Political Science 696
Research Design and Qualitative Methods in Political Science
Department of Political Science, University of Pennsylvania

Spring 2019
Fridays 9am-12pm
PCPE 225

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Overview: This seminar is an introduction to principles of research design and to the collection and analysis of qualitative data in the social sciences. It is worth noting that many of the methods traditionally considered to be qualitative actually employ quantitative data, and vice versa; and that many of the principles underlying research design, case selection, and the process of data collection are common across empirically-oriented research methods, whether qualitative, quantitative, or formal. Hence, the course should be useful to students planning to utilize a variety of different kinds of research tools. Readings encompass theory, how-to, and examples drawn from political science and cognate social science disciplines. There are no prerequisites for the course, but some background in statistics and/or an idea of the substantive research questions you would like to pursue will be helpful.

Academic integrity and plagiarism:
The University of Pennsylvania’s Code of Academic Integrity states: “Since the University is an academic community, its fundamental purpose is the pursuit of knowledge. Essential to the success of this educational mission is a commitment to the principles of academic integrity. Every member of the University community is responsible for upholding the highest standards of honesty at all times. Students, as members of the community, are also responsible for adhering to the principles and spirit of the [...] Code of Academic Integrity.” The seven points of this code (on cheating, plagiarism, fabrication, multiple submission, misrepresentation, facilitating dishonesty, and unfair advantage) can be found at http://www.upenn.edu/provost/PennBook/academic_integrity_code_of.

Incompletes:
An incomplete in the course may be granted in the case of a true medical or family emergency. In the event that you must take an incomplete, the remaining work must be turned in within four weeks of the end of the emergency or the end of the semester, whichever comes later. This is for your own protection: You do not want the papers for this course hanging over your head.
**Course requirements:**

A. Active and informed participation in seminar discussion (25% of final grade)

Informed, active participation in seminar is a requirement of the course. Read carefully; take notes; come prepared to discuss and participate. While a variety of lesson formats offer opportunities for different kinds of participation (oral and written, individual and collaborative, large and small group), you will be graded on both the quality and quantity of your required contributions to the seminar. I encourage you to request an evaluation of your seminar participation at an early stage during the semester.

B. Exercises (15% of final grade)

Brief weekly exercises are designed to give you practice applying the tools we are discussing each week. Write-ups of the exercises should generally not require more than 4 double-spaced pages. Before the start of class, **print out a copy of your exercise and bring it to class with you.** You may need it to share with a partner during class, and you will turn it in at the end of the class session. Exercises turned in after the end of class will not be accepted except in the case of a printer emergency.

Exercises are not graded, but you must complete the exercises each week in order to get maximum credit for this portion of the final grade. If you must be absent, you may receive credit for the exercise if you turn it in before the start of class.

Some students choose to use the exercises to address different aspects of a single substantive problem throughout the course of the semester. This strategy can facilitate a deeper understanding of qualitative methods and research design, as well as intimacy with a potential dissertation topic. However, this is by no means required. Many students, particularly those in their first year, may find it more helpful to use the written assignments to explore a variety of topics over the course of the semester.

C. Papers (60% of final grade)

For this class you will write three short papers in which you put into practice the methodological tools covered in the course, selecting from among the six Paper Options provided on the syllabus.

**Papers are due in class three weeks after the week in which they were assigned.** For example, Paper 1, on Process Tracing, is assigned in Week 5, and is thus due at the start of class in Week 8. Paper 6, on Content Analysis, is assigned in Week 12, and is due on May 2. I am flexible about deadlines, so if you need some leeway let me know. The three-week limit is to prevent you from (a) going overboard on the papers, and (b) loading yourself with work at the end of the semester.

Papers should be no more than 12 pages double-spaced. You can think of these papers as roughly half of a journal article: the methods section plus presentation/discussion of results, with only the barest nod to an introduction, lit review, synthesis or conclusion. These assignments require that you undertake a small piece of original research before you can write the paper. Furthermore, the page limit is likely to demand significant extra time for editing. Because of this, **these papers are likely to take longer to execute than you expect!** Please leave yourself ample time to complete them and to proof-read carefully (grades will be based partly on the quality of your writing).
**Course Readings:**
Readings for each week are listed in recommended reading order. Most readings are available on Canvas or downloadable directly. Please be sure to bring to each class session a physical manifestation of the required readings: books, printouts, easily readable computer files.

**Required books (available for purchase at the Penn bookstore and on reserve at Rosengarten):**


*Readings preceded by an asterix are on the Canvas site*
**Week 1 (Jan 18)**

**Epistemology, ontology, methodology**

*Exercise 1:* BEFORE YOU DO THE READINGS: Draw a word map of the terms (adjectives, nouns, verbs) you associate with qualitative and quantitative research in political science (or your home discipline, if you are not a political scientist). A word map is simply a spatial representation of how you see these terms being related to one another – you can use arrows, proximity, hierarchy, even color to get your meaning across. AFTER YOU DO THE READINGS: Do the same exercise again. Has your map changed at all?


*Lieberman, Evan. “Can the Bio-Medical Research Cycle be a Model for Political Science?” Forthcoming in *Perspectives on Politics*. 

Recommended:

*James Mahoney, “After KKV: The New Methodology of Qualitative Research,” *World Politics* 62:1 (January 2010), pp. 120-147. [A basic introduction to much of what is to come in this course]


**Week 2 (Jan 25)**

**Concepts, indicators, measures**

If you need it, a refresher on measurement à la KKV (i.e. with a focus on efficiency and bias in the context of random variables): KKV Ch 2 (pp 49-74), Ch 5 (pp150-68).


Exercise 2: Pick a concept that is used in political science that you think is particularly well operationalized and measured (by at least one author). It could be very abstract (e.g, justice, regime), very concrete (e.g., occupation, campaign advertisement), or something in between (e.g. social cleavage, political socialization, stability). Diagram the concept’s dimensions, specify the measures, and discuss the intension/extension. What is it about the concept and/or its operationalization that makes it work well?

Recommended:


Week 3 (Feb 1)
Explanation


*Copi, Irving M, and Carl Cohen. “Causal Connections: Mill’s Methods of Experimental Inquiry.” In Introduction to Logic. London: Macmillan (1994), Chapter 12. [You only need to read this if you are not familiar with Mill’s Methods


Exercise 3: Write down a substantive causal or constitutive question. Concoct a plausible variable-centered and mechanism-centered answer for that question. Then say what empirical observations would be needed, and why, to convince you that each of these explanations is correct. Note: this is harder than it sounds!
**Recommended:**


**Week 4 (Feb 8)**

**Case studies and case selection**


*Collier, David, James Mahoney, and Jason Seawright. “Claiming Too Much: Warnings about Selection Bias” RSI Supplemental Chapter 1.


**Exercise 4:** Examine the reading by Morris MacLean. What rationale does she give for her case selection? Does the case selection allow for causal inference? With what scope? Is selection bias likely to be a problem? Why or why not?

**Recommended:**


*Slater, Dan and Daniel Ziblatt. "The Enduring Indispensability of the Controlled Comparison." *Comparative Political Studies* 46:10(2013), pp. 1301-1327.  [Read first 14 pages; skim the rest.]

**Week 5 (Feb 15)**

**Process tracing**


*Collier, David. “Process Tracing: Introduction and Exercises.” To Accompany Rethinking Social Inquiry, 2nd Ed. Beta Version (September 22, 2010). [You do NOT have to do the exercises, but DO read the Sherlock Holmes story.]*


**Exercise 5:** Consider the article by Melissa Wilde. What is the process that Wilde traces, and why does she need to trace it? How does Wilde go about “tracing the process?” What argumentative steps does the analysis go through? What kinds of tests does she employ? What techniques did she use to generate the evidence used in the process tracing?

**Paper Option 1:** Identify a process that is of political significance. Start by identifying, for yourself, the practical, operational steps you will need to go through to trace the process. In the paper, trace the process, and make a political science argument based on your findings.

**Warning:** Many students have great difficulty with process tracing, but don’t realize that they are not doing it successfully until it’s too late. I recommend submitting a draft to me before the due date in order to make sure that you are on the right track.

**Recommended:**


**Week 6 (Feb 22)**

**Coding**


The entire book is assigned, but you may want to skim Ch 2 after p. 57 (unless you are interested in audio or visual sources); some of Ch 3 pp. 124-197 (skim types of coding that are of little interest to you); Ch 4 and Ch 5 (which are geared toward grounded theorizing, which is less frequently used in the empirical subfields of political science – if you are a political theorist or a sociologist, you may want to spend more time on these chapters).

**Exercise 6:**

Locate a small body of short texts, images, or artifacts (e.g. recent op-eds in the DP, emails from professors, t-shirts in your drawer, billboards on your way to campus). 5-10 items is plenty. Write an analytic memo, do a round of first-cycle coding, and develop a “theory” about the items based on your coding.
**Week 7 (Mar 1)**

**In-depth interviewing**


**Exercise 7**: Think of a question – ANY question - to which you would like to know the answer. Then write several interview questions that would help you elicit the information you need to answer the question. Find a few examples of the types of people you would need to interview, and ASK THE QUESTIONS. (Don’t worry about representative sampling.) Which questions elicited the most useful information? Why? How did you feel while you were asking the questions? How did your respondents seem to feel when they were answering them?

**Paper Option 2**: Use data from in-depth interviews utilizing open-ended questions to answer a question with some relevance for political science. Your paper should include (a) a brief presentation of the question you set out to answer, (b) a description and justification of your sampling procedures (c) an explanation of your coding scheme and data analysis, (d) a presentation of your results, and (e) a discussion of any potential limitations of your study. You should also include an appendix, which does not count toward the page limit, listing the main questions you needed in order to answer your research question (some of which you may have discovered you needed only after you have done a few interviews).

**Recommended:**


SPRING BREAK March 8

Week 8 (Mar 15)
NO CLASS

Week 9 (Mar 22)
Ethnography and participant observation


Exercise 8: Spend at least one hour observing something that is of political or social significance. What did you do/see/hear/smell/taste/feel? What did you learn? (How) did your presence affect what you saw or learned?

Paper Option 3: Design and undertake a small study involving ethnographic or participant observation. Write up your results. Consider what you learned from this study that other methods would not have yielded, and vice versa.

Recommended:

Week 10 (Mar 29)
Field Experiments, Natural Experiments, and Quasi-Experiments


**Exercise 9:** Think of a political science question you would like to answer, and then imagine a scenario in which you could use a *field experiment* or *natural experiment* to answer it. Make sure that you identify what the treatment is. How likely is it that you would find a situation in the real world that meets the necessary conditions for the use of an experimental design? If those conditions did not exist, what other methods could you turn to in order to answer your question?

**Paper Option 4:** Design and conduct an experiment or quasi-experiment to answer a social question. Write up your results and assess the experiment's validity and any limitations of your research design.

**Recommended:**


**Week 11 (Apr 5)**

**History as data**


Exercise 10: Think of a concrete research question in political science (or your home discipline) that interests you. Write it down. Imagine an archive that you think would help you answer this question, and explain what would be in it and why. Then look for a real archive in the world that comes close to your ideal. Learn as much as you can about the structure of that archive and its rules of operation. Finally, based on this information, say whether this archive would be helpful to you in answering your question.

Paper Option 5: Locate an archive that you suspect will allow you to answer a specific research question. Enumerate a sample of materials from that archive that you believe will help you to answer your question: what documents would you request, and for what purpose? (Your sample may comprise the universe of all potentially relevant materials, but you will need to explain what is “relevant” and why.) Request and read these documents (you may read a sub-sample if necessary), and do your best to answer the question that you set out to answer. Discuss any limitations that the archive or your sampling technique imposed on your ability to make good causal or descriptive inferences.

Recommended:

Week 12 (Apr 12)
Content analysis and discourse analysis
Krippendorff, Karl, Content Analysis: An Introduction to Its Methodology. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage (2013 – but earlier editions are also fine). [You can skim the earlier theory chapters, focus on the how-to aspects.]


**Exercise 12:** Think of a question that you would like to answer using content analysis or discourse analysis of materials that can be accessed easily (i.e. no web scraping) on the web sites of one or more academic journals. Write a sampling procedure and codebook that could be used by a partner in class to conduct a miniature content or discourse analysis to answer this question. Construct an Excel spreadsheet into which your partner can enter the results of her/his coding. [Feel free to exceed the normal 2-page limit for this assignment, but keep in mind that your partner will only have about 30 minutes to collect your data for you.]

**Paper Option 6:** Design and undertake a small research project involving content or discourse analysis. Be sure to specify any sampling or coding procedures (although you may use different words to describe these practices if you are conducting discourse vs. content analysis). Write up your methods and results. Include your codebook as an appendix, which will not count toward the page limit.

**Recommended:**


**Week 13 (Apr 19)**

**Field work**


**Exercise 13:** Think of a research project that involves field research and that is of a scope appropriate for a roughly 30-page seminar paper, dissertation chapter, or journal article. Say where you would do your field research, and estimate how much time and money you will need for each field site. Construct a “to-get” list to guide your field research, and identify any items that can be done before leaving for the field.
Recommended:


**Week 14 (Apr 26)**

**Research ethics**


*“Symposium: Transparency in Qualitative and Multi-Method Research.” In Qualitative and Multi-Method Research, Spring 2015, Vol. 13, No. 1.*

**Exercise 14:** Imagine three potential dissertation topics that you could imagine doing and that might be ethically problematic. What would make these projects problematic? For which of these would IRB review be required? How could you modify the IRB review process to ensure that the proposed work would be conducted ethically, or not at all?