

Kolloquium:

Comparative Politics

Version: April 9, 2025

Prof. Dr. Daniel Bischof

Term: each term

Office: SCH 100.206

Office hours: just after class

Time: Wednesdays 12.00 ct – 14.00 Uhr

Lecture Room: SCH 100.206

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Course description:

- Kolloquium
- 2 hours per week
- Language: English
- Assignments:
 1. Abstract for thesis (up to 150 words; template: <https://www.fabriziogilardi.org/resources/papers/good-abstracts.pdf>)
 2. 3 presentations of up to 10 minutes (1) literature & theory; 2) research design; 3) findings)
 3. handing in of thesis

The thesis colloquium in comparative politics is designed to support students in the final phase of their studies. It provides a structured environment for presenting and discussing ongoing thesis projects. Each participant is required to draft a concise abstract outlining the core research question, methodology, and expected contribution of their thesis. Students will present their work three times over the course of the semester, allowing for continuous feedback and academic exchange. In addition, attendance at guest speaker sessions is mandatory, as these provide valuable insights into current research debates and methodological approaches in the field. The colloquium fosters a collaborative learning environment and prepares students for academic discourse, constructive critique, and the effective communication of their research.

Introductory Readings:

- How to write in academia (further readings):
 - Graff, G. and Birkenstein, C. (2014). *They Say, I Say – The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing*. W.W. Norton Company, New York
 - Plümper, T. (2008). *Effizient Schreiben*. Oldenbourg, München, 2. edition
 - King, G. (2006). Publication, Publication. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 39(1):119–125
- How to organize your research (further readings):
 - Whitesides, G. M. (2004). Whitesides' Group: Writing a Paper. *Advanced Materials*, 16(15):1375–1377
- Refresher in statistics/mathematics (if needed):
 - Moore, W. H. and Siegel, D. A. (2013). *A Mathematics Course for Political & Social Research*. Princeton University Press, Princeton & Oxford
 - Imai, K. (2018). *Quantitative Social Science: An Introduction*. Princeton University Press, Princeton
- Research design:
 - Keele, L. (2015). The Statistics of Causal Inference: A View from Political Methodology. *Political Analysis*, 23(3):313–335
 - Gelman, A. and Imbens, G. (2013). Why Ask Why? Forward Causal Inference and Reverse Causal Questions. *Inconnu*, pages 1–7
 - Cunningham, S. (2021). *Causal Inference: The Mixtape*. Yale University Press, New Haven & London
 - Angrist, J. D. and Pischke, J.-S. (2009). *Mostly Harmless Econometrics: An Empiricist's Companion*. Princeton University Press, Princeton & Oxford

“Studienleistung”:

You will need to:

1. hand in an abstract of your thesis prior to your first presentation.
2. present three times throughout the semester
3. attend talks by guest speakers

in order to fulfill your “Studienleistung”.

Use of AI:

- If you use AI (chatGPT, Claude, etc.) to write your term paper, you are required to be transparent about it. More specifically, list the prompts and answers in a separate appendix at the end of the term paper.
- This appendix does not count towards the word count. You do not need to list the use of AI for coding, data analysis, and grammar corrections (e.g., DeepL Write, Grammarly, etc.).
- Please remember always to respect the rules of academic integrity and honesty!

Plagiarism:

Students must comply with the university policy on academic integrity found at https://www.uni-muenster.de/imperia/md/content/wwu/rektorat/dokumente/info_plagiate_prueflinge.pdf.

There are no excuses for plagiarism.

Relevant techniques and tricks to navigate an academic seminar:

- *Reading scientific papers:* There is tons of information on the web how to read and engage with scientific articles. Many of these push you to a) read faster b) read more c) find the key information from papers quicker. Some of the readings I encourage you to use here are: “[How to Read a Paper by Keshav](#)”, “[How to Read Political Science: A Guide in Four Steps by Green](#)” or “[How to read and understand a scientific paper: a guide for non-scientists by Jennifer Raff](#)”. In many ways the starting point to read a paper is to classify it quickly into which type of a paper it is and how you can then extract the relevant info you need from it. There is also no shortcut to reading: you need to read! The more you read the better you get at it and writing as well.
- *Writing scientific papers:* it is key for you that you engage with your term paper as early as possible. In each session we will work on parts of your term paper. We will begin by trying to understand how in the world you can come up with a research topic and question all the way to understand the key parts you need to discuss in your research design section. The goal of this is to provide you as much guidance as possible for your term paper. There are many good readings to help you navigate academic writing, e.g.: <https://www.uvm.edu/~cbeer/ps174/ResearchPaper.html>, “[Writing a Political Science Essay by King](#)” or Graff, G. and Birkenstein, C. (2014). *They Say, I Say – The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing*. W.W. Norton Company, New York. In my experience the key part is to get started as soon as you enter a seminar, try to find out what interests you the most and dig into it.

Softwaretips:

The days without technical and software skills are long gone in the social sciences: Work is written on laptops, literature is consumed on iPads, and statistics are part of basic training. This means it is relevant to acquire certain software skills and develop coding skills.

- **Officesoftware** You can choose your own office software. As a student, you can get access to Word, etc., at a low cost or even for free. If not, there's [Open Office](#). I use [L^AT_EX](#) for both my publications and presentations. Overleaf makes it easy to train yourself in the commands and handling. However, learning it is only worth it if you want to work statistically and are possibly considering a PhD.
- **Citation programs** greatly simplify your life. I use the free software [Zotero](#), which also offers direct browser apps and macros for office software. The program is self-explanatory: install Zotero, install apps. Click Zotero Connector in the browser, and the literature ends up in Zotero.
- There are many **statistical programs**, but most come with issues for you: either they are not free (e.g., Stata, SPSS) and/or they don't offer the necessary skills (e.g., SPSS). I recommend downloading the free software R: [R-Studio](#). R has become the most widely used statistical software in social sciences, followed by Stata. Thanks to [Chat-GPT](#), learning R has never been easier. Try it out by asking Chat-GPT to create a world map based on the Freedom House Index. You can typically run the generated code directly in R-Studio to get a world map (though with erroneous values, which you can easily correct with the actual Freedom House dataset). In my teaching, you will often come across graphics/results based on “own illustration”. When this is the case, I usually also provide the code for replication in the learning space.

References

- Angrist, J. D. and Pischke, J.-S. (2009). *Mostly Harmless Econometrics: An Empiricist's Companion*. Princeton University Press, Princeton & Oxford.
- Cunningham, S. (2021). *Causal Inference: The Mixtape*. Yale University Press, New Haven & London.
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