Western University
Department of Political Science

FOUNDATIONS OF QUALITATIVE METHODS

Political Science 9593B
Winter 2021

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Office Hours: Mondays 1-2pm or by appointment (on Zoom)

Course Description and Objectives:

The term 'qualitative methods' encompasses a wide variety of empirical research strategies in political science, ranging from historical documentary research to elite interviews and immersive ethnographic work. This course provides graduate students with an overview of the philosophical underpinnings and practical applications of a range of qualitative research practices.

The course aims to develop both theoretical understanding and practical research skills. By the end of the course, you will understand the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of different qualitative research approaches in political science. You will have a strong grasp of alternative logics of concept-formation, and an understanding of models of causation and issues of case selection associated with small-n research. Through reading, discussion, and hands-on assignments, you will learn about – and have an opportunity to apply – a variety of concrete data gathering techniques, including documentary research, interviews, and participant observation; and you will be introduced to practices in qualitative data analysis, including narrative analysis and basic principles of qualitative coding. Finally, you will understand how qualitative and quantitative approaches to political inquiry can be – and are being – brought together in the rapidly evolving practice of multi-method research in political science.

This course is wide ranging, but it is an introduction, and it is not comprehensive. We will discuss most of the commonly used qualitative methods, but others will be treated only in passing, if at all. In addition, the course focuses more on the logic and process of qualitative research, as well as on data collection techniques, than on analytical methods. Subjects that will not be addressed in detail include discourse analysis, set theory, Bayesian analysis, qualitative social media research, and computer-assisted qualitative text analysis (eg., NVivo). *Week 12 of the course has been left open so that we can cover an additional subject of students' choosing.*

Course Materials:

Most of the course readings are available electronically through our library system or will be posted on the course OWL site. The one exception to this is the following book, which you can **purchase online** in paperback and a variety of digital formats (cost – about $20-$35):

> Abbott, Andrew. 2014. *Digital Paper: A Manual for Research and Writing with Library and Internet Materials* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press).

In addition, I would strongly encourage you to consider purchasing one or more of the following texts, depending on your methodological interests – we will be reading substantial portions of each of these books in the course, and they are all useful reference volumes:

> Kapiszewski, Diana, Lauren M. MacLean, and Benjamin L. Read. 2015. *Field research in political science: Practices and principles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

> James Mahoney and Kathleen Thelen, eds. 2015. *Advances in Comparative-Historical Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)

> Layna Mosley, ed. 2013. *Interview Research in Political Science* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press).

> Jason Seawright. 2016. *Multi-Method Social Science: Combining Qualitative and Quantitative Tools* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

> Edward Schatz, ed. 2009. *Political Ethnography: What Immersion Contributes to the Study of Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press)

> Marc Trachtenberg. 2009. *The craft of international history: A guide to method* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).

Format:

This will be a synchronous seminar-style class. We will meet on Wednesdays from 12:30 – 2:30 on Zoom, with a brief break half-way through class. Links to meetings will be posted on OWL. I will record our seminar sessions on Zoom and post them to our OWL site (accessible to class participants only), so that anyone facing a technical challenge or other legitimate problem with connecting synchronously can view the content asynchronously.

Our relatively small class size will give us the opportunity to have a true seminar-style discussion, which will be at the heart of the learning in this course. For this format to work well, *you must come prepared having completed all the readings each week.* The course is reading-intensive, so make sure that you budget time accordingly.

Each class (except the first one), will start with a brief *readings commentary* by one of you (see below). I will then present any material that I think requires presentation, and we will follow

with open discussion. In some weeks, *guest experts* on particular methods will join us for one of our two meeting hours.

Evaluation:

Seminar participation (15%)

You are all expected to be active, thoughtful and analytical participants in class discussion, and to come prepared with questions and insights on the reading material for each week.

Readings commentary (10%)

Each of you will choose a week (except the first week) that particularly interests you. You will:

a. Post two or three thoughtful discussion questions about the readings for that week on the "forums" section of our OWL site no later than Monday night.
b. Kick off our Wednesday seminar with a brief – 10 minutes *maximum* – oral commentary on the readings. You do not need to provide a written version. Your commentary should NOT be a summary of the readings – there is way too much material in each week for this! Instead, you will identify and briefly discuss two or three insights, concepts, arguments, issues, ideas, concepts, or controversies that you think are central to that week's material. You can use PowerPoint if you want, but it's not expected – what's important is the substance of your commentary.

Methods training exercises (25% each – choose any three)

You will choose any **three** of the following assignments to complete, depending on your interests and schedule. The written product for each should be roughly 2500 - 3000 words long – I will be flexible with this. Full guidelines for each assignment will be distributed later.

1. **Analysis of a concept.** Choose a concept that is significant for your own research interests. Drawing on academic literature that uses the concept, as well as on discussions of conceptualization introduced in the readings for Week 2, analyse the structure and validity of the concept as it is currently used in the literature.

2. **Methodological review of a work of comparative historical analysis.** Choose a well-regarded comparative historical book from a list that I will provide. Write a methodological review, focusing on case selection and causal mechanisms arguments.

3. **Interviewing a scholar.** Choose a recent single-authored work of political science (article or book) that is based on empirical qualitative research. Conduct a semi-structured Zoom interview of no more than 30 minutes with the author of this work, in which you ask them about their methodological choices and research process. I will secure ethics approval for this assignment for the class, but it will be your responsibility to follow all approved procedures before, during and after the interview. You will use transcription software to transcribe the interview, and you will write a brief review of the

author's work, drawing on and incorporating what you found out during your interview. You will submit both the transcription and the review.

4. **Observation of a political meeting.** Choose an upcoming online public meeting of a governmental decision-making body (a city council, legislature, special-purpose agency, etc.). Before the meeting, conduct documentary research on the mandate, procedural arrangements, and personnel of the body. Based on relevant academic literature and your documentary research, identify some concrete objectives for your observation and observe the meeting, taking field notes. Write up a brief narrative account and analysis. Submit both the field notes and the narrative account.

5. **Primary document analysis.** Identify a set of primary documents (archival memos and papers, transcripts of meetings by a decision-making body, etc.) that might provide insight into a research question that you are interested in. Read and qualitatively code the documents and write up a narrative analysis.

6. **Multi-method research design.** Choose a research question that interests you and that might be amenable to multi-method treatment. Develop a concise design document for the research, justifying your methodological choices, and discussing how the quantitative and qualitative elements of the research design relate to each other.

Due dates and submission:

Each of your three methods training exercises will be submitted on OWL. Each exercise is due two weeks after the relevant methodological material is discussed in our course, as follows:

Assignment	Due Date
Concept analysis	Feb 3
CHA book review	Feb 27
Interview with a scholar	Mar 17
Observation of a meeting	Mar 31
Primary document analysis	Apr 7
Multi-method design	Apr 14

Instructor communication and flexibility:

I fully understand that this is a difficult time for many students. If you are facing challenges with the material in this course, or if your personal circumstances are interfering with your ability to do your work, please do not hesitate to let me know. If you anticipate problems meeting deadlines, please let me know in advance and we will make reasonable accommodations.

POL 9593 Weekly Schedule

Week 1 (Jan 13): Situating 'qualitative methods': Questions, ontologies and the elements of research

Schram, Sanford F., Bent Flyvbjerg, and Todd Landman. 2013. "*Political* political science: A phronetic approach." *New Political Science* 35(3): 359-372.

Brady, Henry E., David Collier, and Jason Seawright. 2010. "Refocusing the discussion of methodology." Chapter 1 in Henry E. Brady and David Collier, eds. *Rethinking social inquiry: Diverse tools, shared standards* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield).
- Read up to the start of the chapter outline for the rest of the book.

Thomas, George. 2005. "The qualitative foundations of political science methodology." *Perspectives on Politics* 3(4): 855-866.

Hall, Peter. 2003. "Aligning Ontology and Methodology in Comparative Research." Chapter 11 in James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer, eds., *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003)

Allina-Pisano, Jessica. "How to tell an axe murderer: An essay on ethnography, truth, and lies." In Edward Schatz, ed., *Political Ethnography: What Immersion Contributes to the Study of Power.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press): 53-73.

Week 2 (Jan 20): Concept formation as qualitative reasoning

Goerz, Gary. 2005. "Structuring and Theorizing Concepts". Chapter 2 in *Social Science Concepts: A User's Guide* (Princeton: Princeton University Press): 27-67.

Collier, David and Steven Levitsky. 1997. "Democracy with Adjectives: Conceptual Innovation in Comparative Research," *World Politics* 49(3): 430-415.
- Review from Research Design course.

Adcock, Robert and David Collier. 2001. "Measurement Validity: A Shared Standard for Quanlitative and Quantitative Research". *American Political Science Review* 95(3): 529-546.

Bevir, Mark and Asaf Kedar. 2008. "Concept formation in political science: An anti-naturalist critique of qualitative methodology". *Perspectives on Politics* 6(3): 503-517.

Week 3 (Jan 27): Small-n work and case studies: purposes, causalities, and case selection

George, Alexander L. and Andrew Bennett. 2005. "Case Studies and Theory Development". Chapter 1 in Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press).
- Read pages 17-34 only.

Flyvbjerg, Bent. 2006. "Five misunderstandings about case-study research". *Qualitative inquiry 12*(2): 219-245.

Blatter, Joachim and Till Blume. 2008. "In search of co-variance, causal mechanisms or congruence? Towards a plural understanding of case studies". *Swiss Political Science Review* 14(2): 315-356.

George, Alexander L. and Andrew Bennett. 2005. "Comparative Methods: Controlled Comparison and Within-Case Analysis". Chapter 8 in Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press).

Mahoney, James and Rodrigo Barrenechea. 2019. "The logic of counterfactual analysis in case-study Explanation". British Journal of Sociology 70(1): 308-338.

Further reading:

Mahoney, James and Gary Goertz. 2004. "The possibility principle: Choosing negative cases in comparative research". *American Political Science Review* 98(4): 653-669..

Ragin, Charles. 2006. "Set Relations in Social Research: Evaluating their Consistency and Coverage". *Political Analysis* 14: 291-310.

Week 4 (Feb 3): Comparative historical analysis: Foundations and causality

Thelen, Kathleen and James Mahoney. 2015. "Comparative-historical analysis in contemporary political science". Chapter 1 in James Mahoney and Kathleen Thelen, eds. *Advances in Comparative-Historical Analysis*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press): 3-36.

George, Alexander L. and Andrew Bennett. 2005. "Case Studies and the Philosophy of Science". Chapter 7 in Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press).

Faletti, Tulia and James Mahoney. 2015. "The comparative sequential method". Chapter 8 in James Mahoney and Kathleen Thelen, eds. *Advances in Comparative-Historical Analysis*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press): 211-239.

Capoccia, Giovanni. 2015. "Critical junctures and institutional change". Chapter 6 in James Mahoney and Kathleen Thelen, eds. *Advances in Comparative-Historical Analysis*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press): 147-179.

Further reading:

Chapters 2-5 and 7 of *Advances in Comparative-Historical Analysis* are all useful reading for those interested in comparative historical work.

Week 5 (Feb 10): The design and practice of process tracing

Beach, Derek. 2016. "It's all about mechanisms–what process-tracing case studies should be tracing". *New Political Economy* 21(5): 463-472.

Bennett, Andrew, Tasha Fairfield and Hillel David Soifer. 2019. "Comparative methods and process tracing". *American Political Science Association Organized Section for Qualitative and Multi-Method Research, Qualitative Transparency Deliberations, Final Report of Working Group III.1*.

Ricks, Jacob I. and Amy H. Liu. 2018. "Process-tracing research designs: a practical guide". *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 51(4): 842-846.

Crasnow, Sharon. 2017. "Process tracing in political science: What's the story?" *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science* 62: 6-13.

Week 6 (Feb 24): Documents and archives: Researching the written record

Abbott, Andrew. 2014. *Digital Paper: A Manual for Research and Writing with Library and Internet Materials.* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press).
     - Read Chapters 1 ("Introduction"), 3 ("Fundamentals"), and 7 ("Reading").

Lustick, Ian S. 1996. "History, historiography, and political science: Multiple historical records and the problem of selection bias." *American Political Science Review* 90(3): 605-618.

Trachtenberg, Marc. 2009. "Working with Documents". Chapter 5 in Marc Trachtenberg, *The craft of international history: A guide to method* (Princeton: Princeton University Press): 140-168.

Further reading:

The rest of *Digital Paper* is a very useful read - especially for those who expect to be working heavily with library-based sources, but in fact, for all researchers.

Week 7 (Mar 3): Interview research

Mosley, Layna. 2013. "'Just talk to people'? Interviews in Contemporary Political Science". Introduction in Layna Mosley, ed. *Interview Research in Political Science*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press): 1-28.

Lynch, Julia. 2013. "Aligning sampling strategies with analytic goals". Ch 1 in Layna Mosley, ed. *Interview Research in Political Science*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press): 31-44.

MacLean, Lauren. 2013. "The power of the interviewer". Ch 3 in Layna Mosley, ed. *Interview Research in Political Science*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press): 67-83.

Mikecz, Robert. 2012 "Interviewing Elites: Addressing Methodological Issues". Qualitative Inquiry.18(6): 482-493.
- Review from Research Design course.

Leech, Beth. 2002 "Asking Questions: Techniques for Semistructured Interviews". *PS: Political Science and Politics* 35(4): 665-668.
- Review from Research Design course.

Beamer, Glenn. 2002. "Elite interviews and state politics research." *State Politics & Policy Quarterly* 2.1: 86-96.

Further reading:

Additional chapters of *Interview Research in Political Science* are useful for those who intend to conduct interviews in their research.

Recommended viewing:

"Conducting Fieldwork Under COVID Constraints: Interviews, Surveys, and Experiments". Institute for Qualitative and Multi-Method Research Webinar, July 21, 2020: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kKTVMTBLGY4

Week 8 (Mar 10): Field research: Purposes and challenges

Kapiszewski, Diana, Lauren M. MacLean, and Benjamin L. Read. *Field research in political science: Practices and principles*. Cambridge University Press, 2015.
- Read Chapters 1 ("Field research in political science: practices and principles") and 11 ("The future of field research in political science").

Wood, Elizabeth Jean. 2006. "The Ethical Challenges of Field Research in Conflict Zones". *Qualitative Sociology* 29: 373-386.

Fujii, Lee Ann. 2013. "Working with interpreters". Ch 7 in Layna Mosley, ed. *Interview Research in Political Science*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press): 144-158.

Ortbals, Candice D. and Meg E. Rincker, eds. 2009. "Symposium: Fieldwork, Identities, and Intersectionality". *PS: Political Science and Politics* 42(2). *Read contributions by Henderson, Aldrich, and Johnson.*

Week 9 (Mar 17): Participant observation and ethnography

Schwartz-Shea, Peregrine and Samantha Majic, eds. 2017. "Symposium: Ethnography and Participant Observation: Political Science Research in this "Late Methodological Moment". *PS: Political Science and Politics* 50(1).
- Read contributions by Schwartz-Shea and Majic, Forrest, and Kang.

Schatz, Edward. 2009. "What Kind(s) of Ethnography Does Political Science Need?" In Edward Schatz, ed., *Political Ethnography: What Immersion Contributes to the Study of Power*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press): 303-318.

Yanow, Dvora. 2009. "Dear Author, Dear Reader: The Third Hermeneutic in Writing and Reading Ethnography". In Edward Schatz, ed., *Political Ethnography: What Immersion Contributes to the Study of Power*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press): 275-302.

Wolfinger, Nicholas H. 2002. "On writing fieldnotes: strategies and background expectancies". Qualitative Research 2(1): 85-95.

Further reading:

Hart, Tabitha. 2017 "Online Ethnography". In Jorg Matthes, ed. *International Encyclopedia of Communication Research Methods* (John Wiley & Sons): 1-8.

Recommended viewing:

"Conducting Fieldwork Under COVID Constraints: Interpretive Approaches and Ethnography". Institute for Qualitative and Multi-Method Research Webinar, July 21, 2020: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BeOBLokYRnE

Week 10 (Mar 24): Approaches to qualitative data analysis

Abbott, Andrew. 2014. *Digital Paper: A Manual for Research and Writing with Library and Internet Materials.* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press).
- Read Chapter 9 ("Midphase Analysis").

Kapiszewski, Diana, Lauren M. MacLean, and Benjamin L. Read. *Field research in political science: Practices and principles*. Cambridge University Press, 2015.
- Read Ch 10 ("Coding and analyzing data in the field") – read pp. 332-348 and skim the rest of the chapter.

Herrera, Yoshiko M. and Bear F. Braumoeller. 2004. "Symposium: Discourse and Content Analysis". *Qualitative methods*, *2*(1). Read the piece by Hardy, Harley and Phillips (pp. 19-21).

Wesley, Jared J. "Qualitative document analysis in political science." *T2PP Workshop*. Amsterdam: Vrije Universiteit, 2010.

Trachtenberg, Marc. 2009. "Writing it Up". Chapter 7 in Marc Trachtenberg, *The craft of international history: A guide to method* (Princeton: Princeton University Press): 183-197.

Further reading:

Kurasaki, Karen. 2000. "Intercoder reliability for validating conclusions drawn from open-ended interviewer data". *Field Methods* 12(3): 179-194.

Welsh, Elaine. 2002. "Dealing with data: Using NVivo in the qualitative data analysis process". *Forum qualitative sozialforschung/Forum: qualitative social research* 3(2).

Week 11 (Mar 31): Multimethod research

Goerz, Gary. 2016. "Multimethod Research". *Security Studies* 25(3): 3-24.

Seawright, Jason. 2016. "Better Multimethod Design: The Promise of Integrative Multimethod Research". *Security Studies* 25(3): 42-49.

Lieberman, Evan. 2015. "Nested analysis: towards the integration of comparative-historical analysis with other social science methods". Chapter 9 in James Mahoney and Kathleen Thelen, eds. *Advances in Comparative-Historical Analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 240-263.

Seawright, Jason. 2016. "Multi-Method Case Studies". Chapter 8 in Jason Seawright, *Multi-Method Social Science: Combining Qualitative and Quantitative Tools* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press): 171-191.

Further reading:

Lieberman, Evan. 2010. "Bridging the Quantitative-Qualitative Divide: Best Practices in the Development of Historically Oriented Replication Databases". *Annual Review of Political Science* 13: 37-59.

Humphreys, Macartan and Alan M. Jacobs. 2015. "Mixing Methods: A Bayesian Approach." *American Political Science Review* 109 (4): 653–73.

In addition, those interested in multi-method work should read more of *Multi-Method Social Science.*

Week 12 (Apr 7): Students' choice of material (to be determined)