Research Tools for PhD Students, 2017-2018
(provisional)
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1. Introduction
This course aims to provide basic tools for PhD students to write their thesis projects and carry out good research in the social and political sciences, as well as in political theory. The course aims to help students understand how different research questions turn into different research designs. The first and largest part of the course is devoted to discuss the main three types of research question and corresponding research designs in the social and political sciences -- experimental, cross-sectional, and exploratory -- as well as some other mixed types located in between the three "pure" types -- semi-experimental and comparative. Each research design responds to a different type of logic -- deductive, inductive, and abductive -- best suited to solve the research problems at hand. The second and shortest part of the course is dedicated to discuss the role of theorizing in the social and political sciences, and to provide a brief introduction to different types of research questions and designs in political theory. Ultimately, the course is intended to help students start writing the research proposals that they will need to defend at the end of the second term of the academic year.

2. Prerequisites
None

3. Competences to be achieved in the subject
- **General competences** (Instrumental, Interpersonal and Systemic)
  1. **Instrumental Competences**
     - Capacity to apply deductive, inductive and abductive logic in processes of theory building
     - Ability to operationalize ideas and concepts employed in theories
     - Ability to identify different research solutions for different research problems
     - Planning and development of research designs
  2. **Interpersonal Competences**
     - Critical and self-critical ability
     - Team work
     - Ability to work in a interdisciplinary team
  3. **Systemic Competences**
     - Research abilities
     - Ability to work autonomously
     - Ability to generate new ideas (creativity)
     - Design and management of research designs
- **Specific competences**
  1. Knowledge of some of the main types of theories in the social and political sciences
  2. Knowledge of main types of research designs
  3. Understanding of main threats to validity in each research design
  4. Ability to solve problems of endogeneity and environmental and selection effects
  5. Capacity to transform concepts into variables and indicators

4. Assessment
The course is assessed on a pass/non-pass basis. To pass the course students need to:
- Act as leading discussant of the compulsory reading chosen to illustrate the specific method/theoretical approach for that class (see weekly plan below)
• For each class students shall bring a short summary (about 600 words) of the reading been assigned. Failure to hand in three summaries will result in not passing the course.
• Additional/alternative requirements may be requested by each professor to pass the course.

5. Contents
There will be three basic content blocks.
1. **Main types of research proposals**
   Brief introduction on how to write a coherent research proposal starting from alternative research problems, and on how to operationalize ideas and concepts.

2. **Main types of research designs**
   Overview of the main research designs employed in the social and political sciences, as well as in political theory: experimental, quasi-experimental, cross-sectional, comparative, and exploratory. Characteristics and main threats to validity.

3. **Main types of political and social theories**
   Descriptive, normative theories

6. Methodology
Each weekly 3-hour session will be divided into: a lecture-type, 1:20 minutes session where the main aspect of the weekly topics will be laid out, and a 1:20 minutes practical session where students will discuss existing pieces of research that apply the methods or theories being discussed and reflect on how they could be used on their own research. In between both sessions there will be a 20 minute break.

7. Sources of information and didactic resources
1. **Basic bibliography**
   See detailed readings in weekly program.

2. **Complementary bibliography**
# Weekly plan

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<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Lecture 1 (October 16)</th>
<th>Lecture 2 (October 20)</th>
<th>Lecture 3 (October 23)</th>
<th>Lecture 4 (October 27)</th>
<th>Lecture 5 (October 30)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>16-20 Oct</td>
<td>Methodological approaches in political &amp; social research</td>
<td>Operationalizing concepts and searching for the explanatory mechanisms</td>
<td>Identification issues</td>
<td>Experimental designs</td>
<td>Quasi-experimental designs: solutions to endogeneity</td>
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<td>How to answer different questions in our disciplines</td>
<td>Concepts, variables and indicators in quantitative research</td>
<td>‘Comparing like with like’: selection bias, endogeneity</td>
<td>The basic experiment and its deductive logic, controlling for experimental, environmental, and selection effects</td>
<td>Panel and cohort studies with lagged variables, discontinuous models, instrumental variables</td>
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<td>Esping-Andersen</td>
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### Optional readings

### Lecture 6 (November 3)
**Quasi-experimental designs: solutions to selection and environmental effects**
- Natural experiments, matching, fixed effects models

#### Compulsory readings

#### Optional readings
- Rodriguez

### Lecture 7 (November 6)
**Qualitative analysis in perspective:**
- Strengths, limitations, and possibilities for mixed-methods

#### Compulsory reading
- Lyn Spillman, 2014 "Mixed Methods and the Logic of Qualitative Inference", *Qualitative Sociology* 37(2): 189-205.

#### Optional readings
- Fishman

### Lecture 8 (November 8)
**Qualitative research designs:**
- Case study, comparative, and historical designs

#### Compulsory reading

#### Optional readings

#### Lecture 9 (November 13)
**Qualitative Research tools:**
- Interviews, participant observation, document analysis, and ethical challenges

#### Compulsory readings
- Brady and Collier, chapter 13, pp. 229-266.

### Lecture 10 (November 15)
**Advanced qualitative research:**
- Advanced techniques and methodologies

#### Compulsory readings
- Fishman

### Lecture 11 (November 17)
**Quantitative research designs:**
- Correlation, regression, and causal inference

#### Compulsory readings
- Fishman

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<th>Lecture 10 (November 15)</th>
<th><strong>Political Theory, Political Science, and Sociology</strong>&lt;br&gt;Types and functions of theorizing in social research; the relation between political theory, political science, and sociology; types of research questions and design in political theory</th>
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<th>Lecture 11 (November 22)</th>
<th><strong>Methods and Approaches in Political Theory (1)</strong>&lt;br&gt;Rational choice; constructivism (Rawls); the capability approach (Sen)</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Optional readings</strong></td>
<td>Leopold, D. and Stears, M. <em>Political Theory: Methods and Approaches</em>, Oxford University Press, 2008 (ch. 3 and 4).</td>
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<th>Lecture 12 (November 24)</th>
<th><strong>Methods and Approaches in Political Theory (2)</strong>&lt;br&gt;Comparative political theory (Dallmayr); The Cambridge School (Skinner, Pocock); Critical Theory (Habermas); genealogy (Foucault); deconstruction (Derrida)</th>
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