Qualitative Methods in Political Research  
POL2505H  
Spring 2020  
Wednesdays, 2-4 pm, TC22

This course surveys qualitative methods used in political science research. After briefly reviewing key issues in the philosophy of science, as well as elements of research design and concept formation, the course covers the practical uses of specific qualitative methods, including case studies, comparative historical analysis, archival research, interviewing, ethnography, and mixed-method strategies. A key theme will be the trade-offs involved in selecting one approach, method, technique, or type of evidence over other approaches, methods, techniques, or types of evidence. Because much is learned by doing, this course also has a “hands-on” component.

Readings

Books: The following are available electronically through Robarts and from your favourite vendor:

- Layna Mosley, ed. Interview Research in Political Science (Cornell, 2013)
- Shaul R. Shenhav, Analyzing Social Narratives (Routledge, 2015) [available electronically]

Additional Readings: Readings listed as “additional” may or may not be available electronically via Robarts. 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

Participation and Engagement (22%): Our seminar depends on your preparation. I am more interested in the quality than in the quantity or frequency of participation. That said, silence leaves me guessing how well you are engaging the material.

Critical Reflections (16%). Write a short weekly reflection from weeks 2 through 9, sharing it with the instructor and peers via Quercus by 10 pm the Tuesday before each Wednesday seminar. Reflection papers should offer a critical engagement of the week’s material, should be no more than 2 single-spaced pages in length, and should avoid summary.

Oral Presentation on Readings (11%): Offer a short (5-7 minute) presentation that provokes discussion on the week’s topic. Do not read from a text; instead, put together a talk that is organized and conceived as an oral presentation. You will be marked on the degree to which you: 1) provide stimulating questions/critiques while minimizing summaries of the readings; 2) consider interconnections among the assigned readings; 3) consider links to other weeks’ readings; 4) integrate discussion of some of the additional readings into your presentation. A sign-up sheet will be circulated at our first meeting.

Double Critique (16%): Attend a public presentation in which a single scholar discusses her/his empirical research. 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 claims about what would improve the research, and 3)
critiques it from an interpretivist perspective, providing specific claims about what would improve the research. Deadline for submission: February 5. The presentation must meet all the following criteria:

- presented by a scholar (rather than a practitioner);
- based on original research and/or original interpretation of existing research;
- focused on empirical findings;
- lasts at least 25 minutes (before Q&A).

(You may need to attend more than several presentations before you find one that meets all four criteria.)

**Final Presentation (10%).** Final presentations will be held during on March 18 and April 1. Each student will provide a defense of a [randomly assigned] qualitative research method/ology to a [randomly-assigned] common criticism. Each presentation will last five minutes and should be very well rehearsed. After each, a [randomly assigned] opponent will offer a brief (2-minute) follow-up to rebut the defense. The presenter will then respond to the rebuttal. I will provide your marching orders 2 weeks in advance of your final presentation.

**“Opponent” Role (5%).** During final presentations, each student will play the role of an “opponent,” as above. I will provide your marching orders 2 weeks in advance of the final presentation.

**Hands-on Assignment (20%):** Choose one of the below. By February 12 email me to specify your choice, explaining how it furthers your intellectual and professional development. Once approved, further changes require my written approval. The assignment is due April 1 (except the archive and participant observation assignments; see below). Late submissions are penalized 2% per calendar day. Details follow in the first weeks of classes.

- **Review Essay:** Write an essay that critically reviews a key qualitative method or issue not covered in the course (e.g., configurational analysis, focus group research), insofar as the method can be used to study political questions. The essay (about 2500 words) should demonstrate your command of the literature while advancing an original argument.
- **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 or an in-depth interview with a person of your choosing on a politics-related topic. The interview should last at least 45 minutes. 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) that discusses the extent to which your interview allowed you to answer your research question(s). Be specific about what worked well and what did not. This option may require Ethics Review approval.
- **Archival work.** If you have access to original documents, you may choose this exercise. Students submit a full, typed version of their notes, as well as a write-up analysis that discusses the extent to which your archives allow you to answer a research question(s). Be specific about what worked well and what, in retrospect, you should have done differently. If this requires travel outside of the GTA, you may submit your work by August 1, 2019. (Contact me for details.)
- **Participant Observation.** If you would like to practice being a participant observer in a “natural” setting, choose this assignment. Submit a full, typed version of your fieldnotes, as well as an analysis that discusses the extent to which your experience allowed you to answer your research question(s). Be specific about what worked well and what did not. 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, 2019. (Contact me for details.)

- **Other qualitative exercise:** If you would prefer to try another qualitative method, 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 advance 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, but extended conversations will be conducted face to face. I generally reply within 3 days. If you do not hear from me 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](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:* On rare occasions, 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 an alternative time. I consider such circumstances until one week before the due date. After that, I discuss the possibility of an extension 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](http://studentlife.utoronto.ca/accessibility) as soon as possible.
Course Outline

Week 1 (January 8): Introduction and Research Ethics

- Peter Hall, “Aligning Ontology and Methodology in Comparative Research,” in James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer, eds., *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, 2003)

**Additional**

*Consider attending a session about the Ethics Review process held by the Research Ethics office. Dates TBA*

- Elisabeth Jean Wood, “The Ethical Challenges of Field Research in Conflict Zones,” *Qualitative Sociology* 29(3) 2006: 373-86
Week 2 (January 15): Positivism

- Ryan, Phil. "Positivism: paradigm or culture?" *Policy Studies* 36(4), 2015: 417-433

**additional**

- Martin Hollis and Steve Smith, *Explaining and Understanding in International Relations* (Oxford, 1991), chapter 3
- George Thomas, “The Qualitative Foundations of Political Science Methodology,” *Perspectives on Politics* 3(4), 2005: 855-866

Week 3 (January 22): Interpretivism

- Peregrine Schwartz-Shea and Dvora Yanow. *Interpretive Research Design: Concepts and Processes.* (Routledge, 2013) [available electronically]

**additional**

- Clifford Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures* (Basic Books, 1973), chapter 1, chapter 15
- Charles Taylor, “Interpretation and the Sciences of Man,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 25(1), 1971: 3-51
• Martin Hollis and Steve Smith, *Explaining and Understanding in International Relations* (Oxford, 1991), ch. 4
• Anne Norton, *95 Theses on Politics, Culture, and Method* (Yale, 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, 1997), 42-80
• “Symposium: Interpretivism,” *Qualitative Methods Newsletter of APSA* 1:2 (Fall 2003)
• Keith Topper, *The Disorder of Political Inquiry* (Harvard, 2005)

Week 4 (January 29): Cases and Case Selection (Guest Instructor: Professor Kanta Murali)

- F. Douglas Dion, “Evidence and Inference in the Comparative Case Study,” *Comparative Politics* 30(2), 1998: 127-146

Additional

- Edward Schatz and Elena Maltseva, “Assumed to be Universal: The Leap from Data to Knowledge in the *American Political Science Review*,” Polity 44(3), 2012: 446-472.
- Charles Ragin and Howard Becker, eds., *What is a Case?* (Cambridge, 1992), introduction
- Jason Seawright and John Gerring, “Case Selection Techniques in Case Study Research: A Menu of Qualitative and Quantitative Options,” *Political Research Quarterly* 61(2), 2008: 294-308
- David Collier and James Mahoney, “Insights and Pitfalls: Selection Bias in Qualitative Research,” *World Politics* 49, 1996: 56-91
• Gary Goertz, “Assessing the trivialness, relevance, and relative importance of necessary or sufficient conditions in social science,” *Studies in Comparative International Development* 41(2), 2006: 88-109

**Week 5 (February 5): What Does “Taking History Seriously” Mean? Double critique due**


• Theda Skocpol and Margaret Sommers, “The Uses of Comparative History in Macrosocial Inquiry,” in *Social Revolutions in the Modern World* (Cambridge, 1994), 72-98

**Additional**


• Andreas Schedler, “Mapping Contingency,” in Ian Shapiro and Sonu Bedi, eds., *Political Contingency: Studying the Unexpected, the Accidental, and the Unforeseen* (NYU, 2007), 54-78

• Andrew Bennett and Colin Elman, “Complex Causal Relations and Case Study Methods: The Example of Path Dependence,” *Political Analysis* 14(3), 2006: 250-267


• James Mahoney, “Path-Dependent Explanations of Regime Change: Central America in Comparative Perspective.” *Studies in Comparative International Development* 36(1), 2001: 111-141


**Week 6 (February 12): Ethnography**
• Edward Schatz, ed., *Political Ethnography: What Immersion Contributes to the Study of Power* (Chicago, 2009), introduction and conclusion

*Additional*
• Michael Burawoy, “Teaching Participant Observation,” in Michael Burawoy, editor, *Ethnography Unbound* (California, 1991), 291-300
• Robert Emerson, Rachel Fretz and Linda Shaw. “Processing Fieldnotes: Coding and Memoing,” in their *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes* (Chicago, 1995), 142-168

**February 20: NO CLASS MEETING**

**Week 7 (February 26): Interviewing I**
• Lee Ann Fujii, *Interviewing in Social Science Research: A Relational Approach* (Routledge, 2017) [available electronically]

*Additional*
• Robert Dingwall, “Accounts, Interviews and Observation,” in Gale Miller and Robert Dingwall, eds., *Context and Method in Qualitative Research* (Sage, 1997), 51-64
• James P. Spradley, *The Ethnographic Interview* (Wadsworth, 1997)
• Herbert Rubin and Irene Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data* (Sage, 2005)

**Week 8 (March 4): Interviewing II**
• Layna Mosley, ed. *Interview Research in Political Science* (Cornell, 2013) [available electronically]

*Additional*
• Irvine, Annie, Paul Drew, and Roy Sainsbury. "'Am I not answering your questions properly? 'Clarification, adequacy and responsiveness in semi-structured telephone and face-to-face interviews." *Qualitative Research* 13, no. 1 (2013): 87-106.

**Week 9 (March 11): Narrative Approaches**
• Shaul R. Shenhav, *Analyzing Social Narratives* (Routledge, 2015) [available electronically]

*Additional*
• David Howarth, Aletta Norval, Yannis Stavrakakis, eds., *Discourse Theory and Political Analysis* (Manchester, 2000), introduction
• Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development* (Princeton, 1994), chapters 1 and 2
• Jutta Weldes, *Constructing National Interests: The United States and the Cuban Missile Crisis* (Minnesota, 1999)
• Donald N. McCloskey, “Metaphors Economists Live By,” *Social Research* 62(2), 1995
• Kathy Ferguson and Phyllis Turnbull, *Oh, Say, Can You See? The Semiotics of the Military in Hawai`i* (University of Minnesota, 1999)
• Peter K. Manning, *Semiotics and Fieldwork* (Sage, 1987)
• Peter K. Manning, *Semiotics and Fieldwork* (Sage, 1987)
• George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, “Metaphors we live by,” available at [https://www.cc.gatech.edu/classes/AY2013/cs7601_spring/papers/Lakoff_Johnson.pdf](https://www.cc.gatech.edu/classes/AY2013/cs7601_spring/papers/Lakoff_Johnson.pdf)

**Week 10 (March 18): Presentations, part 1**

**Week 11 (March 25): NO CLASS MEETING**

**Week 12 (April 1): Presentations, part 2**