

American University
School of Public Affairs
Department of Government

Ph.D. Seminar: Qualitative Research Methods

Professor: Joe Soss
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Office Hours: Tues. 9-11am, 5-6pm,
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Tuesday, 2:10-4:50pm

Overview

This seminar explores a variety of research strategies available to students of politics, concentrating on those that make use of empirical evidence but do not require quantification of data. The seminar is built around three general goals. First, you should leave this course with a working knowledge of standard approaches to qualitative research design, data collection, and analysis. By comparing different qualitative approaches to one another, as well as to relevant quantitative methods, we will try to identify the particular combination of possibilities and problems that each method offers for specific types of research projects. Second, this seminar provides an opportunity to discuss a number of general issues related to the meaning, logic, and conduct of social science inquiry. Particularly in the early part of the course, we will take up general questions associated with epistemology, rhetoric, standpoint, interpretation, ethics, politics, conceptualization, theory development, validity, inference, and so on. My own view is that these topics should concern researchers regardless of their choices among methods. Third, this course includes a significant “how to” component focusing on questions of technique. No discussion or practice exercise can fully prepare a student for the experience of field research. But over the course of the semester, students should become familiar with the basic skills and techniques researchers use to gather and make sense of qualitative data. My hope is that we will all learn something about how to use (and not abuse) particular research strategies.

Class Meetings

The course will be structured as a seminar. I will bring some prepared remarks to each meeting, but we will devote most of our class time to discussion. For this format to work, you will need to read with a critical eye and come prepared to talk about how the readings relate to your substantive interests. Also, I invite you to think broadly about suitable topics for discussion. At root, this course is about what social scientists do and why one might or might not want to make some of these practices a part of one’s life. Any issue related to this topic strikes me as fair game. Finally, I want to stress at the outset that each of us knows a different subfield of research, and each of us is at a different point in the process of learning about methodology. For a seminar of this sort to work, people need to feel comfortable asking simple questions and occasionally saying, “I don’t get it.” Please do what you can to make this possible.

Seminar Leadership

Each seminar meeting will begin with a brief student presentation on the week’s assigned readings. Working in a group of two or three, students will take the first 20 minutes to identify and critique key elements of the readings. Seminar leaders should work together on their presentation and put some thought into the best ways to lay the groundwork for a productive seminar discussion. Following the

presentation, we will take 30 minutes for students to add to, respond to, and build on the seminar leaders' comments. I will offer clarifications and help facilitate this discussion. But my goal for the first hour of class is to focus on the issues that *students* have reacted to most strongly. After this hour, I will assume more control over our agenda, pursuing some combination of lecture and guided discussion on topics we have not covered completely in the first half of class. Each student will be responsible for seminar leadership twice during the semester.

Written Work

Students in this seminar (including those who are auditing) are responsible for two writing assignments.

The “Apples and Oranges” Essay: Write a brief critical essay (6-8 pages) comparing two published studies that share a common research question but employ different types of qualitative data. (For example, you might compare a study of bureaucratic discretion based on agency documents to a study of bureaucratic discretion based on in-depth interviews.) Please note that the studies you choose for this assignment cannot be taken from the assigned readings for the seminar. Also, bear in mind that the purpose of your essay is not to summarize the published studies. Your essay should offer a critical evaluation of how well the researchers have *chosen*, *executed*, and *presented* their methods of data collection and analysis. Please note that this paper functions as a kind of “midterm” for this class. The goal of the assignment is to write a comparative analysis that offers general insights into the researchers' methods *and demonstrates a critical understanding of relevant course materials from weeks 1 through 9*. The paper will be due on **Friday, November 1, by 3:00pm**. It should be 6-8 pages in length and will count for 25 percent of your final grade. Late papers will be penalized one-third of a letter grade for each day after the due date.

The “Make Your Own Project” Project: This is a more substantial assignment that will require steady work throughout the semester. You may choose one of two options.

Plan A: The Research Design. Propose a thorough design for a do-able, dissertation-size research project that addresses an important question in your field of interest. During week 4 (Sept. 16-20), we will have a one-on-one meeting to discuss your preliminary research question. You will need to bring a printed copy of the research question to my office hours. During week 8 (Oct. 21-25), we will meet to discuss your progress in reviewing relevant literature. You should bring a bibliography that identifies (separately) relevant works you have read and plan to read. Your full research design (15-20 pages) will be due on **Monday, December 9**. It should include a clear statement of your research question and its significance, a focused review of relevant literature, a detailed description of your research strategy, a discussion of feasibility and ethics, and estimates of the project's timetable and funding needs.

Plan B: The Practicum: For a research question of your own choosing, collect and analyze four relevant qualitative observations. Your observations must include *at least* two different types of data, and at least one of your observations must be based on an in-depth interview or focus group. During week 4 (Sept. 16-20), *prior* to any observations, we will have a one-on-one meeting to discuss your preliminary research question. You will need to bring a printed copy of the research question to my office hours *and* a preliminary draft of your consent letter (see Sieber, pp.34-37). During week 8 (Oct. 21-25) or earlier, we will need to meet to review your interview or focus-group protocol (see Rubin and Rubin). You should give me a copy of your protocol several days in advance of our meeting so that I can prepare comments. The final report on your practicum will be due on **Monday, December 9**. It should include (a) a statement of your research question and its significance, (b) a substantive analysis of what you've found, (c) a comparative evaluation of your methods, and (d) a critical evaluation of your own attempts to employ them. In an

appendix, you should provide your consent letter, your interview or focus-group protocol, and any transcripts, fieldnotes, or document summary sheets used in your analysis.

Grades

Seminar Leadership	Counted toward participation
Drafts and Scheduled Meetings	Counted toward participation
Seminar Participation	20%
“Apples and Oranges” Essay	30%
“Make Your Own Project” Project	50%

Readings

My apologies in advance: this course has a heavy reading load. Many of the readings are available in a file box that I’ve placed in the grad student room. The books for this class are available for purchase at the AU campus bookstore.

The following books have been ordered as required:

- Robert Emerson, Rachel Fretz and Linda Shaw. 1995. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba. 1994. *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Ann Chih Lin. 2000. *Reform in the Making: The Implementation of Social Policy in Prison*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Charles Ragin. 2000. *Fuzzy Set Social Science*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Herbert J. Rubin and Irene S. Rubin. 1995. *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Joan E. Sieber. 1992. *Planning Ethically Responsible Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Stephen Van Evera. 1997. *Guide to Methodology for Students of Political Science*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

The following books have been ordered as recommended. With one exception (McAdam 1988), relevant material from these books has been included in course file box.

- A.M. Huberman and M.B. Miles, eds. 2002. *The Qualitative Researcher's Companion*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Jerome Kirk and Marc Miller. 1986. *Reliability and Validity in Qualitative Research*. Newbury Park: Sage Publications.
- John Lofland and Lyn Lofland. 1995. *Analyzing Social Settings*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Doug McAdam. 1988. *Freedom Summer*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin. 1998. *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Robert K. Yin. 1994. *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. Newbury Park: Sage Publications. 2nd ed.

I. Commonality and Difference in Empirical Research

Week 1: Aug. 27

Goals and Approaches in Social Science Research: Commonality and Difference

Scientific Struggles: Purpose, Politics, and Perestroika

Gregory J. Kasza. 2001. "Perestroika: For an Ecumenical Science of Politics." *PS: Political Science & Politics*. 34(3): 597-99.

Stephen Earl Bennett. 2002 "'Perestroika' Lost: Why the Latest 'Reform' Movement in Political Science Should Fail." *PS: Political Science & Politics*. 35(2): 177-79.

Sanford F. Schram. 2003. "Return to Politics." *Political Theory*. Forthcoming.

Are "Qualitative" Methods Qualitatively Different?

Karen McElrath. 2001. "Confessions of a Quantitative Criminologist." *ACJS Today*. 24(4): 1-7.

Martyn Hammersley. 1992. "Deconstructing the Qualitative-Quantitative Divide." *What's Wrong with Ethnography?* New York: Routledge. pp.159-73.

Studies that Make a "Scholarly Contribution": More than 31 Flavors

Rudra Sil. 2000. "The Division of Labor in Social Science Research: Unified Methodology or 'Organic Solidarity'?" *Polity*. 32(4): 499-531.

Stephen Van Evera. 1997. "What Is a Political Science Dissertation?" *Guide to Methodology for Students of Political Science*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. pp.89-95.

Week 2: Sept. 3

Positive, Interpretive, and Critical Social Science

Positivist

Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba. 1994. *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. pp. 3-49.

Peter Gourevitch. 1986. "The Politics of Economic Policy." *Politics in Hard Times: Comparative Responses to International Economic Crises*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. pp.17-34.

Interpretivist

Clifford Geertz. 1973. "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture." *The Interpretation of Cultures*. New York: basic Books. pp.3-32.

Richard F. Fenno, Jr. 1978. *Home Style: House Members in Their Districts*. Boston, MA: Little, Brown, and Co. pp.1-30.

Critical

Craig Calhoun. 1995. "Rethinking Critical Theory." *Critical Social Theory*. Cambridge, MA: Blackwell. pp.1-42.

Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward. 1993. "Introduction" and "Relief, Labor, and Civil Disorder: An Overview." *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare*. New York, NY: Vintage Books. pp.xv-xix, 3-42.

Week 3: Sept. 10

Empirical Linkages: Causal and Relational

Alternative Views of Causation

Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba. 1994. "Causality and Causal Inference," *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. pp.75-114

Charles Ragin. 2000. "Causal Complexity." *Fuzzy Set Social Science*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. pp.88-119.

Interpretive Research and Causal Accounts

Ann Chih Lin. 1998. "Bridging Positivist and Interpretivist Approaches to Qualitative Methods." *Policy Studies Journal* 26(1): 162-80.

Joe Soss. 2003. "Making Clients and Citizens: Welfare Policy as a Source of Status, Belief, and Action." In A. Schneider and H. Ingram, eds. *Deserving and Entitled: Social Constructions and Public Policy*. Forthcoming.

Beyond Cause: Relational Social Science

Mustafa Emirbayer. 1997. "Manifesto for a Relational Sociology." *American Journal of Sociology*. 103(2): 281-317.

Clifford Geertz. 1972. "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight." *Daedalus*. 101(1)
Reprinted in Paul Rabinow and William Sullivan, eds. 1979. *Interpretive Social Science: A Reader*. Berkeley: University of California Press. pp.181-223.

Week 4: Sept. 17

Evaluative Criteria for Qualitative Research

Positive and Interpretive Criteria

Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba. 1994. *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. pp. 150-207.

Joseph A. Maxwell. 2002. "Understanding and Validity in Qualitative Research." In A.M. Huberman and M.B. Miles, eds. *The Qualitative Researcher's Companion*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. pp.37-64.

David L. Altheide and John M. Johnson. 1994. "Criteria for Assessing Interpretive Validity in Qualitative Research." *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, edited by Denzin and Lincoln. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. pp.485-99.

Applications: Positive, Interpretive, and Critical

Herbert M. Kritzer. 1994. "Interpretation and Validity Assessment in Qualitative Research: The Case of H.W. Perry's Deciding to Decide." *Law and Social Inquiry* 19(Summer): 687-724.

Loïc Wacquant. 2003. "Scrutinizing the Street: Poverty, Morality, and the Pitfalls of Urban Ethnography." *American Journal of Sociology*. Forthcoming.

II. Field Research: Gathering, Evaluating, and Learning from Qualitative Data

Week 5: Sept. 24

Into the Field: Ethics, Identities, Goals, and Experiences

Nuts and Bolts of the Field

John Lofland and Lyn Lofland. 1995. "Getting Along," *Analyzing Social Settings*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth. pp.46-65.

Experiences of Entering and Negotiating the Field

Dorinne K. Kondo. 1990. "The Eye/I." *Crafting Selves: Power, Gender, and Discourses of Identity in a Japanese Workplace*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. pp.3-48.

John Van Maanen. 1982. "Fieldwork on the Beat: This Being an Account of the Manners and Customs of an Ethnographer in an American Police Department." *Varieties of Qualitative Research*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications. pp.103-51.

A Grounded Theory Approach to the Field

Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin. 1998. "Introduction," "Description, Conceptual Ordering, and Theorizing," "Basic Operations," and "Theoretical Sampling." *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*. 2nd ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. pp.3-25, 73-85, 201-15.

Ethics, IRBs, and Research Protocols

Joan E. Sieber. 1992. *Planning Ethically Responsible Research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. pp.3-74, 142-51.

Week 6: Oct. 1

Participant Observation

Participating, Observing, and Extending

Danny L. Jorgensen. 1989. "The Methodology of Participant Observation." *Participant Observation*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications. pp.12-25.

Michael Burawoy. 1998. "Critical Sociology: A Dialogue Between Two Sciences." *Contemporary Sociology*. 27(1): 12-20.

Nuts and Bolts of Fieldnotes

Robert Emerson, Rachel Fretz and Linda Shaw. 1995. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. pp.1-38, 108-41.

Contrasting Examples

Manuel de la Puente. 1994. *Using Ethnography to Explain Why People are Missed or Erroneously Included by the Census: Evidence from Small Area Ethnographic Studies*. Washington, DC: U.S. Census Bureau.

Janet Gilboy. 1992. "Penetrability of Administrative Systems: Political 'Casework' and Immigration Inspections." *Law & Society Review*. 26: 273-314.

Lynne Haney. 1996. "Homeboys, Babies, Men in Suits: The State and the Reproduction of Male Dominance." *American Sociological Review*. 61(Oct): 759-78.

Fall Break: Oct. 7-8

Week 7: Oct. 15

Interviews & Focus Groups

Methodological Comparisons and Some Nuts and Bolts

Herbert J. Rubin and Irene S. Rubin. 1995. *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. pp.1-16, 42-64, 145-225.

David Morgan. 1997. *Focus Groups as Qualitative Research*. Newbury Park: Sage Publications. 2nd ed. pp.7-30.

Interviews and Focus Groups for Alternative Purposes

Dennis Chong. 1993. "How People Think, Reason, and Feel about Rights and Liberties." *American Journal of Political Science* 37(3): 867-99.

William Gamson. 1992. *Talking Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. pp.1-58.

Doug McAdam. 1988. *Freedom Summer*. New York: Oxford University Press. pp.3-10, 66-198, 233-40.

Week 8: Oct. 22

Documents and Other Social Artifacts

Archival Research as a Field Experience

Sandra Van Bukleo. 1984. "My Own 'Desperate Deeds and Desperate Motives': How the Project Evolved." in P. Shively, ed. *The Research Process in Political Science*. Itsaca, IL: F.E. Peacock. pp. 206-221.

Documentary Difficulties

David Pitt. 1975. "The Critical Analysis of Documentary Evidence." in G. Lewis, ed. *Fist-Fights in the Kitchen: Manners and Methods in Social Research*. pp. 319-331.

Ian S. Lustick. 1996. "History, Historiography, and Political Science: Multiple Historical Records and the Problem of Selection Bias." *American Political Science Review*. 90(3): 605-18.

Documentary Diversities

Linda Gordon. 1988. *Heroes of Their Own Lives: The Politics and History of Family Violence*. New York, NY: Penguin Books. pp.250-306.

Barry Schwartz. 1987. *George Washington: The Making of an American Symbol*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. pp.1-39 and illustrations.

Week 9: Oct. 29

Challenges and Strategies for Qualitative Data Analysis

D. Royce Sadler. 2002. "Intuitive Data Processing as a Potential Source of Bias in Naturalistic Evaluations." In A.M. Huberman and M.B. Miles, eds. *The Qualitative Researcher's Companion*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. pp.123-135.

Howard S. Becker. 1998. *Tricks of the Trade: How to Think About Your Research While You're Doing It* Chicago: University of Chicago Press. pp.146-64.

Matthew Miles and Michael Huberman. 1983. *Qualitative Data Analysis: A Sourcebook of New Methods*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications. pp. 215-243.

Norman K. Denzin. 2002. "The Interpretive Process." In A.M. Huberman and M.B. Miles, eds. *The Qualitative Researcher's Companion*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. pp.349-66.

Robert Emerson, Rachel Fretz and Linda Shaw. 1995. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. pp.142-68.

Joanne Martin. 1990. "Deconstructing Organizational Taboos: The Suppression of Gender Conflict in Organizations." *Organization Science*. 1(4): 339-59.

III. Approaches to Design in Qualitative Research

Week 10: Nov. 5

Case Study Research

Single Cases from a Statistical Standpoint

Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba. 1994. *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. pp. 208-30.

Timothy McKeown. 1999. "Case Studies and the Statistical Worldview." *International Organization*. 53(1): 161-90.

Introduction to Case Study Methods

Kathleen M. Eisenhardt. 2002. "Building Theories from Case Study Research." In A.M. Huberman and M.B. Miles, eds. *The Qualitative Researcher's Companion*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. pp.5-35.

Stephen Van Evera. 1997. "What are Case Studies? How Should They be Performed?" *Guide to Methodology for Students of Political Science*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. pp.49-88.

A Case of What? And When is a Case Not Just a Case?

Herbert Kaufman. 1960. *The Forest Ranger: A Study in Administrative Behavior*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. pp.3-22.

Kai T. Erikson. 1976. *Everything In Its Path: Destruction of Community in the Buffalo Creek Flood*. pp.9-48, 246-59.

Week 11: Nov. 12

Comparative Case Studies

Alternative Positivist Approaches to Comparing Cases

Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba. 1994. *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. pp.115-149.

Charles Ragin. 2000. *Fuzzy Set Social Science*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. pp.21-87, 120-45.

Interpretive Comparisons

Ann Chih Lin. 2000. *Reform in the Making: The Implementation of Social Policy in Prison*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Week 12: Nov. 19

Historical Analysis

What Use is History?

Marc Bloch. 1953. *The Historian's Craft*. New York: Vintage Books. pp.3-47.

Victoria Hattam. 2000. "History, Agency, and Political Change." *Polity*. 32(3): 333-38.

Challenges and Promises of Historical Explanation

Craig Calhoun. 1998. "Explanation in Historical Sociology: Narrative, General Theory, and Historically Specific Theory." *American Journal of Sociology*. 104(3): 846-71.

Paul Pierson. 2000. "Not Just What, but When: Timing and Sequence in Political Processes." *Studies in American Political Development* 14 (Spring): 72-92.

Discourse, Action, and Institutions in Historical Analysis

Stephen Ellingson. 1995. "Understanding the Dialectic of Discourse and Collective Action: Public Debate and Rioting in Antebellum Cincinnati." *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 101(1): 100-144.

Suzanne Mettler. 1998. *Dividing Citizens: Gender and Federalism in New Deal Public Policy*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. pp.xi-xii, 211-31.

Week 13: Nov. 26

Comparative History

Macrocausal Analysis in Perspective

Theda Skocpol and Margaret Somers. 1994. "The Uses of Comparative History in Macrosocial Inquiry." *Social Revolutions in the Modern World*. New York: Cambridge University Press. pp.72-95.

James Mahoney. 2000. "Strategies of Causal Inference in Small-N Analysis." *Sociological Methods & Research*. 28(4): 387-424.

Alternative Approaches

Jeffrey Herbst. 2000. *States and Power in Africa: Comparative Lessons in Authority and Control*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. pp.3-31.

Nicola Beisel. 1990. "Class Culture and Campaigns Against Vice in Three American Cities, 1872-1892." *American Sociological Review* 55: 44-62.

Robert C. Lieberman. 2003. "Race and the Limits of Solidarity: American Welfare State Development in Comparative Perspective." In S. Schram, J. Soss, and R. Fording, eds. *Race and the Politics of Welfare Reform*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press. Forthcoming.

IV. Writing and Practicing Research

Week 14: Dec. 3

Social Science in the Dissertation and Beyond: Writing, Doing, Being

Stephen Van Evera. 1997. "Helpful Hints on Writing a Dissertation" and "The Dissertation Proposal." *Guide to Methodology for Students of Political Science*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press. pp.96-116.

Howard S. Becker. 1998. *Tricks of the Trade: How to Think About Your Research While You're Doing It* Chicago: University of Chicago Press. pp.215-19.

C. Wright Mills. 1959. "On Intellectual Craftsmanship." *The Sociological Imagination*. New York: Oxford University Press. pp.195-226.

Herbert J. Rubin and Irene S. Rubin. 1995. *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications. pp.257-74.

Robert Emerson, Rachel Fretz and Linda Shaw. 1995. *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press. pp.169-210.