Political Science 696  
Research Design and Qualitative Methods in Political Science  
Department of Political Science, University of Pennsylvania

Fall 2016  
Fridays 10am-1pm  
Large seminar room, 3440 Market St Suite 300

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Overview: This seminar is an introduction to principles of research design and to the collection and analysis of qualitative data in the social sciences. It is worth noting that many of the methods traditionally considered to be qualitative actually employ quantitative data, and vice versa; and that many of the principles underlying research design, case selection, and the process of data collection are common across empirically-oriented research methods, whether qualitative, quantitative, or formal. Hence, the course should be useful to students planning to utilize a variety of different kinds of research tools during. Readings encompass theory, how-to, and examples drawn from political science and cognate social science disciplines. There are no prerequisites for the course, but some background in statistics and/or an idea of the substantive research questions you would like to pursue will be helpful.

Academic integrity and plagiarism:  
The University of Pennsylvania’s Code of Academic Integrity states: “Since the University is an academic community, its fundamental purpose is the pursuit of knowledge. Essential to the success of this educational mission is a commitment to the principles of academic integrity. Every member of the University community is responsible for upholding the highest standards of honesty at all times. Students, as members of the community, are also responsible for adhering to the principles and spirit of the [...] Code of Academic Integrity.” The seven points of this code (on cheating, plagiarism, fabrication, multiple submission, misrepresentation, facilitating dishonesty, and unfair advantage) can be found at http://www.upenn.edu/provost/PennBook/academic_integrity_code_of.
Course Readings:
Readings for each week are listed in recommended reading order. Most readings are available on Blackboard or downloadable directly. Please be sure to bring to each class session a physical manifestation of the required readings: books, printouts, easily readable computer files.

Required books (available for purchase at Penn Book Center):


Recommended books:


*Readings preceded by an asterix are on the Canvas site

Course requirements:
A. Active and informed participation in seminar discussion (25% of final grade)
Informed, active participation in seminar is a requirement of the course. Read carefully; take notes; come prepared to discuss and participate. While a variety of lesson formats offer opportunities for different kinds of participation (oral and written, individual and collaborative, large and small group), you will be graded on both the quality and quantity of your required contributions to the seminar. I encourage you to request an evaluation of your seminar participation at an early stage during the semester.
B. Exercises (24% of final grade)
Brief weekly exercises are designed to give you practice applying the tools we are discussing each week. Before the start of class, submit your exercise on Canvas and print out a copy of your exercise. You may need it to share with a partner during class. Exercises are not graded, but you must complete the exercises each week in order to get maximum credit for this portion of the final grade. Write-ups of the exercises should generally not require more than 5 double-spaced pages.

Some students choose to use the exercises to address different aspects of a single substantive problem throughout the course of the semester. This strategy can facilitate a deeper understanding of qualitative methods and research design, as well as intimacy with a potential dissertation topic. However, this is by no means required. Many students, particularly those in their first year, may find it more helpful to use the written assignments to explore a variety of topics over the course of the semester.

C. Feedback (11% of final grade)
Each week you will be responsible for giving written feedback on one of your classmates’ exercises. Feedback is due before class the week following submission of the exercises. Canvas will randomly assign a “peer reviewer” for each exercise and will send you an email to let you know which assignment you need to review. When you complete your feedback, attach it as a file in the peer review section of the assignment on Canvas to make the feedback accessible to your partner. You must ALSO submit the file via the appropriate assignment (“Feedback on Exercise X” in order to receive points for your feedback.

You should devote at least 30 minutes to giving critical and constructive written feedback on the exercise. What did the author of the exercise do well or poorly? What concepts might she have misunderstood or misapplied, and what could he do to fix the problem? Did the author consider all relevant “lessons” from the readings when completing the exercise? Where possible, point to specific places in the readings to provide further clarification.

D. Papers (40% of final grade)
For this course you will write two short papers in which you put into practice the methodological tools covered in the course, selecting from among the five Paper Options provided on the syllabus. Papers are due via Canvas on the stated due date. Extensions can be negotiated IN ADVANCE to accommodate unusual circumstances.

Papers should generally be no more than 12 pages double-spaced. You can think of these papers as roughly half of a journal article: the methods section plus presentation/discussion of results, with only the barest nod to an introduction, lit review, synthesis or conclusion. These assignments require that you undertake a small piece of original research before you can write the paper. Furthermore, the page limit is likely to demand significant extra time for editing. Because of this, these papers are likely to take longer to execute than you expect! Please leave yourself ample time to complete them and to proof-read carefully (grades will be based partly on the quality of your writing).
Incompletes:
An incomplete in the course may be granted in the case of a medical or family emergency. In the event that you must take an incomplete, the remaining work must be turned in within four weeks of the end of the emergency or the end of the semester, which ever comes later. This is for your own protection: you do not want these papers hanging over your head.

TOPIC OUTLINE

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Week 1 (Sept 9)

Epistemology, ontology, methodology

Exercise 1: BEFORE YOU DO THE READINGS: Draw a word map of the terms (adjectives, nouns, verbs) you associate with qualitative and quantitative research in political science (or your home discipline, if you are not a political scientist). A word map is simply a spatial representation of how you see these terms being related to one another – you can use arrows, proximity, hierarchy, even color to get your meaning across. AFTER YOU DO THE READINGS: Do the same exercise again. Has your map changed at all?


* Lieberman, Evan. “Can the Bio-Medical Research Cycle be a Model for Political Science?” Forthcoming in Perspectives on Politics.

Recommended:
*James Mahoney, “After KKV: The New Methodology of Qualitative Research,” World Politics 62:1 (January 2010), pp. 120-147. [A basic introduction to much of what is to come in this course]

Week 2 (Sept 16)

Concepts, indicators, measures


Exercise 2: Pick a concept that is central to one of your research interests. It could be very abstract (e.g. justice, regime), very concrete (e.g., occupation, campaign advertisement), or something in between (e.g. social cleavage, political socialization, stability). Devise two potential research projects that would involve this concept in some way, but that would require you to conceptualize, operationalize, and/or measure it differently. Specify how you would conceptualize, operationalize and measure the concept for each research project, and why you would need to do it differently for the two projects.

Recommended:


Week 3 (Sept 23) – NO CLASS
Week 4 (Sept 30)
Explanations


*Copi, Irving M, and Carl Cohen. “Causal Connections: Mill’s Methods of Experimental Inquiry.” In Introduction to Logic. London: Macmillan (1994), Chapter 12. [You only need to read this if you are not familiar with Mill’s Methods]


Exercise 3: Write down a substantive causal question. Concoct a plausible variable-centered and mechanism-centered answer for that question. Then say what empirical observations would be needed, and why, to convince you that each of these explanations is correct. Note: this is harder than it sounds!

Recommended:


FALL BREAK (Oct 9)
**Week 5 (Oct 14)**

**Case studies and case selection**


*Collier, David, James Mahoney, and Jason Seawright. “Claiming Too Much: Warnings about Selection Bias” RSI Supplemental Chapter 1.


**Exercise 4:** Examine the reading by Morris MacLean. What rationale does she give for her case selection? Does the case selection allow for causal inference? With what scope? Is selection bias likely to be a problem? Why or why not?

**Recommended:**


*Slater, Dan and Daniel Ziblatt. “The Enduring Indispensability of the Controlled Comparison.” *Comparative Political Studies* 46:10(2013), pp. 1301-1327. [Read first 14 pages; skim the rest.]

**Week 6 (Oct 21)**

**Process tracing**


*Collier, David. “Process Tracing: Introduction and Exercises.” To Accompany Rethinking Social Inquiry, 2nd Ed. Beta Version (September 22, 2010). [You do NOT have to do the exercises, but DO read the Sherlock Holmes story.]


**Exercise 5:** Consider the article by Melissa Wilde. What is the process that Wilde traces, and why does she need to trace it? How does Wilde go about “tracing the process:” What argumentative steps does the analysis go through? What kinds of tests does she employ? What techniques did she use to generate the evidence used in the process tracing?

**Paper Option (Due Nov 7):** Identify a process that is of political significance. Start by identifying, for yourself, the practical, operational steps will you need to go through to trace the process. In the paper, trace the process, and make a political science argument based on your findings.

**Recommended:**


Week 7 (Oct 28)

History and archival research


**“From the Archives: Innovative Use of Data in Comparative Historical Research.” Trajectories: Newsletter of the Comparative Historical Section of the ASA (2008), contribution by Wilde.

Exercise 6: Think of a concrete research question in political science (or your home discipline) that interests you. Write it down. Imagine an archive that you think would help you answer this question, and explain what would be in it and why. Then look for a real archive in the world that comes close to your ideal. Learn as much as you can about the structure of that archive and its rules of operation. Finally, based on this information, say whether this archive would be helpful to you in answering your question.

Paper Option 1 (Due Nov 14): Locate an archive that you suspect will allow you to answer a specific research question. Enumerate a sample of materials from that archive that you believe will help you to answer your question: what documents would you request, and for what purpose? (Your sample may comprise the universe of all potentially relevant materials, but you will need to explain what is “relevant” and why.) Request and read these documents (you may read a sub-sample if necessary), and do your best to answer the question that you set out to answer. Discuss any limitations that the archive or your sampling technique imposed on your ability to make good causal or descriptive inferences.
In-depth interviewing


*Emerson, Robert, Rachel Fretz, and Linda Shaw. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press (1995), Chapter 6. [This is about moving from ethnographic field notes to writing, but the sample techniques apply to grounded theorizing based on interview transcripts or notes.]

**Exercise 7:** Think of a question – ANY question - to which you would like to know the answer. Then write several interview questions that would help you elicit the information you need to answer the question. Find a few examples of the types of people you would need to interview, and ASK THE QUESTIONS. (Don’t worry about representative sampling.) Which questions elicited the most useful information? Why? How did you feel while you were asking the questions? How did your respondents seem to feel when they were answering them?

**Paper Option 2 (Due Nov 21):** Use data from in-depth interviews utilizing open-ended questions to answer a question with some relevance for political science. Your paper should include (a) a brief presentation of the question you set out to answer, (b) a description and justification of your sampling procedures (c) an explanation of your coding scheme and data analysis, (d) a presentation of your results, and (e) a discussion of any potential limitations of your study. You should also include an appendix, which does not count toward the page limit, listing the main questions you needed in order to answer your research question (some of which you may have discovered you needed only after you have done a few interviews).

**Recommended:**


**Week 9 (Nov 11)**

**Ethnography and participant observation**


**Exercise 8:** Spend at least one hour observing something that is of political or social significance. What did you do/see/hear/smell/taste/feel? What did you learn? (How) did your presence affect what you saw or learned?

**Paper Option 3 (Due Nov 28):** Design and undertake a small study involving ethnographic or participant observation. Write up your results. Consider what you learned from this study that other methods would not have yielded, and vice versa.

**Recommended:**


**Week 10 (Nov 18)**

**Field Experiments, Natural Experiments, and Quasi-Experiments**


Exercise 9: Think of a political science question you would like to answer, and then imagine a scenario in which you could use a field experiment or natural experiment to answer it. Make sure that you identify what the treatment is. How likely is it that you would find a situation in the real world that meets the necessary conditions for the use of an experimental design? If those conditions did not exist, what other methods could you turn to in order to answer your question?

Paper Option 4 (Due Dec 5): Design and conduct an experiment or quasi-experiment to answer a social question. Write up your results and assess the experiment’s validity and any limitations of your research design.

Recommended:


TESS web site: http://www.tessexperiments.org/. Read Introduction and review some of the experiments listed under TESS Studies and Data.
**Week 11 (Nov 23)**

**Content analysis and discourse analysis**


**Exercise 10**: Think of a question that you would like to answer using content analysis of materials that can be accessed easily (i.e. no web scraping) on the web sites of one or more academic journals. Write a sampling procedure and codebook that could be used by a partner in class to conduct a miniature content analysis to answer this question. Construct an Excel spreadsheet into which your partner can enter the results of her/his coding. [Feel free to exceed the normal 2-page limit for this assignment, but keep in mind that your partner will only have about 30 minutes to collect your data for you.]

**Paper Option 5 (Due Dec 12)**: Design and undertake a small research project involving content or discourse analysis. Be sure to specify any sampling or coding procedures (although you may use different words to describe these practices if you are conducting discourse vs. content analysis). Write up your methods and results. Include your codebook as an appendix, which will not count toward the page limit.

**Recommended:**


Week 12 (Dec 2)
Research ethics


*Snyder, Jack. “Active Citation: In Search of Smoking Guns or Meaningful Context?”* *Security Studies*, 23:4 (2014), 708-714.

**Exercise 11:** Imagine three potential dissertation topics that you could imagine doing and that might be ethically problematic. What would make these projects problematic? For which of these would IRB review be required? How could you modify the IRB review process to ensure that the proposed work would be conducted ethically, or not at all?

Recommended:

Week 13 (Dec 9)

Logistics and conclusions


**Exercise 12:** Think of a research project that involves field research and that is of a scope appropriate for a roughly 30-page seminar paper, dissertation chapter, or journal article. Say where you would do your field research, and estimate how much time and money you will need for each field site. Construct a “to-get” list to guide your field research, and identify any items that can be done before leaving for the field.

Recommended:


