

Leiden University | Political Science

## Master Thesis Seminar

# Political Communication, Public Opinion, and Political Behavior

MSc 2014-2015, Semester 2, Block 3 & 4  
20 ECTS, Level 600

### Formal Schedule

Monday, February 2 - May 18, 13:00-15:00  
Wednesday, February 4 - May 20, 13:00-15:00

Instructor: Michael F. Meffert  
Office: 5B11 | Office Hours by appointment  
071-527-3862 | m.f.meffert@fsw.leidenuniv.nl

### Course Description

The objective of this Master Thesis Seminar is to deepen the understanding of theories and research methods related to political communication, public opinion, and political behavior, and to apply them to a specific topic as part of the student's master thesis project. This includes but is not limited to different forms of political participation such as electoral behavior, longitudinal or comparative research of (old and new) media content, as well as media effects on political attitudes and individual behavior. Students are expected to develop their own research question within these broad themes and to answer them by collecting their own data using surveys, experiments, and/or content analyses but might also conduct secondary analyses of existing data sources. Students will develop a thesis proposal in Block 3 and, after conducting research, write the master thesis in Block 4.

### Method of Instruction

Seminar-style group meetings and individual supervision

### Readings

Required: A very limited selection of journal articles and book chapters (see *Seminar Schedule* below and Blackboard).

Recommended (some **highly**):

Topics in political communication, public opinion and political behavior:

- Dalton, Russell J., and Hans-Dieter Klingemann. 2007. *The Oxford Handbook of Political Behavior*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Research Methods:

Introductory:

- Van Evera, Stephen. 1997. *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.
- Babbie, Earl. 2010. *The Practice of Social Research*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Creswell, John W. 2009. *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*. 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

## Advanced:

- King, Gary, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba. 1994. *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Brady, Henry E., and David Collier (eds.). 2004. *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

## Statistics:

- Field, Andy. 2013. *Discovering Statistics Using IBM SPSS Statistics*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

## Writing:

- Colburn, Forrest D., and Norman Uphoff. 2012. "Common Expository Problems in Students' Papers and Theses." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 45 (2): 291–297.
- Burrough-Boenisch, Joy. 2013. *Righting English That's Gone Dutch*. 's Gravenhage: Kemper Conseil Publishing.

## Final Checks:

- Zigerell, L. J. 2013. "Rookie Mistakes: Preemptive Comments on Graduate Student Empirical Research Manuscripts." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 46 (1): 142–146.

## Assignments

Block 3: Thesis Reviews, Two Essays, Presentations, Peer Reviews, Thesis Proposal

Block 4: Progress Reports, Presentation, Master Thesis

**Thesis Reviews.** In Weeks 1 & 2, students will choose any two political science master theses in the library/student repository and write two short 400-word reviews summarizing and evaluating each thesis (research question, theory, methods, results, and overall contribution).

**Essays & Peer Reviews.** In Weeks 3 & 4, students are expected to write two 1000-word essays that constitute key building blocks of the thesis proposal.

The **Review Essay** defines a research question, followed by a topical literature review that summarizes key studies (10 academic research studies/articles) related to the chosen research topic and research question. The review should point out the contributions and shortcomings of these studies to the chosen topic, define the key concepts, and usually end with one or more clearly stated and testable hypotheses.

The **Methods Essay** proposes a quantitative or qualitative research design that allows you to answer your research question and test your research hypothesis. The essay describes the unit of analysis, case selection and/or sampling, the operationalization of the key concepts and variables, data collection, and the planned data analyses.

After the essays are posted on Blackboard, each student will review and evaluate the (assigned) essays of two other students and discuss them in workshops. The peer reviews and the feedback from the instructor will help to develop and improve the thesis proposal. Please note that students will be split in two separate groups with different deadlines for this part of the seminar.

**Presentation & Discussion.** In Week 5, students are expected to have a first draft of their thesis proposal completed, and each student will read and discuss one other (assigned) proposal. In two workshops, students will give a 5-minute presentation of their proposal, followed by a 5-minute response by the discussant.

**Thesis Proposal.** On March 16, 2015 (noon), students submit their final thesis proposal (10-15 pages) for review and approval by supervisor and second reader.

**Master Thesis.** On May 11, 2015 (noon), students submit their first draft of the complete master thesis to the instructor and will receive feedback within one week. On June 8, 2015 (noon), the final master thesis is submitted.

**Format of Written Work.** Unless stated otherwise, all written assignments including thesis and thesis proposal use 12-point font (Times New Roman), double-spacing, and 3 cm page margins.

**Participation & Deadlines.** Seminar attendance is *mandatory* and an active and informed participation of the students in class discussions is expected. Students who miss classes unexcused will automatically fail the course. Any readings and assignments must be completed before class. All deadlines are final and late submissions are not accepted and lead, at a minimum, to no feedback or to the failure of the course. More specifically, if a student fails to submit the thesis proposal on time, the thesis advisor has no further obligation to continue the supervision of the thesis.

**Plagiarism.** Plagiarism is understood as presenting, intentionally or otherwise, someone else's words, thoughts, analyses, argumentations, pictures, techniques, computer programs, etc., as your own work. Plagiarism is not allowed and has serious consequences. Students must be familiar with Leiden University's rules about plagiarism. They are available at: <http://www.regulations.leiden.edu/education-students/plagiarism.html>  
The departmental rules and procedures with regard to plagiarism can be found at: <http://www.socialsciences.leiden.edu/politicalscience/students/postgraduate/regulations/plagiarism.html>

Important note: Plagiarism occurs in both of the following situations:

- Quoting work from other (and outside) sources without attribution;
- Copying the work of others when completing individual assignments.

### Key Departmental Deadlines

<b>Monday, 16 March 2015</b>	<b>Research Proposal</b> Students submit revised and final version of research proposal to the thesis seminar instructor and second reader.
23-27 March 2015	Final version of research proposal approved by thesis seminar teacher and second reader.
<b>Monday, 11 May 2015</b>	<b>First Complete Draft of Master Thesis</b> Students submit the first complete draft of their Master thesis
21-22 May 2015	Feedback and comments on first complete draft thesis by supervisor.
<b>Monday, 8 June 2015</b>	<b>Master Thesis</b> Students submit two copies of the final version of the Master thesis, one for the supervisor and one for the second reader.
Wednesday 24 June 2015	Supervisor and second reader decide on the grade for the thesis, sign the evaluation report and inform the student about this outcome.
25-26 June 2015	Final meeting with supervisor.

### Additional Resources/Support

**Master Thesis Lab / Scriptieatelier.** Quiet workplace with (some) staff support on the 6<sup>th</sup> floor of the FSW building. You need to sign-up first (you will need my signature on the form). For more information, see: <http://socialsciences.leiden.edu/graduateschool/mtl/>

**Individual Library Support.** The library provides individual support and advice for conducting a targeted literature search (of up to 45 minutes per student). You can sign up via a Master Thesis Lab assistant (SAM).

## Seminar Schedule

### Block 3 – Thesis Proposal

#### | Week 1 |

<b>Mon, 02.02.15</b>	<b>Overview &amp; Presentation of Initial Ideas</b>	Room: 2B36
Seminar overview, presentation of research ideas, and assessment of needs.		
<b>Wed, 04.02.15</b>	<b>Lecture – Research Design (Causal Inference)</b>	Room: 1A03
Literature:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>King, Gary, Robert O. Keohane and Sidney Verba (1994).</b> “Major Components of Research Design.” In: <i>Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research</i>. Princeton: Princeton University Press. Pp. 12-19.</li> </ul>		
Optional:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Knopf, Jeffrey W. 2006.</b> “Doing a Literature Review.” <i>PS: Political Science &amp; Politics</i> 39 (1): 127-132.</li> <li>• Miller, Bernhard. 2007. “Making Measures Capture Concepts: Tools for Securing Correspondence between Theoretical Ideas and Observations.” In <i>Research Design in Political Science: How to Practice What They Preach</i>, ed. Thomas Gschwend and Frank Schimmelfennig. Houndmills: Palgrave MacMillan, 83-102.</li> </ul>		

#### | Week 2 |

<b>Mon, 09.02.15</b>	<b>Deadline: Master Theses Reviews; Lecture – Research Design (Data Collection)</b>	Room: 6C03
Assignment: Two 400 word reviews of two Master Theses [Submission: Hardcopy in class].		
Optional:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ebbinghaus, Bernhard. 2005. “When Less is More: Selection Problems in Large-N and Small-N Cross-National Comparisons.” <i>International Sociology</i> 20 (2): 133-205.</li> <li>• Seawright, Jason, and John Gerring. 2008. “Case Selection Techniques in Case Study Research: A Menu of Qualitative and Quantitative Options.” <i>Political Research Quarterly</i> 61 (2): 294–308.</li> <li>• Adcock, Robert, and David Collier. 2001. “Measurement Validity: A Shared Standard for Qualitative and Quantitative Research.” <i>American Political Science Review</i> 95 (3): 529-546.</li> <li>• Crano, William D., and Marilyn B. Brewer. 2002. “Social Responsibility and Ethics in Social Research.” In <i>Principles and Methods of Social Research</i>. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum, 344-357.</li> </ul>		
<b>Wed, 11.02.15</b>	<b>Lecture – Empirical Methods (Statistics)</b>	Room: 1A03
Optional:		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kstellec, Jonathan P., and Eduardo L. Leoni. 2007. “Using Graphs Instead of Tables in Political Science.” <i>Perspectives on Politics</i> 5 (4): 755-771.</li> <li>• Epstein, Lee, Andrew D. Martin, and Christina L. Boyd. 2007. “On the Effective Communication of the Results of Empirical Studies, Part II.” <i>Vanderbilt Law Review</i> 60: 799-846.</li> <li>• King, Gary. 1986. “How Not to Lie with Statistics: Avoiding Common Mistakes in Quantitative Political Science.” <i>American Journal of Political Science</i> 30 (3) 666-687.</li> </ul>		

## | Week 3 |

	Group I	Group II	
<b>Fri, 13.02.15</b>	<b>Deadline: Review Essay</b>		
Group I Assignment: 1000-word <i>Review Essay</i> due at 12:00 [Submission: Blackboard].			
<b>Mon, 16.02.15</b>	<b>Workshop – Feedback &amp; Discussion</b>		Room: 2B36
<b>Mon, 16.02.15</b>		<b>Deadline: Review Essay</b>	
Group II Assignment: 1000-word <i>Review Essay</i> due at 12:00 [Submission: Blackboard].			
<b>Wed, 18.02.15</b>		<b>Workshop – Feedback &amp; Discussion</b>	Room: 1A03

## | Week 4 |

<b>Fri, 20.02.15</b>	<b>Deadline: Methods Essay</b>		
Group I Assignment: 1000-word <i>Methods Essay</i> due at 12:00 [Submission: Blackboard].			
<b>Mon, 23.02.15</b>	<b>Workshop – Feedback &amp; Discussion</b>		Room: 2B36
<b>Mon, 23.02.15</b>		<b>Deadline: Methods Essay</b>	
Group II Assignment: 1000-word <i>Methods Essay</i> due at 12:00 [Submission: Blackboard].			
<b>Wed, 25.02.15</b>		<b>Workshop – Feedback &amp; Discussion</b>	Room: 1A03

## | Week 5 |

<b>Fri, 27.02.15</b>	<b>Deadline: Draft Master Thesis Proposal</b>		
Group I Assignment: Draft Master Thesis proposal due at 12:00 [Submission: Blackboard].			
<b>Mon, 02.03.15</b>	<b>Workshop – Group I Presentations &amp; Discussion</b>		Room: 2B36
<b>Mon, 02.03.15</b>		<b>Deadline: Draft Master Thesis Proposal</b>	
Group II Assignment: Draft Master Thesis proposal due at 12:00 [Submission: Blackboard].			
<b>Wed, 04.03.15</b>	<b>Workshop – Group II Presentations &amp; Discussion</b>		Room: 1A03

## | Week 6 |

<b>Mon, 09.03.15</b>	<b>Individual Meetings (by Appointment)</b>	Room: Office
<b>Wed, 11.03.15</b>	<b>Individual Meetings (by Appointment)</b>	Room: Office

## | Week 7 |

**Mon, 16.03.15, Noon Deadline: Master Thesis Research Proposal**

Submission of proposal in three formats required:

- Three hardcopies to the instructor.
- An electronic copy (MS Word or similar via Turnitin on Blackboard)
- An electronic copy (pdf) by Email to the instructor (m.f.meffert@fsw.leidenuniv.nl)

## | Week 8 |

<b>Mon, 23.03.15</b>	<b>General Feedback &amp; Coordination Session</b>	Room: 2B36
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**Block 4 – Thesis Writing**

## | April |

<b>Mon, 13.04.15</b>	<b>Deadline: Progress Report 1; Individual Meetings (by Appointment)</b>	Room: Office
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Submission: Progress Report (see Appendix III) by Email to instructor.

<b>Mon, 20.04.15 (at 13:00 sharp)</b>	<b>Deadline: First Results; Workshop – Presentation of First Results (Part I)</b>	Room: 2B36
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15-minute presentation of first results (the use of PowerPoint is recommended; no advance submission necessary).

<b>Wed, 22.04.15 (at 13:00 sharp)</b>	<b>Deadline: First Results; Workshop – Presentation of First Results (Part II)</b>	Room: 2A36
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15-minute presentation of first results (the use of PowerPoint is recommended; no advance submission necessary).

## | May |

<b>Wed, 29.04.15</b>	<b>Deadline: Progress Report 2; Individual Meetings (by Appointment)</b>	Room: Office
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Submission: Progress Report (see Appendix III) by Email to instructor.

**Mon, 11.05.15, Noon Deadline: First Draft of Master Thesis**

Submission of first draft in two formats:

- Hardcopy of draft Master Thesis to instructor/first reader.
- An electronic copy (pdf) by Email to instructor (m.f.meffert@fsw.leidenuniv.nl)

<b>Mon, 18.05.15 &amp; Tue, 19.05.15</b>	<b>Individual Feedback on First Draft (by Appointment)</b>	Room: Office
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## | June |

**Mon, 08.06.15, Noon Deadline: Master Thesis**

Submission of thesis in multiple formats required:

- Two hardcopies to the secretariat.
- Electronic copy (MS Word or similar) via Turnitin (Blackboard)
- Electronic copy (pdf) by Email to instructor (m.f.meffert@fsw.leidenuniv.nl)

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<b>Mon, 29.06.15 &amp; Tue, 30.06.15</b>	<b>Final Meeting with Supervisor (by Appointment)</b>	Room: Office
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Note: You can expect to receive an Email notification about the outcome on Tuesday, June 23. If a meeting on these two days is not possible, it can be moved to a later date.

## **Appendix I Peer Review Questions**

### **Review Essay**

#### **1) General Impression:**

What are the main strengths and weaknesses of the essay?

#### **2) Specific Comments:**

- a) When reading the introduction was the research puzzle and research question clear to the reader?
- b) To what extent is the reader convinced that the research question is important to the real world?
- c) To what extent is the reader convinced that the research question makes a contribution to an identifiable scholarly literature?
- d) How well does the literature review explain how previous studies have answered the research question? For example, are there any important works missing?
- e) How convincing is the researcher's argument for why more research on this topic is needed? For example, does the literature review point out limitations of the existing studies?
- f) Can you think of further limitations that would help the author to strengthen her argument?
- g) Is it clear to the reader how the author defined the major concepts (or independent and dependent variables)?
- h) Do the author's theory and hypotheses follow logically from the limitations of the existing literature? For example, are the hypotheses and any alternative (counter-) hypotheses clear?
- i) Can you think of additional alternative (counter-)hypotheses that were not discussed by the author?
- j) To what extent is the reader convinced that the research question is feasible (the research project can be finished within two months)?

#### **3) Suggestions for Improvement (assuming problems have been identified above):**

What are possible solutions to these problems? How can the author strengthen the essay?



## Methods Essay

### 1) Research Methods:

- a) Is it clear who or what is being studied?
- b) To what extent is the reader convinced that the researcher uses a research methodology that suits the research question?
- c) Any research method has strengths and weaknesses. Does the researcher address weaknesses and discuss potential solutions?
- d) Can you think of any weaknesses with respect to research methodology that the author did not talk about?

### 2) Data, Case Selection, and Sampling:

- a) Is it clear to the reader which case(s) was/were selected and why? (Note: a case can be a country, an institution, an event such as a specific election, an information source such as a newspaper or TV channel, etc.)
- b) Does the researcher discuss potential problems of case selection?
- c) Do you think there is a problem with selection bias (case selection on the dependent variable)? If yes, explain.
- d) In case a sample is used (for survey respondents, experimental participants, text documents etc.): Is the sample appropriate to answer the research question?
- e) Are the sampling procedures clear and accurately described? Are there any weaknesses the researcher fails to address?

### 3) Concepts and Measurement:

- a) Is it clear to the reader how the author operationalized major concepts (independent and dependent variables)?
- b) Are there other and better ways to operationalize these key concepts? If yes, explain.
- c) Does the researcher sufficiently discuss strengths and weaknesses of measurement? Explain why or why not.
- d) Can you think of alternative measures that would help the author to minimize some of the weaknesses?

### 4) Data Collection:

- a) Is it clear how the author described the data collection?
- b) Would you be able to replicate the study yourself? If not, explain.
- c) Can the data collection (and analysis) be completed within two months?

**5) Final Suggestions for Improvement:** What are possible solutions to any of the problems identified above? How can the author strengthen the essay?

## Appendix II

### Formal Requirements for Master Thesis

- Length: Word limit of **16.000 to 20.000 words** (40-60 pages), **including tables, footnotes and bibliography** (but excluding appendix).
- Font: **Times New Roman, 12 point font** or equivalent
- Spacing: **Double-spaced** (except Title Page, Abstract, Table of Contents, Appendix, and Bibliography).
- Paragraphs: Whenever you start a new argument, begin a new paragraph (new line). The **first line of a paragraph is indented**, except directly after a heading
- References: Use a **consistent reference and citation style!** (i.e. the Harvard system)
- Footnotes: Use footnotes to provide additional information that does not fit into the main body of the text, but use sparingly.

Structure	Length	
Title Page	1 page	
Abstract (optional)	1 page, approx. 300 words	
Table of Contents	1-2 pages	
Acknowledgments/Preface (optional)	1 page, approx. 300-600 words	
List of abbreviations (optional)	1 page	
List of figures and tables (optional)	1 page	
Introduction	16.000 to 20.000 words, <i>including</i> tables, footnotes and bibliography.	
Literature Review		
Theory, Concepts, and Hypotheses		
Research Methods, Data & Case Selection		
Operationalization and Measurement		
Empirical Results		
Conclusion		
Bibliography		
Appendix		Less than 15 single-spaced pages

Note: Structure and section titles are a suggestion and should be adapted to the specific needs of each thesis.

## Appendix III Master Thesis Progress Report

**Student:**

**Thesis Title:**

Task	Check if completed (or report status/expected completion)
<b>Research Design</b>	
Revisions suggested with proposal approval	
<b>Data Collection &amp; Preparation</b>	
Full Sample/Documents/Data available?	
Interviews and/or coding	
Data entry (e.g. coding sheets, questionnaires)	
Data management (checks & "cleaning")	
<b>Data Analysis</b>	
Variable operationalization (e.g. recoding, scaling)	
Descriptive summary (tables and/or figures)	
Statistical analyses	
Interpretation of statistical models	
Presentation of results	
<b>Thesis Writing</b>	
Table of contents	
Introduction	
Literature review	
Theory and hypotheses	
Research design	
Data & case selection	
Operationalization and measurement	
Statistical tests	
Interpretation of results	
Conclusion & discussion	
Bibliography	
Appendix	
<b>Thesis Revision</b>	
Required revisions	
Grammar and spelling	
Style and language	
List of references (complete? Formatting?)	