Methods & Methodology

Faculty News
**What’s this?**

**The Methods and Methodologies Project**

This project entails both a Graduate School (GS) and a Faculty of Social Sciences component, and both parts began in September 2015.

**Who am I?**

My background is one that is interdisciplinary, international, and mixed- and multi-method. I am a sociologist, but I also have degrees in Russian language-area studies and Global Studies. My PhD institution (BIGSSS in Bremen, Germany) was also interdisciplinary, involving sociology, political science, and psychology. I also worked as the Director of Studies at BIGSSS in Bremen (which provided highly focused methods courses for PhD students), and I co-founded a methods-heavy master program in comparative social research at the Higher School of Economics (Moscow; St. Petersburg), tailored toward training professional social scientists. In my own research, I have used mixed- and single method methodologies and a range of qualitative and quantitative methods. This and my international educational experiences have made me undogmatic when it comes to disciplinary borders and methods approaches.

**The Faculty Component**

The Faculty component of the methods and methodologies project is more broad, aiming to stimulate discussions surrounding the topics of methods and methodology and also
allow for a better collective overview about methods curricula across the faculty as a whole. The Faculty project involves

1. this newsletter,
2. an open email list, which you can sign up for by clicking: [http://tinyurl.com/elist-signup](http://tinyurl.com/elist-signup)
3. a seminar series (details below),
4. discussions on methods issues with Directors of Studies and methods instructors
5. Two surveys on methods teaching with
   (a) PhD students and
   (b) external degree programs as units of analysis to allow for internal and external comparisons.

**Initial Discussions with Directors of Studies**

I have had the pleasure of a number of interesting discussions so far with directors of studies and methods instructors. These are very encouraging in terms of seeing some similarly perceived issues across departments and the steady engagement of DoS’s in addressing them. I wanted to highlight a few points of discussion that have arisen so far.

(c) At the MA level, the majority of departments in the faculty use a single 15 ECTS block methods course (out of a total of 120 ECTS). There are a couple of exceptions (one unit has 22.5 and the other 30 ECTS devoted to methods). ECTS proportions devoted to methods may be relevant because my impression is that this proportion is quite low in our faculty compared to MA programs abroad (I will try to look at the empirics of this later). ECTS are important to consider because they directly translate (although the conversion varies) into student study-time with the material. Perhaps more than for other subjects, this iterative face time is critical for student learning in methods.

(d) Alternative models to the one-course solution may be worth discussing. Blocked methods courses are quite rare abroad (beyond the Bachelor degree level), partially because it is quite difficult to impart a professional-level complete methods package (philosophy of science, methodology, research design, quant. methods, qual. methods) within a condensed period of time. In my view so far, this time compression for methods teaching in Lund Social Sciences may have affected the teaching of research design and quantitative methods the most.

(e) Departments tend to recognize that it is difficult for an abstract and software-mediated subject such as quantitative methods to ‘sink in’ within a one component of a 15 credit course. An option might be to ‘stretch out’ quantitative teaching across a longer period of time, or to offer a quantitative progression within individual MA programs.

Of course, in teaching methods, there are many differing ways to get the job done. Yet it can be helpful for us to begin to highlight some of our faculty’s accepted norms in teaching methods in order to identify ways to optimize or adapt them in particular departments.

**PhD student survey**

PhD students across the Faculty have recently received an invitation to take a PhD survey on the theme of methods and methodology teaching in their current PhD programs, but also within their previous MA and BA programs (whether or not they were at Lund University before). Summarized results will be made available to directors of studies.

**Methods and Methodologies Seminar Series:**

A new seminar series is planned to be held 3 or 4 times per year to serve as an additional platform for discussing methods. The first two events are already planned:

**14 March, 2016, 15:15-16:45**

Title: *Comparative Research Center Sweden (CORS): Information session on comparative surveys*

Dr. Filip Fors
Comparative Research Center Sweden
Umeå University

**Date to be announced**

Title: *Why hardcore qualitative researchers might need analysis software (NVivo, ATlasTI and MAXQDA) more than they think.*

Dr. Rafael Mrowczynski
Leipzig University

**Suggestions for future seminar speakers and topics are very welcome!**
The Graduate School Component

The Graduate School part of the project involves the short and long-term development of the GS’s methods curriculum. A few concrete developments are already in process at Graduate School. We have added, for MA students, “Introduction to Quantitative Methods” and “Multivariate Analysis”, two separate courses to be held in the Springtime, period 4. We would like to open both up, involving additional work and content themes, to interested PhD students. These courses will go live this year, in Spring 2016. Another methods MA elective is planned for Springtime 2017, “Digital Media Research”, taught by Annette Hill. Our 15 ECTS methods course, “SIMM41” (Autumn, periods 3 and 4) has been fully reorganized, and we are carefully monitoring and adjusting it in order to maximize its success: initial feedback on this course has been very positive.

Other longer term plans are currently in open discussion for possible implementation starting in Autumn 2017. One of these issues involves the positioning of the GS 7.5 Theory of Science for the Social Sciences (SIMM23). It is currently in the students’ second semester, long after their introductory 15-credit methods course. We are currently questioning its temporal positioning with the understanding that it should ideally come before courses on methodology and methods (even when ontological and epistemological starting points are viewed as having a non-hierarchical, creative relationship to methodology, it still makes sense to introduce them first.) A second point under discussion is whether the GS should spend a full 7.5 credits on epistemology and ontology in the situation where many students across the faculty are getting very little in terms of methodology (they are transitioning very quickly from philosophy of science to concrete methods with a weak methodology and research design bridge in between). For this reason, we are considering condensing coverage of ontology and epistemology into a short module at the beginning of our block methods course, and then highlighting and transitioning to the methodological ramifications of these.

This idea has an added advantage of opening up the possibility of another Springtime electives block in period 3. This would be used to provide students with a methods progression or a multiple methods selection from both periods 3 and 4. For instance, the same student might take Intro to Quant or Digital Media Research in Period 3 followed by Multivariate Analysis or Discourse Analysis in period 4.

And finally...

Please feel very welcome as well to suggest some material or thoughts to be highlighted in future versions of this newsletter (it will be released again in early September). And for a faster exchange of ideas, feel free to use the mm-lund email list.

very best,

Chris Swader
Talk on P-curve analysis and “p-hacking”

A Talk by Dr Daniël Lakens
Dept. of Eindhoven University of Technology, the Netherlands
Homepage: http://tinyurl.com/lakensbio

On October 23rd, Daniël Lakens came to the Department of Psychology in order to talk with students and faculty about ‘p-values’ as indicators of statistical significance. His presentation addressed some of the controversies around p-values, especially the misinterpretation of single-study p-values as providing support for a hypothesis, and “p-hacking”, which results in artificial p-values. He then discussed how p-curve analysis can be used to assess p-values across multiple studies and to identify p-hacking.

The talk had especially an interdisciplinary relevance for quantitative meta-analysis. Åse Innes-Ker (ase.innes-ker@psy.lu.se), in the Department of Psychology, has worked with related issues in quantitative meta analysis and can be contacted for inquiries.
Some Recent Books with Methodological Relevance in the Faculty

There are three items to our “recent books” highlights:

1. The Greppbar Metod book series
2. Statistisk verktygsläda
3. Vad är statsvetenskap.

Sara Eldén (Department of Sociology) and Peter Svensson (Department of Business Administration) are editors of the Greppbar Metod book series.

https://www.studentlitteratur.se/#greppbarmetod

Empirical research is to a great extent a craft that the researcher can learn only by trial and error. Doing social science research is seldom as linear and orderly as the polished methods discussions in journal articles and dissertations suggest. The life of the empirical researcher is full of dead ends and pitfalls, but also of surprising findings and unexpected insights. The aim of this book series is to shed light upon this craft of social science research. The contributing authors describe their own as well as others’ experiences of using different research methods. The books also offer discussions on the historical, scientific and societal contexts in which the different research methods have emerged. In addition to this, they provide reflections on the future challenges facing empirical research in the social sciences.

The three recently published books in this series include:

David Wästerfors (Sociology) och Jens Rennstam (Business Administration). Från Stoff till Studie: Om analysarbete i kvalitativ forskning (From stuff to study – analytical work in qualitative research)

Martin Berg (Halmstad). Nethnografi: Att forska om och med internet (Nethnography: to study about and with the internet)

Åsa Bäckström (Gymnastik- och idrottshögskolan i Stockholm) och Vaike Fors (Halmstad) Visuella metoder (Visual Methods)
The book introduces the world of quantitative research to social science students. It focuses on the survey as a means of gaining knowledge about a wide range of social phenomena. Roughly half of the book deals with fundamental aspects of data collection, including the issues of statistical inference and measurement. The other half introduces data processing and analysis (univariate and bivariate analysis).

The authors put great emphasis on motivating social science students to learn statistics by giving plenty of examples of important and socially relevant questions that can only be addressed using statistical methods. The book leaves out mathematical formulas and instead focuses on the pedagogical explanations of the meanings of those formulas, the principles for choosing the appropriate technique in a particular situation, and the interpretation of the results.

The book rests on two basic ideas that together constitute the core of what we call "methodology at work". The first is that our knowledge of politics is closely linked to our philosophy of science and to how we design our research process. The way we pose the question, and the theory, method and material with which we choose to address it, will have a large impact on our research results. So it is essential that this is made visible at an early stage in our courses and programs.

The second core idea is that there is no consensus within the discipline on what constitutes good research and valid knowledge. Political scientists agree to disagree. Since there are no universally accepted criteria for determining the best way of generating results and facts about politics, we give a wide portrayal of the philosophical and methodological pluralism of the discipline. We do argue, however, that there is one methodological requirement that sets the outer boundaries for this pluralism, and around which most of those who seek knowledge of political phenomena could agree. This is the notion of intersubjectivity, which implies that knowledge generated by individual political scientists should be accessible, possible to trace, and understandable by others.

Do you want to highlight a methods/methodology book?
Suggestions are very welcome!