Politics 506
Qualitative Methods
Department of Politics, Princeton University
Spring Term 2012

Wednesdays 1:30-4:20pm
Corwin 127 (*with some exceptions)
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Overview:
The central goal of this seminar is to provide graduate students with a set of analytic tools for carrying out empirical research in political science. As a complement to other methods courses, particularly in statistical or quantitative methods, in this seminar, we will focus on a set of techniques that -- for lack of a better name -- are generally called “qualitative” methods. The issues we raise, including concept formation and measurement, should apply to any mode of empirical analysis, but rather than mapping observations to numbers, or drawing inferences through statistical summaries, we will use narrative modes of summary and logical analysis.

We will identify the types of theoretical and empirical concerns that are typically associated with in-depth analysis of a small number of cases, and the challenges of carrying out systematic research. Subsequently, we will consider the strengths and weaknesses of a variety of approaches and techniques including case selection, process tracing, structured comparison, periodization, analytic narrative, and the integration of qualitative and statistical methods in research design. The seminar will also include discussion of the mechanics of qualitative research, including field methods, in-depth interviewing, and archival research. While the readings tend to be drawn from the sub-field of comparative politics, we will discuss applications to a variety of sub-fields, particularly in response to specific student interests.

Our goal should be to develop the skills for completing high quality, self-conscious, analysis using non-statistical forms of analysis. As such, the written assignments are geared towards practical exercises rather than literature reviews or major research papers. Although I discourage this option, you may replace the exercises with a long paper, but you will need to write this in stages in coordination with the assignments for the course – you must see me immediately if you want to pursue this option.

Each week we will read the methodological literature and a set of examples. Please come to seminar prepared to discuss the examples in light of the methodological issues under consideration.

Prerequisites:
Although there are no formal pre-requisites for the course, you should complete the field seminar in your primary field (comparative politics, international relations, or American politics) prior to enrolling. Moreover, some background in statistics would be helpful and/or some inclination of substantive research questions that you would like to consider. For students without a background in basic regression analysis, or for those who want to brush up on the basic strategies, you might look at


Policy on auditors: No auditors will be allowed in this seminar. Sorry. No exceptions.

Books for purchase: (available at Labyrinth)


Books strongly suggested for purchase:


Course requirements:
1. Problem sets/ written exercises: There will be five short papers/exercises – each should be emailed to me on the dates specified by 5pm. Late papers will be docked one-third grade for every three days they are late.

Due Dates:
Assignment #1: Feb 27
Assignment #2: March 12
Assignment #3: March 26
Assignment #4: April 30
Assignment #5: Dean’s date – May 15
2. Weekly notes – approximately 1-2pp on each of the assigned readings. These should very succinctly summarize the main points of each reading. Not copy and paste quotations, but a very quick abstract of what the reading was about, sometimes with a few sentences of critical reflection or synthesis. These are to be done individually, not collaboratively. I will reserve the right to collect these, but they are really for your own use to maintain a library of notes and reflections.

3. Weekly attendance and active participation in seminar. This is important for the success of the seminar – please come prepared with thoughts, comments, and questions. “Shyness” is not a valid excuse!

4. A presentation on your work in progress. If our group is relatively small, we will do all of these during our last meeting; if not, we will schedule some for earlier in the term.

Grading:
- Class participation: 25 percent of final grade (includes presentation)
- Written assignments: 75 percent of final grade.

Blackboard:
We will use the university’s course software – blackboard.com – accessible through Princeton’s home page as a forum for communicating messages, distributing documents, posting papers, accessing web-links.

The readings are available on Electronic Course Reserves via Blackboard.
Seminar I: Introduction: Craft, method, the search for good questions and good answers in social research (Feb 8)

Seminar II: Research design and qualitative methods relative to statistical and experimental approaches; debates about what constitutes “good” social science research (Feb 15)
Brady and Collier, Chapters 1-4 [B]
Gerring, Chapters 1-2 [B]

Examples:


Strongly suggested:

Seminar III: Concepts, typologies, measurement, and description (Feb 22)


Gerring chapters 3,4

Examples:
(For each, please be prepared to discuss, what are the main variables involved in the theory, what are the conceptual and measurement concerns, and how are they ultimately addressed by the author?)


PICK ONE:


Optional/Further reading:


Seminar IV. Causation, explanation (Feb 29)

Examples:

(For each, be prepared to described and to discuss the specification of the causal theory as well as potential rival causal theories from each piece.)


PICK ONE:


…for those interested in Fuzzy-set/QCA or Necessary/Sufficient Conditions:


Seminar V. Evidence: Sources, replication, and analysis (March 7)


Moravcsik, Andrew. "Active Citation: A Precondition for Replicable Qualitative Research." PS: Political Science & Politics 43, no. 01 (2010): 29-35.


**Exercise: Put all of the historical data (focus on the footnotes) from Lisa Martin’s Chapter 7 (pp169-203) into the database presented to you in seminar.

Seminar VI. Case studies, narratives and process tracing (March 14)


Brady & Collier, chapters 9, 12 (McKeown; Collier, Brady, Seawright) [B]


Examples:
(For each, what is learned and not learned from the case studies? How were these carried out? Using what types of sources? How were those data analyzed?)


Look again at Dunning chapter 5.

Optional/suggested:
Andrew Bennett and Colin Elman, Qualitative Research: Recent Developments in Case Study Methods, Annual Review of Political Science 2006, pp. 455-476. [R]

SPRING BREAK

Seminar VII. Case selection – sampling; debates about selection bias; nested research designs (March 28)

Brady and Collier, chapter 6 (Collier, Mahoney, & Seawright) [B]

Example:

Other examples (optional):

See Fearon and Laitin’s “Random Narratives” project: Read the short article -- Fearon, J.D., and D.D. Laitin. 2008. "Integrating Qualitative and Quantitative Methods.” In *The Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology*, eds. J.M. Box-Steppensmeier, H.E. Brady and D. Collier: Oxford University Press, USA. 756-78; and read one narrative at:
http://www.stanford.edu/group/ethnic/Random20Narratives/random20narratives.htm

Seminar VIII. Comparative Historical Analysis – macro-historical theorizing, key strategies, methods of inference (April 4)

Today’s seminar will be held in 008 Robertson


Mahoney, James and Dietrich Rueschemeyer (eds.), *Comparative-Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002, Chapters 1 (Mahoney and Reuschemeyer), and 11 (Hall). [R]


Gerring, chapter 9.

Examples:

Optional/suggested:


Mahoney, James and Dietrich Rueschemeyer (eds.), *Comparative-Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002, chapter 12 (Skocpol) [B]

**Seminar IX. Field work I – focus on interviews and immersion (April 11)**

Elisabeth Wood. Field Methods. In Charles Boix and Susan Stokes (eds.), The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics. 2007. (in webspace)

Entire PS edition – December 2002 on Elite interviews (in webspace)


**Examples:**


Further reading/optional:


Grant-writing strategies:
Developed by Adam Przeworski (Department of Political Science, New York University) and Frank Salomon (Department of Anthropology, University of Wisconsin) on behalf of the Social Sciences Research Council (SSRC).
Seminar X. Field work II – Project management; Experiments; other forms of observation (April 18)


Lieberman, Howard, Lynch in QualMeth Newsletter (in webspace)


Example:

Seminar XI. Archives, secondary sources, and other published materials (April 25)
-- Today’s seminar will be held at the Seely Mudd library to meet with the University Archivist and Curator of Public Policy Papers, Daniel Linke

Cameron Thies, "A Pragmatic Guide to Qualitative Historical Analysis in the Study of International Relations," International Studies Perspectives 3(4) (November) 351-372 [R]


Hope M. Harrison, "Inside the SED Archives: A Researcher's Diary," Cold War International History Project Bulletin 2 (Fall 1992), 20, 28-32. [R]


Seminar XII. Presenting qualitative research in written, oral form; New frontiers for qualitative methodology (May 2)
Most of this seminar will be dedicated to student presentations, but we will also discuss what makes for an effective presentation of qualitative research in oral presentation, paper and book form; and we will discuss areas for research in qualitative methodology.

In preparation for our meeting this week, please carefully review the examples from the course (and from other courses) in order to critically discuss these topics. More direction will be provided in advance of the seminar.