POS 618: Qualitative Research Methods
Fall 2011
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Office Hours: Thursdays 1:30-2:30, Fridays 3:40-4:40, and by appointment.
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This seminar covers the research process from its design to final analysis, focusing on qualitative and mixed-methods research. That is, we look at how to collect, analyze, and interpret data outside of or in addition to statistical techniques. Throughout the course, we will look at questions of methodology to understand the important differences within qualitative research and between qualitative and quantitative frameworks. Students should come away from the course with an understanding of: (1) what qualitative research is and how it fits in the broader discipline of political science; (2) the logic of qualitative and mixed methods research design; (3) the nuts and bolts of conducting qualitative research; and (4) how to analyze the results. Though no course can be the definitive answer to “how do I write my dissertation,” this seminar is designed to be an important step in the logic and practice of qualitative and mixed methods research. Prerequisites: POS 516 and POS 517 or the equivalent.

**Prior to starting the course, you must complete the online human subjects training. You may have done this already in POS 516, if not please see:
http://www.albany.edu/research/compliance/Training.htm#IRB

Requirements:

- **6 Weekly Assignments.** You may choose which particular week you would like, but please keep in mind you may only write on the topic for any given week and only one paper per week (50%).
- **Research Design:** Design a practical, dissertation-size research project (40%)
  - Literature Review: Due in class October 13
  - Rough Draft: Due in class November 17
  - Final Design: December 9
- **In-class participation (10%)**

Reading Materials:
The following required books are available for purchase at Mary Jane’s along with the starred (*) recommended reading material. In addition, there are a large number of required articles available on the course website (eres) for your convenience. Please note, you are responsible for the articles listed even when they are not posted or posted incompletely. If you have trouble accessing a document, please contact me.

**Required:**


Recommended:


Scott Frisch, Douglas Harris, Sean Kelly, David C.W. Parker. (Forthcoming) *Doing Archival Research: A Practical Guide for Political Scientists.* Cambria Press.

I. Introduction to the Process of Research

September 1: Classes Suspended, Please Read. How Do I Do Research?


Patricia Strach. *Commodity Politics*, various drafts of prospectus.

II. Qualitative Research and Political Science

September 8: Social Science Research and the Qualitative/Quantitative Divide

**Assignment:** Write a 3-4 page reaction paper on the readings

- Karl Popper. “Science: Conjectures and Refutations.”
- King, Keohane, and Verba, *DSI.* 3-49
- Brady, Collier, and Seawright, *RSI.* (3-20)
- Bartels, *RSI.* (69-74)
- MeKeown, *RSI* (139-67)


Recommended

September 15: Interpretive and Critical Approaches
Assignment: Write a 3-4 page reaction paper on the readings
King, Keohane, and Verba, DSI. 36-43 (review).

Recommended

III. Questions, Contributions, and the Limits of Qualitative Research (Case Studies)

September 22: Cases to Develop Concepts, Models, Theories, or Typologies
Assignment: Choose a particular research question of interest to you. Write a 3-4 page paper on how you would use cases to develop concepts, models, or theories. Incorporate the authors below.


Recommended:

- **Theory Development**

- **Models and Concepts**

- **Typologies**

September 29: Classes Suspended

October 6: Cases to Analyze Causal Mechanisms and Conjunctions

**Assignment**: Choose a particular research question of interest to you. Write a 3-4 page paper on how you would use cases to analyze causal mechanisms and conjunctions. Incorporate the authors below.


Recommended

October 13: Cases to Analyze History--Timing and Sequence, Process & Narrative

**7-10 Page Literature Review Due**

**Assignment:** Choose a particular research question of interest to you. Write a 3-4 page paper on how you would use cases to analyze history. Incorporate the authors below.


- Process Tracing
  
  Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett. “Process Tracing and Historical Explanation.” (Chapter 10)
  

**Recommended:**


October 20: Choosing Cases

**Assignment:** Choose a particular research question of interest to you and create a research design involving case studies. Write a 3-4 page paper laying out your question, your design, and justifying your case selection. Your paper should show evidence in the design and justification from the following authors.


**Recommended**


**IV. The Practice of Qualitative Research**

October 27: Entering the Field

**Assignment:** Choose a particular research question of interest to you. Write a 3-4 page paper on the steps you would take to prepare to collect your data. Include a timeline. Take into account the experiences of the authors below and be realistic on how your project would look similar or different from theirs.


Symposium by Evan Lieberman, Marc Howard, and Julia Lynch on Fieldwork in Qualitative Methods Newsletter.


**Recommended**


November 3: Participant Observation

Assignment: Choose a particular research question of interest to you and design a practical study involving participant observation. Write a 3-4 page paper describing your question, your design, and your observations on what it is like to conduct participant observation. Your paper should show evidence in the design and analysis from the following authors.


Recommended


November 10: Interviews and Focus Groups
Assignment: Choose a particular research question of interest to you and design a practical study involving either interviews or focus groups. Write a 3-4 page paper describing your question, your design, and your observations on what it is like to conduct interviews or a focus group. Your paper should show evidence in the design and analysis from the following authors.

- Interviews

- Focus Groups

- Integrating interviews and focus groups

Recommended:

November 17: Archives and Documents
***Research Design Drafts Due***
Assignment: Choose a particular research question of interest to you and design a practical study involving archival research (note, the New York State Library has some good archives to poke around in). Write a 3-4 page paper describing your question, your design, and your observations on what it is like to conduct archival research. Your paper should show evidence in the design and analysis from the following authors.

Recommended:
The following databases (accessible through UAlbany library) will help you identify where collections are housed: Archives USA and Worldcat.

November 24: Classes Suspended

V. Analysis and Interpretation

December 2: Analysis, Interpretation, and Results

Assignment: Choose a particular research question of interest to you and design a practical study involving discourse/content analysis. Write a 3-4 page paper describing your question, your design, and your observations on what it is like to conduct discourse or content analysis. Your paper should show evidence in the design and analysis from the following authors.

- Moving from Raw Data to Results

- Discourse and Content Analysis

- Genealogy

- **Interpretive Limits**
  

  **Recommended**
  

**December 9: Final Papers Due**

Recommended Additional Topic:

**Multi-method Research**

**Assignment:** Choose an article or study (largely qualitative or quantitative) that you find particularly compelling. What would multiple methods add to the project? How would you go about doing it? Your paper should show evidence from the following authors.

  - Andrew Bennett and Bear Braumoeller. “Where the Model Frequently Meets the Road: Combining Statistical, Formal, and Case Study Methods.”

  **Recommended**
  
  
Information and advice on:

**Dissertation Proposals in Political Science**

Brown University, Political Science, The Dissertation Prospectus  
http://www.brown.edu/Departments/Political_Science/graduate/dissertation.html

Craig Parsons, Oregon, HOW TO FIND A GOOD DISSERTATION  
http://www.uoregon.edu/~rmitchel/gradprogram/tip_diss_choose_write.htm

Peter Hall, Harvard, Tips for Writing a Dissertation  
http://www.engl.niu.edu/wac/psdiss.html

Doing Dissertations in Politics: A Student Guide  
http://www.routledgepolitics.com/books/Doing-Dissertations-in-Politics-isbn9780415246866

**Dissertation Proposals in General**

University of Minnesota, Dissertation Calculator (excellent resource for timeframe impaired)  

Chris Golde, Wisconsin (Education) Some Thoughts on Dissertation Proposal Writing  
http://chris.golde.org/filecabinet/disspropose.html

**Starting a Dissertation Project**


University of North Carolina, Dissertations  
Proposals in general

Adam Przeworski and Frank Salomon, The Art of Writing Proposals

Don Thackrey, University of Michigan, Proposal Writer's Guide
http://www.research.umich.edu/proposals/pwg/pwgcontents.html
<http://www.research.umich.edu/proposals/pwg/pwgcontents.html>