Master's thesis seminar

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- Wrote my Master's thesis in 2014
  - ... but as a part of my PhD

Background

- Master students **must** finish within 2½ years
  - If +2½ years: Goodbye.
  - Expected time: 2 years
  - Plan accordingly!
- You need to write a Master's thesis
- Get started now
  - Write

You?

- Interests
  - Theoretical
    - Welfare studies
    - Comparative politics
    - Public policy
    - Political behavior
    - International relations
    - Public administration
    - Political communication
  - Methodological (qual/quant)

Today

- Two goals
  1. Learn how to write a thesis
  2. Learn how to write a *good* thesis

Master's thesis

- Hand in thesis by **June 1st** (or January 2nd)
- Start the planning before the end of third semester
- Contract must be approved by the supervisor and the head of studies by **January 16th** (or August 15th)
- The contract is an exam condition for submitting the thesis
  - Supervision in the proces is conditional upon an approved contract

Supervision

- 5 hours supervision
  - Use it!
  - Additional supervision? Only if you submit *and* fail
- Discuss everything
  - Ideas
  - Theory
  - Method
  - Limitations
  - Practical stuff

What you need to do

What you need to do

Write!

- "When I procrastinate, current me really expects a lot out of future me."
- "I procrastinate because I am stressed. I am stressed because I procrastinate."
- Ariely and Wertenbroch (2002): "What is clear from our empirical evidence is that procrastination is a real behavioral problem, that people strategically try to curb it by using costly self-imposed deadlines, and that self-imposed deadlines are not always as effective as some external deadlines in boosting task performance." (p. 224)

Time	Students' activity	Supervisor's activities and obligations	Other activities
Students' third semester	Preparing for the master thesis	Informal discussions with potential supervisees – informal acceptance/denial for being supervisor	
20-30 May/ 20/30 November	Course enrollment for master thesis		
2 June/ 2 December	Register ideas for topic and possible supervisor on digital form		Heads of sections decide whom should be supervised by whom – together with SUL
15 June/ 15 December	Receive final designation of supervisor	Receive final assignment of supervisees	
	Contact supervisor to develop research question and supervision plan	Discuss research question and supervision plan with supervisees. DECISIVE THAT YOU ARE AVAILABLE DURING THIS PERIOD	
Period before 15 August/ 16 January	Upload digital supervisor contract for approval by supervisor and Head of Studies	Approve digital supervisor contract: research question is elaborated to an extent that allows supervisor to judge if it can fulfill the goals in the course description sufficiently; supervision plan must include dates for submissions of important chapters and dates and themes for supervisor meetings. Preferably accept before 15 August/16 January	Head of Studies receives approved supervisor contract for final approval and approve no later than 15 August/16 January
~~1 September/ 1 February~~	~~Deadline for supervision contract second attempt~~		
~~15 September/ 15 February~~	~~Deadline for supervision contract third and last attempt~~		
September/ February		Suggest external examiners qualified for the topic ('censors')	Head of Studies approve suggested 'censors'
	Writing master thesis	Supervise according to supervision plan. Each supervisee has right to 5 hours' supervision.	'Censor' assigned
2 January/ 1 June	Submit master thesis	Together with 'censor': receive master thesis from secretariat	
		Grade master thesis together with 'censor' and upload grade before 31 January/ 30 June. DELAY IS NOT AN OPTION	
31 January/ 30 June			Publication of grade. THIS DEADLINE HAS TO BE MET

Figure 1: The plan

What you need to do

- Write 80 pages
  - Or 70
    - Quality beats quantity
- Keep the deadlines
- Don't rely on resubmission
- Have fun

Standard elements of a thesis

- Introduction
  - Theoretical puzzle
- Theory
  - Lit. review
  - Research questions, hypotheses
- Method
  - Identification strategy
  - Data
- Analysis
- Discussion
- Conclusion
- References
- Appendices

Title

- Now: Use a working title
  - Find a title that could be the title of a peer-reviewed research articles
- Zigerell (2013): “titles should indicate the most general level at which the theory can legitimately be applied”

Abstract

- Write an abstract
- Make sure to have a short summary of the thesis
  - Argument
- Zigerell (2013): "Early drafts of a manuscript should include an abstract because the process of condensing a manuscript into a few sentences helps an author pinpoint what he or she is trying to accomplish in the manuscript and its reported research."

Introduction

- Describe why we should care!
- Motivation for the topic, relevance of the topic
- Presents the context of the research – what has been done
- Identifies a gap in the literature
- Formulates the problem and research question(s), justifies its relevance in the light of the identified gap.
- Briefly presents the approach: theories and methods, data
- The roadmap of the paper

Theory

- Make sure to conduct a systematic and comprehensive literature review!
- Literature review aims
  - Establishes what has been done in the field: what has been studies, with what methods, what data and what results
  - Establishes what has not been done = the gap the thesis aims to fulfil
  - Helps with the concepts, and measurements, and methods
  - Definitions of concepts, evaluation of methods
    - But: Only define concepts with multiple definitions
  - Discussion of main theoretical perspectives, overview
  - Development of own theoretical framework

- Study: Is everything we eat associated with cancer? A systematic cookbook review (Schoenfeld and Ioannidis 2012)
- Method: "We selected 50 common ingredients from random recipes in a cookbook. PubMed queries identified recent studies that evaluated the relation of each ingredient to cancer risk. Information regarding author conclusions and relevant effect estimates were extracted."

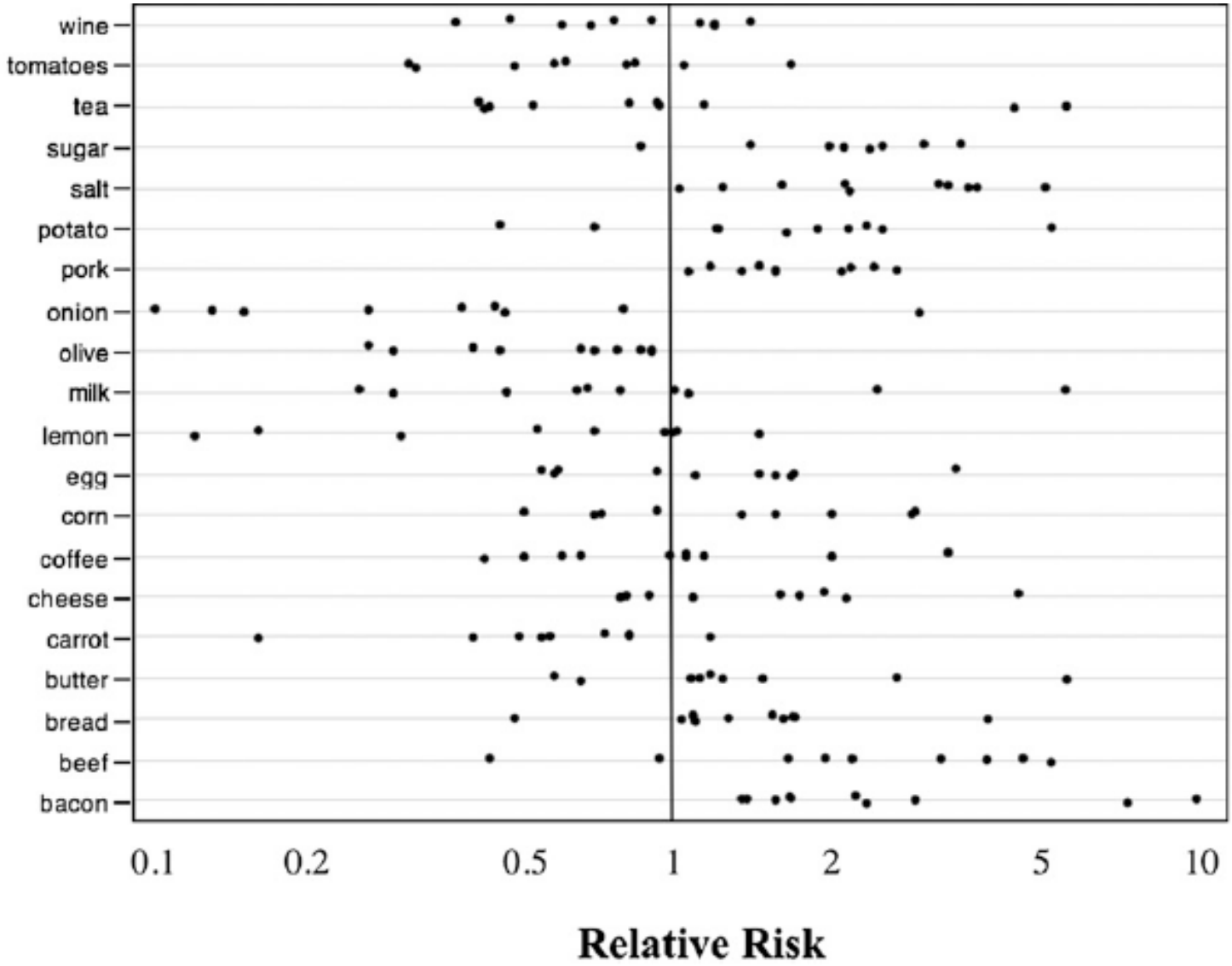

Figure 2: Is everything we eat associated with cancer? A systematic cookbook review (Schoenfeld and Ioannidis 2012

Theory: Where to find the relevant literature?

- Google Scholar
  - Search for key words
  - Search for papers
  - Check specific periods
    - Find most recent working papers and forthcoming papers
  - Check citations to relevant papers

Theory

- Zigerell (2013): "Theory is not background facts, a definition, restatement of the hypotheses, or implications of the hypotheses; theory provides an explanation for the expected correctness or incorrectness of the hypotheses."
- Theoretical framework
  - Combine different theories, propose a mechanism, etc.
  - Concepts used for analysis
    - Define the concepts
  - Develop hypotheses/propositions/mechanisms to be tested/falsified
  - Clarify link to the research question
  - Different research strategies use the theory & concepts in different ways
  - Don't use unclear words (maybe, substantial etc.) for the hypotheses
  - Have as few hypotheses as possible
    - One thesis, one point

Method

- Data and methods aims
  - Presents the data: sources, procedures, reasons for selection of data
  - Presents the methods: brief description of the method, reasons for using them, advantages in relation to the research question
  - Discussion of reliabiliy and validity issues (also reflected upon in the conclusion)
  - Provide information required to replicate the study
    - Information can also be provided in the appendices

Method: data

- "In God we trust; all others must bring data."
- Primary, secondary, tertiary data – advantages / disadvantages
- Important for your work plan
  - Time consuming
- If you can answer your research question using secondary data, do so!

Analysis

- Application of the theoretical framework you chose or you developped to the data you have collected
- Differs depending on the type of research strategy you follow
- Visualize your results

Discussion

- Presents main findings
- Discuss implications of the findings – in the light of the existing literature
  - What is the contribution of the study to the literature in the field?
  - What are the weaknesses/limitations of the study?
- Possible future research directions
  - Discuss implications, not random ideas

A note on footnotes

- Keep them to a minimum. Thanks.

Appendices

- Additional information required to replicate the findings
- Robustness tests
- Information on context
- Questionnaire
- etc.

Figures and tables

- Figures and tables should be included for a reason
  - Have a point to tell with a table or figure
  - If not strictly needed, move to the appendices

References

- Use references for all statements requiring documentation
- Don't have citations mid-sentence
- In the list of references, make sure to include *all* information (also volume and number for journal articles)
  - Be consistent!

The document

- Use a nice font, e.g. Times New Roman
- Use a nice font size, e.g. 12pt
- Use a fully justified alignment
- Use automatic hyphenation
- Use line spacing, e.g. 1½ or 2

What to do?

- Zigerell (2011): Of Publishable Quality: Ideas for Political Science Seminar Papers
  - 20 ideas, pursue multiple of the ideas

1. Add a variable
2. Interact variables
3. Split the sample
4. Disaggregate
5. Check for indirect effects
6. Change perspective
7. Improve a measure
8. Analyze an existing measure
9. Travel to another place
10. Travel through time

What to do?

11. Travel across or within institutions
12. Travel by analogy
13. Travel theories from another discipline
14. Travel methods from another discipline
15. Change estimation technique
16. Criticize an article by analyzing data
17. Criticize an article without analyzing data
18. Advise
19. Review literature
20. Meta-analyze

Remember: social science is difficult!

- Watts (2012): "Well, I'm no rocket scientist, and I have immense respect for the people who can land a machine the size of a small car on another planet. But the sad fact is that we're actually much better at planning the flight path of an interplanetary rocket than we are at managing the economy, merging two corporations, or even predicting how many copies of a book will sell. So why is it that rocket science *seems* hard, whereas problems having to do with people - which arguably are much harder - *seem* like they ought to be just a matter of common sense?"

Get started now

- Find an idea
- Read the literature
- Again: **Write!**
- Don't feel ashamed
  - Write now, edit later
- Something beats nothing

Questions?

Problemformuleringer