Trinity College Dublin
PO3110: Research Methods for Political Science A

Presentation guidelines

Research Methods for Political Science is graded in part on the basis of a research project paper due at the end of the term (max 2,000 words). The idea is to develop and execute a small **research proposal**, including a theory, data analysis and presentation of the results (see guidelines below). This assignment will be done **in groups of three** (your TA will assign you to a group).

In order to receive early feedback on this assignment and to benefit from the thoughts and experiences of others in the class, you are also required to present your research idea in class during weeks 9 and 10 (see schedule below).

The format will be a presentation (**max 10 min**) followed by Q&A from myself, your TA, and the other students. Your presentation should consist of at least the following elements:

1. A brief introduction in which you outline the **research question**, make clear why this should be studied and discuss the scientific and practical **relevance** of such a study. Your research question should aim to fill a gap in the literature, challenge existing findings or provide a replication of existing findings based on new data (see below). Within the context of this assignment you have to pose an *explanatory research question*; you should clearly state the dependent variable and the main independent variable(s). (about 2 min)
2. A short discussion of the **relevant literature**, and how your work fits in it. Please ONLY discuss works that are directly relevant for your study and research question—not a lengthy discussion of all tangential literature. The goal is not to "show off" the amount of background research you have done, but to tell us clearly what gap you aim to fill. (about 1 min)
3. An outline of your **theoretical argument.** Discuss the main **concepts** in your study, as well as your hypotheses (about 3 min)
4. A short **methodology section**, including the overall design of the study, data sources, operationalization and strategy for analysis. Think carefully about issues of confounding factors (i.e., a variable z that affects both x and y, so that x in fact does not cause y) and reverse causality (y causes x, not x causes y). (about 3 min)
5. A short **discussion/conclusion** in which you reflect on the strengths and limitations of your approach. (about 1 min)

Note that 1 and 3 may cover some of the same ground, and you may therefore want to allocate additional time to 1 than to 3, or vice versa. Regardless of the order, the relevance and theory need to be discussed.

As also stated in the guidelines for the research paper, please take the following into account:

- There are limitations on what you will be able to do, so your research question should be feasible for a short research project. Moreover, you should be able to answer your question based on **existing data**. This data should be freely accessible.
- At the same time, you would want to try to be creative and insightful. Research questions that build upon the literature to find an aspect of the political world that has not yet been studied in the way you propose to do, will receive a higher grade. This does not necessarily mean that you have to do something entirely new; it is also very valuable to replicate an existing study using new cases, better measurements or different analysis techniques. That would also be a good contribution to the scientific literature.
- The proposed study should be an empirical study, not just a literature study.
- Observe standard requirements for the presentation of your paper, as stated in the Undergraduate Handbook.
- The word count for this paper is low, so make sure that your writing style is very concise.
- Your statistics training will be limited, but it should be possible to study bivariate relationships using contingency tables, chi square, phi, correlation, t-tests or proportion tests. Take the limitations in terms of the statistical analysis into account when deciding about your research question and design.

Schedule (subject to additions):

Tuesday Nov. 6	Group 1	Group 2	
Thursday Nov. 8	Group 3	Group 4	Group 5
Tuesday Nov. 13	Group 6	Group 7	Group 8
Tuesday Nov. 13	Group 9	Group 10	Group 11