RPOS 618
QUALITATIVE METHODS
Spring 2014

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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. The emphasis is on introducing the qualitative research process from its design to final analysis through an overview of how qualitative approaches operate and through introduction to specific epistemologies and methods. 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 logics of qualitative research design; (3) the nuts and bolts of conducting qualitative research; and (4) how to analyze, interpret, and understand qualitative data. Though no course can be the definitive answer to “how do I write my dissertation,” this seminar should add a significant arsenal of potential tools to your kits. Prerequisites: POS 516 and POS 517 or the equivalent.

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. You must 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. You will be expected to keep up with the reading throughout the term, as the course is cumulative.

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, and periodic deadlines will help to keep you moving forward. You will also be responsible for reviewing and commenting on your classmates’ designs.

Students will also do five additional writing assignments during the weeks these are available (as noted below in the syllabus). You may choose any five weeks, but you may only
write on the topic for the given week, and you may submit only one paper per week. The weights of your various obligations are detailed below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Obligation</th>
<th>Weight</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class participation</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly writing assignments</td>
<td>10% each (50% total)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Draft research design</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Peer critiques</td>
<td>10% total</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final research design</td>
<td>25%</td>
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The timing for the draft research design submission 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._ Because of the nature of the course, no extensions are possible for the short weekly assignments. If you cannot complete one on time, just choose another week. Any student who does not turn in her or his draft design 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 there is some apocalypse-level calamity in play.

_Class attendance._ You are expected to attend class. Excessive absences will affect your class participation grade negatively.

_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. Likewise, if you intend to double submit work for this class, you must clear it with me in advance. 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**

Required books are available for purchase exclusively at Mary Jane Books and are listed below. The other required materials assigned for the course (articles and excerpts from books) should all accessible through the course’s Blackboard site and are denoted with an asterisk. Please note that 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 immediately. I have not scanned the recommended readings, but if you have trouble finding any of them, please let me know.
Required books:


Generally recommended books:


SYLLABUS

January 27 Introduction: What is Qualitative Research?


Recommended
FOUNDATIONAL CONCERNS

February 3  Epistemology

Assignment: Write a 3-4 page paper answering: Which article do you find most compelling and why? While this is a paper based on your opinion, it is not an opinion piece. Please make an argument and back it up with evidence from the reading.

*Karl Popper. “Science: Conjectures and Refutations.”


David Laitin, “The Perestroikan Challenge to Political Science” (in Norton, Perestroika!)

*Ian Shapiro, “Problems, Methods, and Theories in the Study of Politics” (in Norton, Perestroika!)

*Yanow, “Thinking Interpretively” (Y+SS ch. 1)

Recommended


February 10  Social Science and the Qualitative/Quantitative Divide

Assignment: Write a 3-4 page reaction paper on the readings. Where do you stand in the debate over the merits and demerits of qualitative and quantitative research? Is qualitative research merely what you do when you can’t amass enough data to build good generalization?

King, Keohane, and Verba, DSI. 3-49

*Brady, Collier, and Seawright, RSI. (15-32)

*Bartels, RSI. (83-88)

*McKeown, “Case Studies and the Limits of the Quantitative World View.”


**Recommended


**February 17: Interpretive and Critical Approaches**

Assignment: Write a 3-4 page reaction paper on the readings. How do interpretive approaches differ from positivist quantitative approaches? What is gained and lost?

King, Keohane, and Verba, DSI. 36-43 (review).


Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, Interpretive Research Design

**Recommended

Michael McCann. 1994. Rights at Work


**THE CASE STUDY APPROACH**
What is a Case?

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.


*Robert Adcock, “Generalization in Comparative and Historical Social Science” (Y+SS ch 3)

*Bent Flyvbjerg, “Five Misunderstandings about Case Studies,” Qualitative Inquiry 12:2 (April 2006), 219-45 (on BB)

Recommended


Analyzing Causality

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.


*Charles Epp, *The Rights Revolution* (excerpts)


**Recommended**


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**March 10 Using Cases to Conduct Historical Analysis**

**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.

*Anthony Marx, *Making Race and Nation* (excerpts)


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


**Recommended**


March 24    Case Selection

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


QUALITATIVE PRACTICES

March 31    Participant Observation and Political Ethnography

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 assigned authors.

Schatz, ed. Political Ethnography (selected chapters)

Recommended

April 7    Interviewing and its Variations

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.


Recommended


Frederick Schaffer, “Ordinary Language Interviewing” (in Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, Interpretation and Method)

April 14    Archival and Documentary Research

DRAFT DESIGN 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.

*Pamela Brandwein, “Studying the Career of Knowledge Claims” (Y+SS ch 12)


**Recommended


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**April 21 Discourse and Content Analysis**


**Recommended

Mark Bevir, “How Narratives Explain” (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, Interpretation and Method)

Clare Ginger, “Interpretive Content Analysis” (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, *Interpretation and Method*)

Carol Cohn, “Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals,” Signs 12:4 (Summer 1987), 687-718 (on BB)


April 28  Research Participants and their Interests

*Faye Ginsburg, Contested Lives (excerpts)*


*Jack Katz, “Toward a Natural History of Ethical Censorship,” Law and Society Review 41 (2007), 797-809 (on BB)*

**Recommended**

Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, “Doing Social Science in a Humanistic Manner” (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, *Interpretation and Method*)


May 5  Presentations and discussions of research designs; MONDAY MAY 11 FINAL RESEARCH DESIGNS DUE