Methodology Triage Clinic

"If I had an hour to solve a problem I'd spend 55 minutes thinking about the problem and 5 minutes thinking about solutions." Albert Einstein

Today

- Sources of Funding and Grant Proposal Writing Tips (Andrea Charron)
- “Ethics and your Thesis” (Karine Levasseur)
- “Methodology: The absolute musts and must nots” (Scott Sinclair)
- 15 minute “Pitch and Profit” methodology presentations
- What have we learned?

Most important part for you

Pitch and Profit

- Every 15 minutes, rotate to one of the instructors in the room.
- Pitch your methodology problem (be succinct, focus on stumbling blocks, what is your main research question? “I am stuck” is not helpful.)
- Instructors will help **guide** you to find **your** solution.
- Depending on numbers, we would like everyone to speak to at least 2 instructors.
- If you are NOT speaking to an instructor, pitch your idea to a fellow student

Instructors Available

- Andrea Charron – IR Theory, Conflict, Arctic, IOs
- Scott Sinclair – Methodology, Labour market development, human capital formation and evidence based decision-making in the public sector
- Bryan Peeler – Philosophy, Law of War, Writing dos and don’ts
- Karine Levasseur – Methodology, public policy, ethics procedures
- Andrea Rounce - Methodology, public administration, political behavior (public opinion, elections)

Funding and Proposals

- 2 funding streams: internal and external

Internal Awards

- UMGraduate Fellowship
- MB Graduate scholarship
- Duff Roblin Award

don't pay back!

External Awards

- SSHRC Talent Awards - adjudicated locally UM has a quota of 25 MA awards

Average award

- $7,500 to $17,500/year
- GPA average is 3.75 (B+)
- All citizenships eligible
- Usually multiple-year scholarships
- Grants are like a stubborn tap… once you open it, many can flow from your one success

Grant Writing Process

- IT IS LONG!!
- IT WILL TAKE MANY ITERATIONS
- Common CV
- Academic background
- Program of Study (i.e. what is your research project?)
- References (usually 2)
- Transcripts

Program of Study (or the proposal)

- Generally 1-2 pages
- MUST state the research QUESTION
- Context (what is current state of literature on this) and Objectives of the research (i.e. what is the problem, why study this? So what? – answer this!!)
- What methods will be used. ("I will look at this" is NOT detailed enough – how will you "look" at this?)
- How will this advance the literature?
- Bibliography/Citations

Hints

- Try and tell a story - concrete, compelling narrative
- Does it connect to the real world? Research for research sake is not funded
- Do not use jargon (Can anyone read it and understand it?)
- Define your variables. (E.g. what IS a sanction?)
- Methods – what will be your approach to sampling, recruitment/access to data, data gathering, analysis, presentation and dissemination of results?

Evaluation Criteria of most grants

- Academic excellence (60% weighting) – academic distinctions, awards, transcripts
- Research potential (30% weighting)
- Communication skills (10% weighting)

(This is deceptive, however, as your lack of clarity in writing can damage your academic excellence/research potential)

References MATTER!!

- Usually require 2
  - Usually one speaks to your academic/research generally
  - The other speaks to the suitability of your research project… therefore, you have to know what you are going to do BEFORE you ask for the letter.

- Give your referees information about you. You can even provide them with a draft of what you think are your strengths, the originality/importance of your research.

Prior Publications are a HUGE help

- There are LOTS of student journals – use a term paper and submit it!
- Write a book review – best way to get into a peer-reviewed journal
- Write and op ed for the local paper/school paper
- Ask to coauthor with a professor – be prepared, however, to do the lion's share of the work.

Student journals

- http://www.iccs-ciec.ca/international-journal-canadian-studies.php
- http://cgjsc-rcessc.uwaterloo.ca/index.php/cgjsc
- http://www.cjnse-rcjce.ca/ojs2/index.php/cjnse
- *cips.uottawa.ca/publication/potentia/*

Methodology

Dos and Don’ts

Scott Sinclair

Do have an understanding of the foundation of research philosophy and practice.

- Appreciate and Understand the difference between scientific and non-scientific knowledge
  - Science is **empirical**
  - Science is **systematic**
  - Science searches for **causes of events**
  - Science is **provisional**
  - Science is **objective**

Do have an understanding of the foundation of research philosophy and practice.

- Understand the differences between pure and applied research
- Understand the difference between descriptive and explanatory research

Don’t dismiss theoretical as not being empirical

- You can even think of most research as a blending of these two terms -- a comparison of our theories about how the world operates with our observations of its operation.

Do start with a clear formulation of your problem

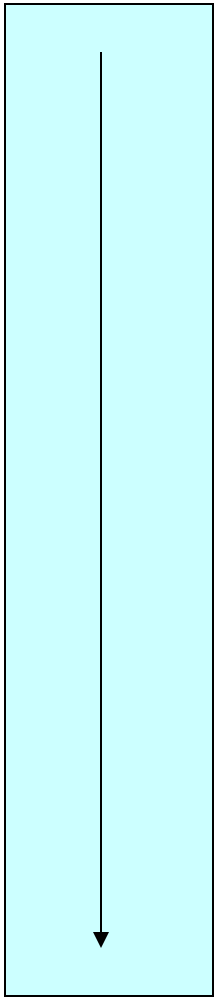
- Consider issues of sampling, measurement, design, and analysis – as well as the theories of validity behind each step.

Do understand how to construct your theory

- Deductive
- Inductive

Building theories

Deductive **Inductive**



Theoretical Level (abstract)

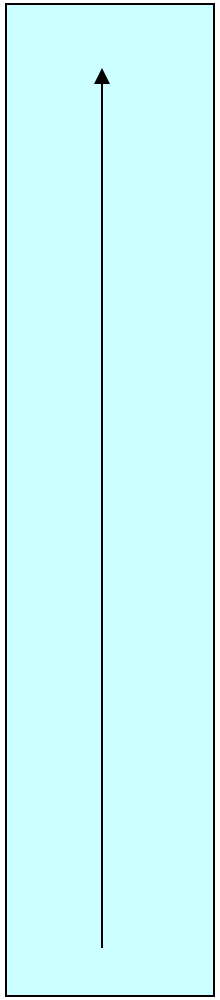
- Abstract explanations of behaviour
- Theory help us make sense of chaos by looking at specific explanations
- X has an impact on Y

Conceptual Level

- You begin to define concepts as outlined in the theoretical level (I.e. here you define what ‘X’ and ‘Y’ mean)
- Examples: peer pressure, education, poverty, alcoholism
- You build your hypothesis statements, which are hunches / predictions of what you think will occur between X and Y.

Operational Level (concrete)

- Where you build measures or indicators to accurately reflect your definitions in the conceptual level (I.e. how much money is spent on food may be considered a measure of poverty).



Do define your variables clearly

- Independent variable
- Dependent variable
- Other variables??

Do know how to construct a proper hypothesis

- Clear
- Directional
- Falsefiable

Don’t commit errors in reasoning

- Ecological fallacy
- Exception fallacy

Do understand that research should strive to be causal

- Most social research is interested (at some point) in looking at cause-effect relationships.
- This doesn't mean that most studies actually study cause-effect relationships.
- There is some research that simply observe –
  - for instance, surveys that seek to describe the percent of people holding a particular opinion.
- There are many studies that explore relationships
  - for example, studies that attempt to see whether there is a relationship voting intentions and SES.

Don’t confuse correlation with causation!

- Correlation does not imply causation
- *Cum hoc ergo propter hoc*
  - with this, therefore because of this
- *Post hoc ergo hoc*
  - after this, therefore because of this

Don’t chose a research question that can’t be answered

- Some research questions in the social sciences are not researchable because they are simply unanswerable

Don’t get trapped by “the rule of the hammer”

- Application of a single method indiscriminately, regardless of its suitability for a given research project.

Don’t confuse personal interest in a topic or questions as being enough to justify it as valuable research

- It is the relevance in terms of existing knowledge and practical need that are the priority.

What have we learned?

The key is the question you ask

- Is it, in fact, a question?
- “Why”? is better than “how”?
- Is it testable?
- Is there data associated with it?
- Are there theories associated with it?
- Will it further knowledge/research?

- Can you measure something? It doesn’t need to be quantitative but you need to compare/contrast ideas, theories, approaches or data

Methodology

- Are you proving/disproving a theory?
- Are you conducting a case study? (the more you have, the more conclusions you can infer, the fewer you have, the more in-depth)
- What are your PRIMARY sources?
- Do you have independent variables?
- What is your dependent variable?
- Have you predetermined your outcome?
- We don’t want summaries of stuff happening. We want arguments about how, why or when something happens.

Methodologies to avoid

- If your dependent variable doesn't change with a change in your independent variables, you have a problem
- Causation is very, very difficult to prove
- NO primary data or inventing data bases (the latter more appropriate for a PhD thesis)
- The meaning of life – break down your research question into sub questions
- If you can't provide a "so what?" to the reason you are conducting your thesis

Final Words of Wisdom

- Your mantra should be “get it done” NOT “make it perfect”
- Read aloud – you’ll catch more mistakes
- Peer review each other’s work

Consider Taking a Methodology Class

scott.sinclair@gov.mb.ca email if interested

POLS 3950 Research Methods in the Study of Politics Cr.Hrs.3 (Formerly 019.395)

An introduction to the major quantitative and qualitative research strategies employed in the study of politics. The topics addressed include interviewing, content analysis, comparative studies, survey design, sampling, research ethics and basic statistical analysis. Students may not hold credit for both POLS 3950 (019.395) and the former