Qualitative Methods in Political Research
POL2505H
Winter 2013
Wednesdays, 10-12, UC255

This course introduces qualitative methods and approaches, considering the trade-offs involved in choosing one approach, method, technique, or type of evidence over another approach, method, technique, or type of evidence.

After briefly reviewing positivist and interpretivist research traditions, we cover the ideal-typical and practical use of specific qualitative methods such as interviewing, archival research, ethnography, counterfactuals, and discourse analysis. Examples come from political science research and speak directly to political science research.

Because much is learned by doing, this course has a significant “hands-on” component.

Readings

Books: Available at Bob Miller Bookroom (180 Bloor W., north side, west of Avenue Rd., lower level)
- Charles Ragin, Redesigning Social Inquiry: Fuzzy Sets and Beyond (Chicago, 2008)

Blackboard readings: Assigned readings available on Blackboard are designated by [BB]

Articles: If there is no designation, the article is available electronically via the U of T library.

Additional Readings: Readings listed as “additional” may be available electronically or from the U of T libraries. It is your responsibility to plan ahead and coordinate with other students to ensure access to additional readings. (You are required to use additional readings when you give your scheduled in-class presentation.)

Assignments

Engagement with Course Material (15%): Please come to seminar come having read and thought about the readings. The quality of the experience depends in large part on your preparation.

Presentation (15%): Offer a short (5-7 minutes) presentation that provokes discussion on a given week’s topics. Do not summarize the readings; analyze them and their interconnections. Sign-up will happen at the first class meeting.

Double Critique of Public Presentation (25%): Attend a public lecture/colloquium/presentation in which a single scholar discusses her/his empirical research. The presentation should last at least 30 minutes. (Contact me with questions about what qualifies.) Write a report (2400-2700 words; provide a word count) that: 1)
briefly summarizes the presentation, 2) critiques it from a positivist perspective, providing specific suggestions for further research, and 3) critiques it from an interpretivist perspective, providing specific suggestions for further research. Due on February 6 in class. Late submissions are penalized 2% per calendar day.

Hands-on Assignments (45% = 2 x 22.5%): Choose any two of the below. Make your choice in writing by January 30, after which changes require my written approval. The assignments are due on April 3 (except the archive and participant observation assignments, which are due on August 1). Late submissions are penalized 2% per calendar day. Details will follow in the first weeks of classes.

- **Journal:** Conduct an ongoing reflection of the weekly course material, in which you both critique the readings and consider the choices you make (or will make) as a research scholar. Each journal entry should be about 500 words. The total word count should be approximately 500 x 12 = 6000 words.
- **Discourse analysis:** Choose a body of written work (e.g., a newspaper over a specific period of time, a set of speeches) and analyze the language, metaphors and/or symbols used therein. What political “work” do such language, metaphors, and/or symbols do? Your analysis should be about 2500 words.
- **Interview:** Conduct a semi-structured interview with a person of your choosing on a topic of your choosing. The interview should last at least 45 minutes. Students submit a full, verbatim written transcript of the interview, a typed version of notes taken during and after the interview, and a write-up analysis (the analysis will be about 2200 words). This option may require Ethics Review approval.
- **Archival work:** If you have access to original documents that you would like to evaluate/analyze, you may choose this exercise. Students submit a full, typed version of their notes, as well as a write-up analysis. If access requires travel outside of the GTA, you may submit your work by August 1, 2013. (May count as 2 assignments. Contact me for details.)
- **Participant observation:** If you would like to practice being a participant observer in a “natural” setting, choose this assignment. Students submit a full, typed version of their fieldnotes, as well as a write-up analysis. Participant observation will likely require a proposal to the Ethics Review Board, which takes time. If you choose this option, the work for this assignment will be due on August 1, 2013. (May count as 2 assignments. Contact me for details.)
- **Other qualitative exercise:** If you would prefer to get your hands “dirty” trying another qualitative approach (e.g., focus groups), please contact me.

**Course Policies**

*Office hours:* If you have questions about the readings, about the discussion, or about the assignments, office hours are best. No appointment is needed. Occasionally, I announce in class and via email that office hours are cancelled. If you cannot make office hours but would like to meet, email me to schedule a mutually agreeable alternative time.

*Email:* Email is great for communicating simple information, but extended conversations will be conducted face to face. I generally reply to email inquiries within 3 days. If you do not receive a reply within this period, resubmit your question(s). Please consult the syllabus and other course information BEFORE submitting inquiries by email.

*Keep copies:* Students are strongly advised to keep rough and draft work and hard copies of their assignments before submitting them. Keep them until the marked assignments have been returned.
Plagiarism: Plagiarism is a serious academic offence and will be dealt with accordingly. For further clarification and information, please see the University of Toronto’s policy on Plagiarism at http://www.utoronto.ca/writing/plagsep.html. This course uses Turnitin.com, a web-based program to deter plagiarism. Students agree that by taking this course all required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to Turnitin.com for the detection of plagiarism. All submitted papers will be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of such papers. The terms that apply to the University’s use of Turnitin.com are described on the Turnitin.com web site.

Extensions: Sometimes extraordinary circumstances justify an extension. I discuss possible extensions during office hours, not via email. If you cannot make office hours, email me to schedule a mutually agreeable alternative time. I consider such circumstances only until 1 week before the due date. After that, I discuss extensions only if a student has an official note from a doctor or from the University.

Missed Assignments: If, due to an emergency, you miss an assignment without receiving my prior consent, you may make up the assignment only with a note from the university or a physician. You must contact me within 48 hours of the missed assignment for me to consider any documentation.

Accessibility Needs: The University of Toronto is committed to accessibility. If you require accommodations or have any accessibility concerns, please visit http://studentlife.utoronto.ca/accessibility as soon as possible.

Course Outline

Week 1 (January 9): Introduction

- Peter Hall, “Aligning Ontology and Methodology in Comparative Research,” chapter 11 from James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer, eds., Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003) [BB]
- Jonah Lehrer, “The Truth Wears Off: Is There Something Wrong with the Scientific Method?” The New Yorker, 13 December 2010

additional


Week 2 (January 16): Positivism

- Brady and Collier, ed., start - 199
- Edward Schatz, ed., chapter by Allina-Pisano

additional

- King, Keohane, and Verba, Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research (Princeton, 1994)
Week 3 (January 23): Interpretivism

- Terrence Ball, “Deadly Hermeneutics; or SINN and the Social Scientist,” in Terrence Ball, ed., Idioms of Inquiry: Critique and Renewal in Political Science (State University of New York, 1987), pp. 95-112 [BB]
- Clifford Geertz, Interpretation of Cultures (Basic Books, 1973), chapter 1, chapter 15 [BB]
- Edward Schatz, ed., chapters by Wedeen, Pachirat
- Charles Taylor, “Interpretation and the Sciences of Man,” The Review of Metaphysics 25(1), September, 1971: 3-51
- Martin Hollis & Steve Smith, Explaining and Understanding in International Relations (Oxford, 1991), ch. 4
- Anne Norton, 95 Theses on Politics, Culture, and Method (Yale UP, 2004)
- Marc Howard Ross, “Culture and Identity in Comparative Political Analysis,” in Mark Lichbach and Alan Zuckerman, eds., Comparative Politics: Rationality, Culture, and Structure (Cambridge UP, 1997), 42-80
- Paul Ricoeur, Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences (Cambridge, 1981)
- “Symposium: Interpretivism,” Qualitative Methods Newsletter of APSA 1:2 (Fall 2003)
- Keith Topper, The Disorder of Political Inquiry (Harvard UP, 2005)

Week 4 (January 30): Concepts and Cases

***HANDS-ON ASSIGNMENT SELECTIONS DUE TODAY IN CLASS***
• F. Douglas Dion, “Evidence and Inference in the Comparative Case Study,” *Comparative Politics* 30(2), January 1998: 127-146

additional
• Charles Ragin and Howard Becker, eds., *What is a Case?* (Cambridge UP, 1992), introduction
• Andrew Bennett and Colin Elman. “Qualitative Research: Recent Developments in Case Study Methods.” *Annual Review of Political Science* (June 2006) 9: 455-476
• Jason Seawright and John Gerring. “Case Selection Techniques in Case Study Research: A Menu of Qualitative and Quantitative Options.” *Political Research Quarterly* (June 2008) 61 (2): 294-308
• Jason Seawright, John Gerring. “Case selection techniques in case study research - A menu of qualitative and quantitative options.” *Political Research Quarterly* (June 2008) 61 (2): 294-308
• David Collier and James Mahoney, “Insights and Pitfalls: Selection Bias in Qualitative Research,” *World Politics* 49, 1996: 56-91
• Harry Eckstein, “Case-Study and Theory in Micro-Politics,” in Fred Greenstein and Nelson Polsby, eds., *Handbook of Political Science*, vol. 7 (Addison-Wesley, 1975), 79-138
• Adam Przeworski & Henry Teune, *The Logic of Comparative Social Inquiry* (Interscience, 1970)

Week 5 (February 6): Configurational Approaches

***DOUBLE CRITIQUE ASSIGNMENT DUE TODAY IN CLASS***

• Charles Ragin, *Redesigning Social Inquiry: Fuzzy Sets and Beyond* (Chicago, 2008)

additional
• Charles Ragin. “Set relations in social research: Evaluating their Consistency and Coverage.” Political Analysis (Summer 2006) 14 (3): 291-310

Week 6 (February 13): Path Dependency, Counterfactuals, and Critical Junctures
• Kathleen Thelen, “Historical Institutionalism in Comparative Politics, Annual Review of Political Science 2, June 1999: 369-404

additional
• Andreas Schedler, “Mapping Contingency,” in Ian Shapiro and Sonu Bedi, eds., Political Contingency: Studying the Unexpected, the Accidental, and the Unforeseen (New York University Press, 2007), pp. 54-78
• James Mahoney, “Path-Dependent Explanations of Regime Change: Central America in Comparative Perspective.” *Studies in Comparative International Development* 36(1), spring 2001: 111-141

**February 20: Reading Week**

**Week 7 (February 27): Historiography and Archival Work**

- Theda Skocpol and Margaret Sommers, “The Uses of Comparative History in Macrosocial Inquiry,” in *Social Revolutions in the Modern World* (Cambridge, 1994), 72-98 [BB]
- Marc Bloch, *Historian’s Craft*, excerpt TBA [BB]

**additional**

- James G. Blight, Bruce J. Allyn, and David A. Welch, *Cuba on the Brink: Castro, the Missile Crisis, and the Soviet Collapse* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2002), chapters 1 and 2
- Kate Brown, *A Biography of No Place: From Ethnic Borderland to Soviet Heartland* (Harvard, 2003), introduction and epilogue

**Week 8 (March 6): Interviewing**


**additional**

- J. Vincent Buck and Bruce E. Cain. “British MPs in Their Constituencies,” *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 15(1), 1990: 127-143
- James P. Spradley, *The Ethnographic Interview* (Wadsworth, 1997)
• Herbert Rubin and Irene Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data* (Sage, 2005)

**Week 9 (March 13): Ethnography**

- Edward Schatz, ed., chapters by Schatz, Kubik, Pachirat, Walsh, Yanow (skim chapters by Bayard de Volo, Jourde, Schatzberg, Arias)

*additional*

- Edward Schatz, ed., chapters by Zirakzadeh, Wood
- Robert Emerson, Rachel Fretz and Linda Shaw. “Processing Fieldnotes: Coding and Memoing,” in their *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes* (Chicago, 1995), 142-168

**Week 10 (March 20): Discourse Analytic Approaches**

- David Howarth, Aletta Norval, Yannis Stavrakakis, eds., *Discourse Theory and Political Analysis* (Manchester, 2000), introduction [BB]
additional

- Jutta Weldes, *Constructing National Interests: The United States and the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Minnesota, 1999)
- Kathy Ferguson and Phyllis Turnbull, *Oh, Say, Can You See? The Semiotics of the Military in Hawai‘i* (University of Minnesota Press, 1999)
- Peter K. Manning, *Semiotics and Fieldwork* (Sage, 1987)
- Peter K. Manning, *Semiotics and Fieldwork* (Sage, 1987)

**Week 11 (March 27): Multiple Methods**

additional


Week 12 (April 3): Multiple Methods, revisited

***HANDS-ON ASSIGNMENTS DUE IN CLASS TODAY***


additional

- Frieder Wolf, “Enlightened Eclecticism or Hazardous Hotchpotch? Mixed Methods and Triangulation Strategies in Comparative Public Policy Research,” *Journal of Mixed Methods Research* April 2010 vol. 4 no. 2 144-167
- James Mahoney and Gary Goertz. “A Tale of Two Cultures: Contrasting Quantitative and Qualitative Research.” *Political Analysis* (Summer 2006) 14 (3): 227-249