COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course provides an overview of qualitative approaches to political science research. It also provides grounding in recent debates over methodology and epistemology in political science, with particular emphasis upon critiques of positivism. The course will focus primarily upon interpretive methods, but will begin with a discussion of the positivist framework and its application through qualitative approaches.

Students completing the course successfully should be able to 1) understand and evaluate a variety of different genres of interpretive and qualitative work in the discipline, 2) understand and intervene critically in debates over epistemologies in political science, and 3) design a workable empirical research project utilizing at least one qualitative approach, and 4) successfully negotiate the IRB approval process for qualitative research involving human subjects.

The course will be run in a seminar format, with the students spending most of the class time discussing the readings. The professor will facilitate these discussions both formally and informally. A few sessions will take place through Blackboard discussions.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

First, a caveat: this course will be taught on a graduate level and the workload and expectations will be high. Most students will come in having taken 516 or another course in research design. I will expect you to come to each class meeting having done all of the readings thoroughly and carefully. Class attendance and participation will constitute a significant portion of your grade. Students will be expected to attend class and participate in class discussions. You will be expected to keep up with the reading throughout the term.

In addition to the regular participation you do in class, each student will be expected to present once on the readings for the week and to present her or his research design to the class for discussion and critique. For the reading presentation, you will write a short (3-5 pp.) response paper for distribution before the class meeting. You will then spend ten to fifteen minutes presenting and discussing your paper, and you will facilitate the day’s discussion.

The major writing assignment for the course is to draft and revise an empirical research design. Guidelines for this assignment will be distributed early in the term.
Students will also do additional writing assignments. The first will be an evaluation of an article or book of your choice that employs qualitative methods. The second will be a written evaluation of two other students’ research designs. And the third will be the preparation of a sample IRB protocol for human subjects research using your design or another design for which IRB approval would be required.

The weights of your various obligations are detailed below:

- Class participation: 10%
- Presentation on the readings: 10%
- Article/book evaluation: 10%
- Draft research design: 5%
- Peer critiques: 20%
- Final research design: 30%
- IRB protocol: 15%

A schedule will be compiled at the beginning of the term for presentations. The timing for the research design is inflexible so as not to inconvenience your classmates.

POLICIES

Students with disabilities. If you have a documented disability and anticipate needing accommodations in this course, please make arrangements to meet with the professor soon. Please request that Disabilities Resource Center send a letter verifying your disability.

Extensions for papers. Extensions for drafts will only be permitted under compelling circumstances and if the extension is requested in advance. Any student who does not turn in her or his paper on time and has not contacted the professor in advance will lose a half grade per day for every day the paper is late unless the student can provide a University-approved excuse.

Class attendance. You will be expected to attend class. Each student is permitted to miss two days of class per term with no questions asked and no penalties or reductions in his or her class participation grade. Any classes missed beyond those two will be taken into account in determining your class participation grade, regardless of the reason. Note that some class sessions will require participation through Blackboard.

Regrading of materials. You may request regrading of materials. If you wish to make such a request, contact the professor for a copy of the regrading policy. You will be asked to provide a written explanation of why you wish to have the assignment regraded.

Plagiarism or cheating. This one’s simple: don’t do it. Don’t even think about doing it. Plagiarism is the use of someone else’s words or ideas without giving the original author credit by citing him or her. If you use someone else’s language directly, you must use quotation marks. If you rely on another person’s ideas in creating your argument, you must provide a citation. If you have any questions about plagiarism, please contact me before you submit the assignment for grading. If you plagiarize or cheat in this class, the BEST outcome you can hope to achieve is a failing grade from me, in addition to any mandatory university sanctions. Plagiarism or cheating, even if unintentional, will result in a failing grade for the assignment at the very minimum.
MATERIALS

Books available for purchase exclusively at Mary Jane Books include King, Keohane & Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry*, Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, *Interpretation and Method*, Fujii, *Killing Strangers*, and Schatz, *Political Ethnography*. The other materials assigned for the course (articles and excerpts from books) are all accessible through the course’s Blackboard site. To log on to Blackboard, go to http://bls.its.albany.edu/webct/entryPageIns.dowebct and follow the login instructions. I have not scanned the recommended readings, but if you have trouble finding any of them, please let me know.

SYLLABUS

January 21: *What is Qualitative Research?*
Conference paper assignment: select a paper from the annual meeting website of WPSA or MPSA and post a note about it on the discussion board (guidelines will be emailed).

RECOMMENDED

POSITIVIST QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

January 26: *Descriptive Inference and Causality*
King Keohane and Verba, Chapters 1-3

January 28: *Design Issues*
King Keohane and Verba, Chapters 4-6

RECOMMENDED

EPSTEMOLOGICAL ISSUES

February 2: *Epistemology Debates*
Karl Popper, *Logic of Scientific Discovery* (Basic 1959), 27-88, (Problem of Induction thru Falsifiability and Falsification) and 247-73 (Indeterminist Metaphysics thru Corroborability) (on BB)
David Laitin, “The Perestroikan Challenge to Political Science” (in Norton, *Perestroika!* ) (on BB)
Ian Shapiro, “Problems, Methods, and Theories in the Study of Politics” (in Norton, *Perestroika!* ) (on BB)
February 4: Epistemology Debates and the Interpretive Challenge
Tim Pachirat, “We Call it a Grain of Sand” (Y+SS ch. 21)
Michael McCann, Rights at Work (excerpts) (on BB)
Yanow, “Thinking Interpretively” (Y+SS ch. 1)

February 9: What is Science? What is Political?
Mary Hawkesworth, “Contending Conceptions of Science and Politics” (Y+SS ch 2)

February 11: What’s Good? What’s Rigorous?
Robert Adcock, “Generalization in Comparative and Historical Social Science” (Y+SS ch 3)
Dvora Yanow, “Neither Rigorous Nor Objective?” (Y+SS ch 4)
Peregrine Schwartz-Shea, “Judging Quality” (Y+SS ch 5)

RECOMMENDED:

INTERPRETIVE INTERVIEWING

February 18: Interviewing as a Practice
Joe Soss, “Talking Our Way to Meaningful Explanations” (Y+SS ch 6)
Frederick Schaffer, “Ordinary Language Interviewing” (Y+SS ch 7)

February 23-25: Eliciting Stories about Death
Lee Ann Fujii, Killing Strangers
BOOK/ARTICLE EVALUATION DUE IN CLASS FEB. 25

RECOMMENDED:

DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

March 2: Discourse Analysis as an Approach
Mark Bevir, “How Narratives Explain” (Y+SS ch 15)
Cecelia Lynch, “Critical Interpretation and the Interwar Peace Movements” (Y+SS ch 17)
Clare Ginger, “Interpretive Content Analysis” (Y+SS ch 19)

March 4: Discourse Analysis Applications (NOTE: this discussion will take place online)
Carol Cohn, “Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals,” Signs 12:4 (Summer 1987), 687-718 (on BB)

RECOMMENDED:

**HISTORICAL ANALYSIS**

March 9: *History as Knowledge and Practice*


March 11: *Historical Analysis and State Discourse*
Pamela Brandwein, “Studying the Career of Knowledge Claims” (Y+SS ch 12)

Julie Novkov, “Legal Archaeology” (on BB)

RECOMMENDED:


**POLITICAL ETHNOGRAPHY**

March 16: *Political Ethnography as an Approach* (NOTE: this discussion will take place online)
Schatz, ed. *Political Ethnography* (intro, chapters 1, 2, 4, and 6)

March 18: *Political Ethnography, the Researcher, and the Participant*
Schatz, ed. *Political Ethnography* (chapters 8, 9, 12, 13, and 14)

DRAFT RESEARCH DESIGN DUE IN CLASS

March 23-26: PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH DESIGNS
PEER CRITIQUES OF RESEARCH DESIGNS DUE IN CLASS MARCH 26

RECOMMENDED:


**CASE STUDIES**

April 6: *Using Case Studies*
John Gerring, “What is a Case Study and what is it Good For?” *American Political Science Review* 98:2 (May 2004), 341-54 (on BB)
Bent Flyvbjerg, “Five Misunderstandings about Case Studies,” *Qualitative Inquiry* 12:2 (April 2006), 219-45 (on BB)

April 8: *Case Studies*
Charles Epp, *The Rights Revolution* (excerpts) (on BB)
Anthony Marx, *Making Race and Nation* (excerpts) (on BB)
Dean McHenry, “The Numeration of Events” (Y+SS ch 10)

**POLICY ANALYSIS**

April 13: *Critical Policy Analysis*
Ellen Pader, “Seeing with an Ethnographic Sensibility” (Y+SS ch 8)
Ronald Schmidt, Sr., “Value-Critical Policy Analysis” (Y+SS ch 17)

April 15: *Policies, Dynamics, and Consequences*

**RECOMMENDED:**

**RESEARCHERS, RESEARCH, AND IDENTITY**

April 20: *Positionality and the Researcher*
Ido Oren, “Political Science as History” (Y+SS ch 11)

April 22: *Thinking about Research Participants* (NOTE: This discussion may take place online)
Faye Ginsburg, *Contested Lives* (excerpts)

April 27-29: *Working with the IRB*
Law and Society Association, “The Impact of Institutional Review Boards on Law and Society Researchers”

May 4: *What Have We Learned? What Can We Know?*
Schatz, “Conclusion” in Schatz volume
Lowndes, Novkov, Warren, “Introduction” in *Race and American Political Development* (on BB)
Yanow & Schwartz Shea, “Doing Social Science in a Humanistic Manner” (Y+SS ch 22)
IRB PROTOCOL DUE IN CLASS

RECOMMENDED:

FINAL RESEARCH DESIGN DUE AT 5 PM ON MAY 12