

# RESEARCH DESIGN

*MSc in Public Administration, Leiden University*

*2011 Autumn Semester, 2<sup>nd</sup> block*

## **Instructors:**

Dr. Dimiter Toshkov, [dtoshkov@fsw.leidenuniv.nl](mailto:dtoshkov@fsw.leidenuniv.nl), tel.071 527 6771, office 5A12

Brendan Carroll, [carrollbj@fsw.leidenuniv.nl](mailto:carrollbj@fsw.leidenuniv.nl), tel. 071 527 6772, office 5A13

## **Time and place:**

Fridays 4/11 - 16/12 in SB-45

Time: 10-13u

## **Overview**

The aim of this course is to provide students with an understanding of the basic principles of research design in the social sciences, and public administration in particular. Students will get the fundamental skills needed to critically evaluate existing research. They will also learn how to discover interesting and doable research questions, sharpen the theories they use, and develop sound designs for empirical research. The course will provide an overview of experimental, comparative, large-N, and single case study designs. Case-selection strategies and common threats to internal and external validity of different research approaches will also be covered. Students will have ample opportunities to discuss and critique the research design of state-of-the-art academic articles in public administration and related fields, and to develop their own research proposal. The course will review different research methodologies and discuss their strengths and weaknesses but this is *not* a course in any specific method.

## **Goals of the course**

The main goals of the course are:

- to learn to critically assess empirical public administration research
- to understand the advantages and disadvantages of different designs for empirical research in public administration
- to understand the most common problems associated with observational studies
- to learn how to write a proposal for an empirical research project

## **Study material**

The study material consists of one book and several articles assigned for each session. The required book is:

King, Gary, Robert Keohane and Sidney Verba (1994) *Designing Social Inquiry*.  
Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

We will refer to that book as 'KKV' for short. You can buy the book in a bookstore, or purchase it through the Internet. The required articles are listed under each session (see below). Most of the articles will be available on Blackboard, or through the library digital services. Occasionally, you might have to copy a book chapter. The assigned literature, including the articles, should be read **in advance** of each session. The assigned literature is compulsory. Only literature marked explicitly as 'additional reading' is optional.

## **Method of instruction**

The course is based on a combination of lectures, class discussions and some practical exercises. The lectures will present the background material for each session. Do not expect the lectures to cover each and every topic from the assigned readings. Instead, the lectures will be mostly focused on the more difficult and controversial issues. Hence, it is essential that you read the assigned literature in advance of the sessions. Each session, the lecture will be followed by a class discussion. The discussions will be based on a general issue, some of the assigned literature or on your assignments (see below).

## Assignments and assessment

The assessment is based on two types of assignments: group and individual ones. There are five groups assignments that contribute altogether 50% of the final grade (so, each group assignments gives 10%). There are two individual assignments that contribute the remaining 50% of the final grade. The two individual assignments are two versions of a research proposal. The first version gives 10% of the final grade and the second (and final) version gives 40% of the final grade. The final version of the research proposal needs to get at least a 'six' for a student to pass the course. Therefore, even if your grade from the group assignments is an 'eight' you would not finish the course if your individual research proposal gets a failing grade.

### Schedule for the assignments

Group assignment 1:	Week 2 (9 November)
Group assignment 2:	Week 3 (16 November)
Individual assignment 1:	Week 4 (23 November)
Group assignment 3:	Week 5 (30 November)
Group assignment 4:	Week 6 (7 December)
Group assignment 5:	Week 7 (14 December)
Individual assignment 2:	14 January 2012

### *Group assignments*

Each group is composed of 5 or 6 students. The students are **randomly** assigned to groups. The assignment of students to groups is going to happen at the end of the first meeting (Week 1). That is why it is imperative that all students who are going to take the course are **registered** on the Blackboard site before the first meeting.

The five group assignments will deal with the development of different components of a research design, and the identification of different research approaches. All groups will work on the same research question during the entire course. The common research question will be selected during the first meeting. The five assignments will cover (1) making a literature review, (2) developing hypotheses and clarifying causal mechanisms, (3) conceptualization, operationalization and identifying data sources, (4) designing experimental and large-N research, and (5) designing small-N comparative and

single case study research. Hence, each student will get experience with designing **different** types of research and discussing their pro-s and con-s. Also, the competitive element of the group assignments will ensure that students take seriously the challenges in designing quality public administration research.

All students within a group will get the same grade. However, if a student does not participate in the work of the group (as attested by the other members) on **more than one** occasion, he or she will get no grade for the group assignments (which automatically implies that he or she will not be able to finish the course). Each student will have an opportunity to (anonymously) identify people who systematically do not contribute to the group assignments. These statements will be examined by the instructors and appropriate measures will be taken to prevent free-riding. In special circumstances, a student will be allowed not to contribute to the workgroup for **a maximum of two times**, but in that case, the students would need to present to the student advisor **evidence** for these 'special circumstances' (e.g. a note from the doctor). Study trips, extra-university work, travel, family vacations, course load, etc. are not sufficient reasons for non-participation.

The group assignments have to be submitted **electronically** and **in-print** by the deadlines. Late assignments will not be considered (so the group gets automatically **no points** for the week). First, the group assignments need to be uploaded on the Blackboard site of the course (in the specially-designated folders). Second, one printed copy has to be provided in the red box in the secretariat.

The group assignments will be graded very strictly using the full range of possible grades. The grades are going to be announced during the class and the assignments are going to be extensively discussed in class (normally, during the last hour of the session). Therefore, the students are advised to have read the work on the other groups (on BB).

#### *Individual assignments*

The individual assignment is the preparation of a research proposal, which can become the basis for a Master thesis. Two versions of the research proposals are to be submitted and graded. The students will get feedback on their first drafts of the individual research proposals and will have an opportunity to discuss their work during individual appointments with the instructors. The research proposals **can** be used as a preparation for the Master thesis, but they **do not need to be** (you can write a thesis about something

else). In any case, the research proposals should be realistic given the time and money constraints that a typical Master thesis research faces.

The research proposals will be assessed primarily on the quality of the argument, the feasibility of the proposed research, the overall logic of the research design, and the consistency of the different elements of the proposal.

#### *Re-takes*

If the students complete all assignments but receive a final grade that is not sufficient to pass the course, they will have the chance to improve on their individual research proposal (with a deadline in February). If students have not participated in the group assignments (as explained above), they would need to redo the entire course.

#### *Attendance*

Attendance of the lectures is required. The same rules as for the group assignments apply: missing one session is fine (no need to inform us); missing two sessions is possible only under exceptional circumstances and with a written proof, missing more than two sessions means that you have to retake the course.

#### *Referencing and plagiarism*

Use in-text references (e.g. King, Keohane and Verba, 1994). We take plagiarism **very seriously**. Assignments that include plagiarized text (including text that is copied verbatim without quotation marks even if the reference is provided) will not be graded. Repeated failures to attribute credit to existing sources will be referred to the Examination Board and will preclude the students from finishing the course.

#### *Use of Blackboard*

Blackboard (BB) is our main tool for communicating with you. All information about the organization of the course, the reading materials, announcements, assessment, etc will be provided through the BB. Students have the responsibility to stay informed by visiting BB regularly. We reserve the right not to answer any emails asking for information which is provided in this course outline or on the BB site.

#### *Language*

The working language for the course is English. According to Dutch law, students have the right to submit assignments in Dutch as well.

# PLAN OF CAMPAIGN

## **Week 1 Introduction.**

**4 November 2011**

Explaining the organization of the course (goals, expectations, assessment, etc.).

Assignment of students into groups.

Defining and delineating social-scientific research.

Types of research (normative vs. positive; descriptive vs. explanatory; exploratory vs. confirmatory; theoretical vs. empirical).

Choosing a research question. Doing a literature review.

What makes a good research question? (*discussion*)

Selection of the research question for the group assignments and explanation of the first group assignment.

Short overview of research tools provided by UL (web of science, google scholar, access to academic journals, factiva, the library, etc).

Reminder about referencing and plagiarism.

*Assigned readings:*

(1) KKV pp. 3-19

*Individual assignment*

Get the KKV book

*Group assignment 1 (Deadline 9 November, 17.00h):*

Short literature review for the research topic and question selected in the previous week.

**Week 2 The role of theory in the research process.**

**11 November 2011**

The second session focuses on the role of theory in the research process.

What is the purpose of a theory? What are hypotheses? What are causal mechanisms?

The language of empirical research: units of analysis and observation, independent and dependent variables, etc.

Discussion of the group assignment

*Assigned readings:*

(1) KKV pp. 19-22; 99-114

(2) Gary Goertz, *Social Science Concepts: A User's Guide*, Princeton University Press, 2006, Chapter 9 [http://press.princeton.edu/chapters/s9\\_8089.pdf](http://press.princeton.edu/chapters/s9_8089.pdf)

*Group assignment 2 (Deadline 16 November, 17.00h):*

Formulate a simple theoretical argument about the common research question, identify hypotheses, and specify the causal mechanisms.

**Week 3 Concepts, operationalization and measurement.**

**18 November 2011**

The third session focuses on the operationalization and measurement of theoretical concepts.

What is a concept? What is an indicator? How do we measure concepts? What are the criteria to judge the quality of operationalization and measurement?

Different ideas about measurement validity and practical strategies for translating abstract concepts into measurable indicators will be discussed.

Discussion of the second group assignment

*Assigned readings:*

- (1) KKV pp. 23-26; 150-167
- (2) Adcock, Robert, and David Collier. "Measurement Validity: A Shared Standard for Qualitative and Quantitative Research." *American Political Science Review* 95, no. 3 (2001): 529-546.
- (3) (optional) Gary Goertz, *Social Science Concepts: A User's Guide*, Princeton University Press, 2006, Chapter 1 <http://press.princeton.edu/chapters/s8089.pdf>

*Individual assignment 1(Deadline 23 November, 17.00h):*

Prepare a first draft of a research proposal containing research question, justification of the research question in terms of practical and scientific relevance, hypotheses, causal mechanisms, dependent and independent variables.



## **Week 4 Experimental research designs. Causality in non-experimental research.**

**25 November 2011**

Discussion of causality and introduction of the counterfactual definition of causality.

The classic experimental research design and its strengths in establishing causal inferences.

Applications of experimental research design in public administration, political science and development economics.

A general approach to establishing causality with non-experimental data.

The conditions (assumptions) for establishing a causal relationship.

Performing, analyzing and discussing the results of a social scientific experiment in class

### *Assigned readings:*

- (1) KKV pp. 75-98
- (2) Banerjee and Duflo 2008. "The Experimental Approach to Development Economics", NBER Working Paper No. 14467
- (3) McDermott, R. 2002. "Experimental Methodology in Political Science." Political Analysis. 10(4):325-61.
- (4) (optional) Gerring, John (2005) Causation. A unified framework for the social sciences. Journal of Theoretical Policy 17(2).

### *Group assignment 3 (Deadline 30 November, 17.00h):*

Identify the variables in your group research project, operationalize the concepts and identify possible data sources, and discuss their validity.

The fifth session deals with two main topics. First, it presents the logic of large-N research and discusses the weaknesses and strengths of quantitative designs. Second, we focus on case selection and the crucial role it plays in the process of research design.

Detailed discussion of articles 3 and 4.

Discussion of the group assignments.

*Assigned readings:*

- (1) KKV pp.115-149, 168-207
- (2) Barbara Geddes, "How the Cases You Choose Affect the Answers You Get: Selection Bias in Comparative Politics," *Political Analysis*, Vol. 2 (1990), pp. 131-150.
- (3) Lewis, David E. (2007) 'Testing Pendleton's Premise: Do Political Appointees Make Worse Bureaucrats?' *The Journal of Politics* 69(4): 1073-88.
- (4) Ringquist, E. J., Worsham, J. & Eisner, M. A. (2003) Salience, Complexity, and the Legislative Direction of Regulatory Bureaucracies. *J Public Adm Res Theory*, 13, 141-164.

*Group assignment 4 (Deadline 7 December, 17.00h):*

Develop two hypothetical research designs addressing the common research question: one experimental, and one observational & based on a large number of cases. Discuss how each of them deals with the common threats to establishing causality.

**Week 6 Comparative case study analysis. Singly case studies. 9 December 2011**

Comparative research approaches in the social sciences. Most-similar and most-different system designs. 'Necessary' and 'sufficient' conditions. Qualitative comparative analysis (crisp-set and fuzzy). Single case studies. The logic of using and the principles of selecting single case studies.

Discussion of the group assignments.

*Assigned readings:*

- (1) KKV pp.208-228
- (2) John Gerring "What is a case study and what is it good for", *American Political Science Review*, no. 6 (2004)
- (3) Boin, A., t'Hart, P. et al. (2010) Leadership Style, Crisis Responses and Blame Management: The Case of Hurricane Katrina, *Public Administration*, pp. 1-17.
- (4) Hood, Christopher et al. (2009) "Testing times: Exploring staged responses and the impact of blame management strategies in two examination fiasco cases," *European Journal of Political Research* 48: 695-722.
- (5) Dimitrova, A. and Toshkov, D. (2009) Post-accession Compliance between Administrative Co-ordination and Political Bargaining. *European Integration Online Papers*, Special Issue 2, Vol. 13, Art. 19
- (6) (optional) Mahoney, James (2007) 'Qualitative Methodology and Comparative Politics', *Comparative Political Studies* 40(2): 122-44.
- (7) (optional) George, Alexander L., and Andrew Bennett. 2005. *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*. MIT Press., Chapter 1  
<http://mitpress.mit.edu/books/chapters/0262572222chap1.pdf>

*Group assignment 5 (Deadline 14 December, 17.00h):*

Develop two hypothetical research designs addressing the common research question: one based on a small-N comparative design and one based on a single case study. Discuss how each of them deals with the common threats to establishing causality.

**Week 7 Conclusion.****16 December 2011**

The final session draws all the elements discussed during the course together. It also deals with the ethics of doing social scientific research, and topics like plagiarism in particular. The session presents some general advice and tips about writing research reports (papers, articles, dissertations) that present the findings from your research projects.

Discussion of the group assignments.

**14 January 2012 Deadline for final research proposals**

Individual assignment 2: The final research proposal is an improved version of the first draft. In addition it contains operationalization and measurement strategy, possible data sources, and a description of the empirical research approach, a presentation of the case selection strategy, as well as a detailed discussion of possible threats to the validity of the results.

**14 February 2012 Retake deadline**

Retake of the final research proposal (only possible in case the group assignments are successfully completed).

