

RESEARCH DESIGN
Political Science 750
University of Massachusetts, Amherst
Spring 2006

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Seminar time: Thursdays, 2-4
Office hours: Mondays, 2-5 (and by appointment)

This seminar introduces graduate students to basic issues in research methods for the social sciences. The goal is to provide a solid grounding in the logic of research methodology, not to achieve proficiency in any one method. General topics include philosophy of science; concept formation; case studies; comparative methods; interview techniques; questionnaire design; measurement issues (e.g., scaling, coding, reliability, and validity); causal inference (e.g., path dependence, process tracing, hypothesis testing, quasi-experiments, selection bias, and replication); content and discourse analysis; and fieldwork (e.g., observation, participant-observation, and archival research). As an introductory and non-mathematical course, students need not have any prior background in research methods. The course is, nevertheless, rigorous. By the end of the semester, you should be able to (1) recognize the types of methods appropriate for addressing particular research questions; (2) design your own research project in a dissertation prospectus or grant proposal; and (3) identify methodological strengths and weaknesses in published research in your field.

The seminar is designed to serve several audiences, including students who desire an introduction to methodological rigor, and those who want to learn about the great variety of methodologies available for addressing research problems. In practical terms, the seminar helps students write a prospectus, raise grant money, and complete a dissertation; and it satisfies one-half of the methods requirement for the graduate program (the other half must be fulfilled by completing an additional course in quantitative or qualitative methods). Given this broad approach, the seminar will not probe any single methodology in depth, but will instead guide students towards more advanced courses appropriate to their specific needs and interests. For those who seek only to dabble in research methods, or who seek a better understanding of published research in their field, the course offers a one-stop source for materials social scientists should know. We will begin with the assumption that real-world phenomena can be adequately – though not perfectly – described, measured and compared, and that we can draw reliable and valid inferences from these descriptions and measurements. For some, this is a strong (if not untenable) assumption. The readings will include some discussion of the relationship between ontology and epistemology, but we will not cover the philosophy of science in great depth. Instead, we will start with the assumption that social science is a productive enterprise, and quickly turn to a semester-long discussion of the relative validity and reliability of specific types of methods for addressing particular research problems.

Required Books

The following required books can be purchased at the Textbook Annex or on-line.

Brady, Henry E., and David Collier. 2004. *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards*. Rowman and Littlefield.

Geddes, Barbara. 2003. *Paradigms and Sand Castles: Theory Building and Research Design in Comparative Politics*. University of Michigan Press.

George, Alexander L., and Andrew Bennett. 2005. *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*. MIT Press.

Gerring, John. 2001. *Social Science Methodology: A Criterial Framework*. Cambridge University Press.

Neuman, W. Lawrence. 2006. *Social Research Methods: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*, 6th Edition. Allyn and Bacon. (You may use the 4th or 5th editions, if you want to save money; but they differ from the 6th edition.)

Putnam, Robert D. 1993. *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*. Princeton University Press.

Other Required Readings

Other readings in the syllabus will be handed out in class or placed on e-reserve.

Grade Distribution

Participation: 40%

Short essays: 30%

Grant proposal or dissertation prospectus: 30%

Grading Policy

Seminar time will be devoted to discussing the assigned readings. Lectures will be brief and rare. Therefore, weekly participation will be crucial for the seminar to be effective. To receive an "A" on the participation portion (40%) of your grade, you must attend class each week and demonstrate through discussion that you have carefully considered the assigned readings. Weekly readings will include descriptions and justifications of specific methods, along with examples of their application. Class discussion will focus on how each method can and should be used to address particular research questions, and whether scholars have applied the methods appropriately in published research.

The remaining portion (60%) of your grade is based on your development of a research project, and is divided into two components. The first component includes several short

essays (30% of your grade), in which you will apply the assigned readings by designing your own research project, step-by-step, throughout the semester. (See the essay topics below.) The second component, which will build on your essays, is a grant proposal or dissertation prospectus (30% of your grade). Grant proposals must be submitted on the actual forms required by a private foundation, public agency, or other granting organization, and in the format they specify. You may submit your prospectus in lieu of a grant proposal, provided that your prospectus clearly specifies (1) your research design, (2) potential funding sources, and (3) a detailed budget and timeline. You should submit a draft of the proposal or prospectus to your dissertation committee (or likely committee members) for their feedback before you submit the final version at the end of the semester. If you have difficulties preparing the proposal or prospectus, you should review Howard Becker, *Writing for Social Scientists*; and Locke, Spirduso, and Silverman, *Proposals That Work*.

Auditing

I recognize three types of auditors: (1) *passive auditors* (those who come to class, but do not keep up with the assigned readings, participate in discussion, or write the assignments); (2) *discussion auditors* (those who keep up with the readings and actively participate in discussions, but do not write the assignments); and (3) *active auditors* (those who write the assignments and participate in class discussions). I discourage passive auditors from attending because they usually gain little (since lectures are rare), and because they usually weaken class discussions. Discussion auditors and active auditors are both welcome because they gain much from and contribute much to class discussions. Yet only active auditors who complete all the assignments can receive “Audit” on their transcripts at the end of the semester.

Essay assignments

You must submit all essay assignments described below. Your essays should be 3-5 pages long, double-spaced. Due dates are noted on the weekly calendar at the end of the syllabus. Late essays will receive a 1/3-grade penalty for each week they are late. In grading these assignments, I will evaluate your use of the assigned readings on Research Design, not your knowledge of the fields in which you are specializing. So keep your literature reviews short, and devote most of your essays to analyzing topics in your field in light of the assigned readings.

Essay 1 – Concept Formation

Briefly describe your primary area of research interest and specify a research question that interests you. Choose one major concept in the question, and provide two definitions of that concept from the relevant literature in your field. Then use the assigned readings on concept formation to analyze how these authors have defined this concept, and identify the strengths and weaknesses of their concept formation. The latter is the heart of the assignment, so use the assigned readings carefully, not casually.

Essay 2 – Measurement

Specify and discuss two alternative ways to measure a concept of interest to you. The first paragraph should either restate the research question and concept you introduced in Essay #1 or briefly introduce a different research question and concept. You may develop your own measures or rely on previously published measures. Think carefully about measurement issues, such as scaling, coding, reliability and validity. Be sure to identify threats to reliability and validity, and to carefully define the different types of reliability and validity you discuss. Most importantly, make sure you understand the distinction between a “measure” and the “systematized concept” for which it serves as an indicator (per Adcock and Collier).

Essay 3 – Case Selection

Describe two alternative sampling strategies for selecting one or more cases for which you would conduct case studies. Discuss the relative merits of these sampling strategies within the context of your research question and theoretical approach, and in light of the assigned readings on single case studies and comparative case studies. The first paragraph of your essay should either restate the research question and concept you introduced in Essay #1 or #2, or briefly introduce a different research question. Be sure to specify what you mean by a “case study,” and identify the population from which your case(s) will be selected.

Essay 4 – Asking Questions in the Field

Identify a population of individuals you would like to interview in the field; justify your selection of this population and your sampling technique; and design a questionnaire, in which you specify the interview format and list 5-10 questions you would like to ask these individuals. If the targeted individuals differ in theoretically interesting ways, then you should stratify the sample and select questions appropriate for each sub-sample. Your first paragraph should restate the research question, theory, and concepts you introduced in one of the preceding essays. You may also want to briefly discuss concept formation, case selection, or measurement if they affect the design of your questionnaire or interview format.

Weekly Topics and Readings

The assigned readings for each week typically below typically begin with an overview piece (often a chapter from Neuman), followed by different methodological approaches to each topic, and concluding with one an example of how these methods have been used in practice. Therefore, it’s probably best to follow the suggested order of the readings. If you fall behind during some weeks, you should strive to familiarize yourself with each of the readings, rather than read a smaller number of them in great depth.

- Week 1
(Feb 2)
- Introduction: Recipes, Cookbooks, and Epistemologies
- Neuman, Chs. 1-3
 Gerring, “Preface” and Chs. 1-2
 Graduate Student Grant Service, <http://www.umass.edu/gradschool/gsgs/>
 Consortium on Qual. Research Methods, www.asu.edu/clas/polisci/cqrm/
- Guest speaker: Graduate Student Grant Service representative
- Week 2
(Feb 9)
- Philosophy of (Social) Science
- Neuman, Ch. 4
 Hill, “Myths About the Physical Sciences...”
 Almond, “Clouds, Clocks, and the Study of Politics”
 Taylor, “Interpretation and the Sciences of Man”
 Symposium, “Two Paths to a Science of Politics”
 Geddes, Ch. 1 (and skim Ch. 5)
 George and Bennett, Ch. 7
 Rosenau, *Post-Modernism and the Social Sciences*, Ch. 1
- Week 3
(Feb 16)
- Concept Formation
- Weber, “Ideal Types and Theory Construction”
 Collier and Mahon, “Conceptual Stretching”
 Gerring, Chs. 3-4
 Wedeen, “Concepts and Commitments in the Study of Democracy”
 Owen, “The Task of Liberal Theory after September 11”
- Week 4
(Feb 23)
- Literature Reviews, Research Questions, Advisors, and Ethics
- Mantel, “Otto I.Q. Besser-Wisser”
 Becker, “Terrorized by the Literature”
 Symposium, “Advisors and the Dissertation Proposal”
 Neuman, Ch. 5
 Gerring, Chs. 5-7
 Geddes, Ch. 2
 Putnam, Ch. 1
- Due: Essay #1 on Concept Formation (2 copies)
- Week 5
(Mar 2)
- Measurement: Indicators, Reliability, Validity, and Replication
- Neuman, Ch. 7, and pp. 331-339
 Jacob, *Using Published Data: Errors and Remedies*.
 Adcock and Collier, “Measurement Validity: A Shared Standard...”

Putnam, Chs. 2-3
Symposium, "Verification/Replication"

Week 6
(Mar 9)

Causal Inference (I): Case Studies

Gerring, "What is a Case Study and What is it Good for?"
Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture"
George and Bennett, Chs. 1-6
Lijphart, "The Puzzle of Indian Democracy"

Due: Essay #2 on Measurement (2 copies)

Week 7
(Mar 16)

Causal Inference (II): Comparative Methods

Collier, "The Comparative Method"
Gerring, Chs. 8-10 and "Postscript"
Geddes, Chs. 3-4
George and Bennett, Chs. 8-9 (and skim the appendix)
Mahoney and Goertz, "The Possibility Principle"

Guest speaker: Kemi George, on selecting cases for his dissertation

SPRING BREAK

Week 8
(Mar 30)

Causal Inference (III): Experiments and Quasi-Experiments

Neuman, Ch. 9
Reinharz, "Feminist Experimental Research"
Green and Gerber, "Reclaiming the Experimental Tradition..."
Shadish, Cook, and Campbell, *Experimental... Designs*, Chs. 1,2,3,6
Wood, "Principals, Bureaucrats, and Responsiveness..."

Due: Essay #3 on Case Selection (2 copies)

Week 9
(Apr 6)

Causal Inference (IV): History, Process Tracing, and Path Dependence

Fisher, "Fallacies of Causation"
Lustick, "History, Historiography, and Political Science"
George and Bennett, Ch. 10
David, "Clio and the Economics of QWERTY"
Liebowitz and Margolis, "Policy and Path Dependence"
Pierson, "Increasing Returns, Path Dependence, and the Study of Politics"

Week 10
(Apr 13)

Causal Inference (V): Comparative Historical Analysis & Counterfactuals

Neuman, Ch. 14

Skocpol and Somers, "The Uses of Comparative History ..."
Mahoney, "Nominal, Ordinal, and Narrative Appraisal ..."
Fearon, "Counterfactuals and Hypothesis Testing in Political Science"
Sekhon, "Quality Meets Quality: Case Studies ... and Counterfactuals"
Putnam, *Making Democracy Work*, Chs. 4-6

Due: Calls for proposals from granting organizations, with explanatory cover memo

Week 11 Causal Inference (VI): The Qualitative/Quantitative Dispute
(Apr 20)

Brady & Collier, Chs. 1-13
Geddes, Ch. 6
Neuman, Ch. 6
Thomas, "The Qualitative Foundations of Political Science Methodology"

Week 12 Field Work (I): Sampling, Conducting, and Analyzing Interviews
(Apr 27)

Neuman, Chs. 8, 10
Biernacki and Waldorf, "Snowball Sampling"
Dexter, *Elite and Specialized Interviewing*, Ch. 1
Reinharz, "Feminist Interview Research"
Symposium, "Interview Methods in Political Science"
Orr, "New Technology and Research: ... Internet Survey Methodology"
Putnam, Appendix A
Belenky, et al., *Women's Ways of Knowing*, Introduction and Appendix A

Week 13 Field Work (II): Observational Research
(May 4)

Neuman, Ch. 13
Bayard de Volo and Schatz, "From the Inside Out"
Reinharz, "Feminist Ethnography"
Siplon, "Scholar, Witness, or Activist?"
Geertz, "The Balinese Cockfight"
Fenno, *Home Style*, Introduction and Appendix

Due: Essay #4 on Asking Questions in the Field (2 copies)

Week 14 Content and Discourse Analysis
(May 11)

Neuman, Ch. 11 (and skim Ch. 15)
Reinharz, "Feminist Content Analysis"
Symposium, "Discourse and Content Analysis"
Woodrun, "Mainstreaming Content Analysis in Social Science"
Schwartz-Shea and Yanow, "Reading Methods Texts..."

May 15 Due: Grant proposal or dissertation prospectus

