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Undergraduate Research in the Social Sciences: A Survey of Eight Countries and Five Disciplines



The Survey Sample

•This study surveys methods teaching and research in undergraduate political science degrees in Australia, Canada, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and the United States.



•The data come from a benchmarking report* on the teaching of methods in undergraduate programs for the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) of the UK.



•This report selected countries because of their success in producing social science doctorates and comparability to the United Kingdom.



• The US sample consisted of 120 research institutions, so the results undercount the extent of methods and research (See other poster on US). All universities were sampled in other countries.



New World vs. Old World Models of Higher Education

- There is substantial variation across both subjects and countries in the provision of research methods training and undergraduate research.
- Northern European countries, including Finland, the Netherlands, and Sweden have much stronger requirements across the board.
- These countries have particularly rigorous curricula that emphasize lots of required modules, strict sequencing, and multiple research projects.
- The anglophone countries appear particularly weak in the same areas. The US, in particular, has a culture that emphasizes electives, little sequencing, and infrequent requirements for undergraduate research.
- Canada and Australia both require additional years to obtain an honours degree, in which students are required to do a research project. However, this option does not apply to ordinary degrees.

Mean Number of Research Methods Modules Per Degree

Subject	Australia	Canada	Finland	Netherlands	Norway	Spain	Sweden	US
Business	1.2	0.1	0.4	4.4	0.3	0.3	0.6	0.2
Economics	1.6	0.1	.09	1.7	0	0.7	0	0.0
Political Science	0.5	0.3	1.1	3.3	0.5	1.9	1.1	0.3
Psychology	1.8	0.9	1.8	2.8	1.0	3.3	1.5	1.0
Sociology	1.4	1.2	2.0	2.7	1.0	4.8	1.3	1.0

Mean Number of Research Projects, Dissertations, or Theses Per Degree

Subject	Australia	Canada	Finland	Netherlands	Norway	Spain	Sweden	US
Business	0	0	.7	1.9	0.7	0.1	0.8	0
Economics	0	0	0.4	1.0	0.4	0.1	0.9	0
Political Science	0	0	0.6	2.1	0.3	0.1	1.6	0
Psychology	0	0	0.3	1.7	1.0	0	1.3	0.1
Sociology	0	0	0.7	2.3	0.6	0.1	1.5	0.1

*Parker, Jonathan et al. 2006. *International Benchmarking Review of Best Practice in the Provision of Undergraduate Teaching in Quantitative Methods in the Social Sciences*. Swindon: ESRC.

Credit Weightings

- Standardizing module weighting to the percentage of a degree proved far too cumbersome, time consuming, and difficult, while the results would be misleading in terms of how much training a student actually receives.
- For the purposes of this study, module data is only used to construct simple distribution tables, so such a precise level of standardization is unnecessary.
- The study adopts a quick rule of thumb that modules are all generally equivalent
- Credit weightings are collected in order to classify modules as a half, single, or double according to their relative weight in whatever system was being used. This method does not account for the number of years required to complete a degree, but that debate is far beyond scope of this study.

