval level independent variables

CLASS #11: Multiple Regression Analysis II

Key Questions

- How to we compare the effects of different independent variables?
- How do we deal with conditional relationships?

Nuts & Bolts


Objectives

- Learning how to ‘control’ statistically
• Learning how to interpret effects when variables interact with one another

CLASS #12: Relaxing the Assumptions of the Classical Model

Key Questions

• How can we be misled by heteroskedasticity and autocorrelation?
• How can we deal with categorical dependent variables?
• How can we deal with non-linear relationships?

Nuts & Bolts


Objectives

• Learning how to recognize and cope with violations in underlying assumptions of the classical model