

17.878 Qualitative Research: Design and Methods

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Fall 2007
Tuesday
9:00 – 11:00
E51-061

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Course website:
<http://stellar.mit.edu/S/course/17/fa07/17.878/>

Course Overview

This course is intended for graduate students planning to conduct qualitative research in a variety of different settings. The course aims to prepare students for research by:

1. making students aware of the ways in which choices of methodology are closely linked to broader theoretical and conceptual issues;
2. providing students with a critical understanding of the philosophical commitments and behavioral assumptions in social science research
3. enabling students to consider the appropriateness of different methodologies and types of evidence to test alternative hypotheses and to construct various arguments;
4. familiarizing students with a variety of research methods, including survey research, interviewing, participant observation, case studies, comparative analysis, and the use of documentary/primary sources;
5. showing students how to evaluate published studies in various social science fields, focusing on the logic of their argument, their methodologies, and the relationship between the evidence presented and their argument;
6. acquainting students with the types of materials, especially documents and surveys, available in the Boston area;
7. sensitizing students to the ethical issues in social science research; and
8. providing assistance in the design of a dissertation research project.

The primary goal of this course is to assist students in preparing their (Masters and Ph.D) dissertation proposals.

Readings

All the required readings for this class are available on the course website. In addition, the following books are available on reserve at Dewey library, should students wish to consult them further:

- Abbott, A. (2004). *Methods of Discovery: Heuristics for the Social Sciences*. W.W. Norton and Company.
- Mills, C.W. (2000). [1959]. "On Intellectual Craftmanship." (in *The Sociological Imagination*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 195-228.)
- King, G., Keohane, R. and Verba, S. (1994). *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Brady, H. and Collier, D. (eds.). (2004). *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards*. Rowman and Littlefield
- Van Evera, S. (1997). *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, pp. 49-76.
- Kuhn, T. (1996). *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 3rd Ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Becker, H. (1998). *Tricks of the Trade: How to Think about Your Research While You're Doing It*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Freeman, R.B. and Rogers, J. (1999). *What Workers Want*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Geddes, B. (2003). *Paradigms and Sand Castles: Theory Building and Research Design in Comparative Politics*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Shapiro, I., Smith, R.M. and Masoud, T.E. (2004). *Problems and Methods in the Study of Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Assignments and Due Dates

In addition to regular class attendance,

1. Students are required to complete weekly assignments. These assignments are explained after each week's readings. They are due at the beginning of the appropriate seminar session. They will not be accepted after the due date. Essays are to be brief – three or four pages. I am looking for analytically sharp, well-reasoned essays, with precisely defined concepts and testable hypotheses and which demonstrate a grasp of the relationship between methodology and theory. Students should be prepared to summarize their main points in class.
2. Students will present 15 minute oral presentations of their research proposals on November 20, December 4, 11. On the Monday prior to the oral presentations a one or two page summary of the research proposals should be distributed to all participants in this class. Students will also be expected to provide written comments (positive feedback) on the proposals of their peers.
3. A 15-20 page dissertation research proposal is due by December 11.

Schedule Overview

September 11	Introduction: Why Qualitative Research?
September 18	Philosophy of Social Science
September 25	Causation, Explanation, and Mechanisms
October 2	Research Discover and Design
October 16	Case Studies
October 23	Interviews and Documentary Evidence
October 30	Participant Observation
November 6	Survey Research
November 13	Doing Fieldwork
November 20	Research Proposal Presentations
December 4	Research Proposal Presentations
December 11	Research Proposal Presentations

- Course overview and rationale
- Why qualitative research?

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Required

Shapiro, I. (2004). "Problems, methods, and theories in political science, or: what's wrong with political science and what to do about it." (Ch. 2 in in Shapiro, I., Smith, R.M. and Masoud, T.E., Problems and Methods in the Study of Politics, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press)

Assignment

Come to class prepared to discuss your own research interests. What are you interested in studying? Why? How? Where? What kinds of methods were you thinking of using?

- Philosophical commitments of social science
- Positivist vs. (and?) interpretivist approaches
- Behavioral assumptions in social science research

Required

Kuhn, T. (1996). *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 3rd Ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. [Ch. 2, 3, 9,10].

Popper, K. (1965). "Normal Science and its Dangers." (in Lakatos, I. and Musgrave, A. (eds.), *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 51-59).

Lakatos, I. (1965). "Falsification and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes" (in Lakatos, I. and Musgrave, A. (eds.), *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 91-138).

Burrell, G. and Morgan, G. (1979). *Sociological Paradigms and Organizational Analysis*. Heinemann. [pp.1-9 and pp. 130-143].

Morgan, G. and Smircich, L. (1980). "The Case for Qualitative Research." *Academy of Management Review*. 5 (4): 491-500.

Bates, R. (1998). "The International Coffee Organization: An International Institution." (Ch. 5 in Bates, R., et. al. *Analytical Narratives*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.)

Recommended

Elster, J. (2000). "Rational Choice History." *American Political Science Review*. 94: 685-695.

Sil, R. "Problems chasing methods or methods chasing problems? Research communities, constrained pluralism, and the role of eclecticism." (Ch. 14 in Shapiro, I., Smith, R.M. and Masoud, T.E., (2004) *Problems and Methods in the Study of Politics*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press).

Friedman, M. (1968). "The Methodology of Positive Economics" (in Brodbeck, M., ed., *Readings in the Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, New York: Macmillan, pp. 508-29).

Assignment

Write a brief memo about how one's assumptions about human behavior, and various social, economic and political processes, shape one's approach to research. What questions you ask, what kinds of data you collect, what "findings" you find interesting are all shaped by these assumptions. What are your own underlying assumptions? Where do you stand on the positivist vs. interpretivist divide? Why?

September 25

Causation, Explanation, and Mechanisms

- What is causal explanation?
- Can qualitative research establish causality?
- How can qualitative research reveal mechanisms?

Required

King, G., Keohane, R. and Verba, S. (1994). *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
[Ch. 3: "Causality and Causal Inference"]

Tilly, C. (2001). "Mechanisms in Political Processes." *Annual Review of Political Science* 4: 21-41

Chandra, K. (2006). "Mechanisms v/s Outcomes." Essay for Symposium on David Laitin's Work. Newsletter of APSA Section on Qualitative Methods.

Available: <http://www.nyu.edu/gsas/dept/politics/faculty/chandra/qualmeth2006.pdf>

Petersen, R. (2001). *Resistance and Rebellions: Lessons from Eastern Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. [Ch. 1 (pp. 1-27) and Ch. 6]

Recommended

Elster, J. "A Plea for Mechanisms." (in Peter Hedstrom and Richard Swedberg, eds. *Social Mechanisms: An Analytical Approach to Social Theory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 45-73.)

Fearon, J. (1991). "Counterfactuals and Hypothesis Testing in Political Science." *World Politics* 43 (2): 169-195.

Assignment:

Write a short paper (3-4 pages will suffice) on any research article or book that you believe provides a convincing explanation: what questions did the author pose, what alternative explanations were considered, what method was employed, and why in your opinion do you think the proposed explanation is convincing?

- Discovering a research question
- Designing qualitative research
- Triangulation

Required

Abbott, A. (2004). *Methods of Discovery: Heuristics for the Social Sciences*. W.W. Norton and Company.

[Ch. 1 and 2]

Mills, C.W. (2000). [1959]. "On Intellectual Craftmanship." (in *The Sociological Imagination*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 195-228.)

King, G., Keohane, R. and Verba, S. (1994). *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.)

[Ch. 1 and 4].

Locke, R. (1995). *Remaking the Italian Economy*. Cornell: Cornell University Press.

[Ch. 1 and 4]

Recommended

Brady, H. and Collier, D. (eds.). (2004). *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards*. Rowman and Littlefield

Geddes, B. (2003). *Paradigms and Sand Castles: Theory Building and Research Design in Comparative Politics*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

George, A. and Bennett, A. (2005). *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*. Cambridge: MIT Press. [Esp. Ch. 4].

Assignment

Write a brief memo describing your own research question. How did you "discover" this question? Describe the process. How do you propose to design a research project around this question?

- What is a case?
- Value of case study research.
- The problem of case selection
- Comparative case method

Required

Van Evera, S. (1997). "What Are Case Studies? How Should They Be Performed?" (Ch. 2 in *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, pp. 49-76.)

George, A. and Bennett, A. (2005). *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*. Cambridge: MIT Press. [Ch. 1]

Geddes, B. (2003). "How the Cases you Choose Affect the Answers You Get: Selection Bias and Related Issues." (ch. 3 in *Paradigms and Sand Castles: Theory Building and Research Design in Comparative Politics*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.)

Lijphart, A. (1971). "Comparative Politics and the Comparative Method." *American Political Science Review*. 65 (3): 682-93.

Locke, R. and Thelen, K. (1995). "Apples and Oranges Revisited: Contextualized Comparisons and the Study of Comparative Labor Politics." 23 (3): 337-367.

Recommended

Ragin, C. and Becker, H. (eds). (1992). *What is a Case? Exploring the Foundations of Social Inquiry*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Yin, R.K. (2002) *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*, 3rd Ed. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Gerring, J. (2004). "What Is a Case Study and What is it Good for?" *American Political Science Review*. 98 (2): 341-354.

Collier, D. and Mahoney. J. (1996). "Insight and Pitfalls: Selection Bias in Qualitative Research." *World Politics*. 49: 56-91.

Assignment:

Choose a book or major article that employs a case study for testing a theory. (Do not choose the same book or article as used for the previous assignment.) How did the author decide what village, town, factory, or institution should be selected for the study? Do you think the criteria were appropriate? Is it a "crucial" case for the theory? Can any generalizations be drawn from the case? How does the author define and limit the unit for study? Might the choice of other units lead to different results? Answer these questions in the form of a brief three or four page paper.

- Interviews as social events
- Issues of language and power
- Using documentary evidence

Required

Weiner, M. (1964). "Political Interviewing." (Ch 6 in Ward, R.E., *Studying Politics Abroad*, Boston: Little, Brown.)

Ewick, P. and Silbey, S. (2003). "Narrating Social Structure: Stories of Resistance to Legal Authority." *American Journal of Sociology*. 108 (6): 1328-1372.

Scott, J.W. (1989). "A Statistical Representation of Work." (in *Gender and the Politics of History*, New York: Columbia University Press.)

Nobles, M. (2005). *Shades of Citizenship: Race and the Census in Modern Politics*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
[Ch. 3].

Examples and Recommended further Readings

Tendler, J. (1997). *Good Government in the Tropics*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Rubin, H. and Rubin, I. (1995). *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Leech, B.L. (2002). "Symposium: Interview Methods in Political Science."

Denzin, N. K. (1989). "The Sociological Interview." (In *The Research Act: A Theoretical Introduction to Sociological Methods*. 3rd ed. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1989, pp. 102-120.)

Assignment

Imagine that you want to answer the following research question: What determines success in academia? To carry this out, you decide it is worthwhile to collect the knowledge, opinions, and beliefs of current and aspiring academics. Your assignment is to develop a questionnaire and interview both a faculty member and a student in your department. Write a brief memo describing your interviews? How did you choose your interview subjects? How did you motivate them to provide you with the information you needed? How did you deal with stereotyped answers, evasiveness, lying? Please attach your questionnaire to the memo.

- What is participant observation?
- Thick description?
- Under what conditions is this approach feasible?

Required

Hammersley, M. and Atkinson, P. *Ethnography: Principles in Practice*. London: Routledge.
[Ch. 1 and 2]

Geertz, C. (1973). *The Interpretation of Cultures*, New York: Basic Books.
[Ch. 1 “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture.”]
[Ch. 15. “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight.”]

Scott, J. (1987). *Weapons of the Weak: Of the Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
[Ch. 6.]

Recommended

Becker, H. (1998). *Tricks of the Trade: How to Think about Your Research While You're Doing It*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Garfinkle, H. (1967). *Studies in Ethnomethodology*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

Sewell, W.H. (1999). “The Concept(s) of Culture.” (In Bonnell, V. and Hunt, L. eds., (1999) *Beyond the Cultural Turn: New Directions in the Study of Society and Culture*, Berkeley: University of California).

Wedeen, L. (2002). “Conceptualizing Culture: Possibilities for Political Science,” *American Political Science Review*. 96 (4): 713-738.

Van Maanen, J. (1988). *Tales of the Field*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Ethnographies

Becker, H. (1963). *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*. Free Press.

Whyte, W.F. (1943). *Street Corner Society*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Scott, James C. (1976). *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Assignment:

Attend a public meeting and write a brief report on what you observe. (Examples: a town council, League of Women voters meeting, a protest rally, etc.). Your task is to come up with observations and insights not ordinarily offered by journalists. You might, for example, devise a method for ascertaining the social composition of the audience; a measure of audience response to the speakers; tell us why people came to the meeting; give a content analysis of themes or metaphors presented by the speakers; tell us something about the symbols employed in the event; provide a kind of ethnographic description of the event (a la Geertz and the Balinese cockfight); provide a “discourse analysis”; analyze the event as a “play,” a “fight,” a “religious” revival, or whatever else appears to be an appropriate metaphor. Use your imagination and ingenuity.

Required

Freeman, R.B. and Rogers, J. (1999). *What Workers Want*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. [Ch. 2 and 3].

Examples and Suggested Additional Readings

Frey, F.W. "Cross-Cultural Survey Research in Political Science, " (in Holt, R.T. and Turner, J.E. (1970), *The Methodology of Comparative Research*, Free Press, pp. 173-294).

Weisberg, H.F. and Bowen, B.D. (1996). *An Introduction to Survey Research, Polling and Data Analysis*, 3rd ed. Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Almond, G. and Verba, S. (1965). *The Civic Culture*. Boston: Little Brown.

Verba, S., Nie, N. and Kim, J. (1978). *Participation and Political Equality: A Seven Nation Comparison*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Fishkin, J.S. (1995). *The Voice of the People*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Ingelhart, R. (1990). *Culture Shift*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Converse, P. and Pierce, R. (1986). *Political Representation in France*. Cambridge: Harvard University Belknap Press..

Smith, B. and Turner, R. (1984). "The Quality of Survey Research in Authoritarian Regimes: Brazil and the Southern Cone of Latin America in the 1970s." (in Wilkie, J., ed., (1984), *Statistical Abstract of Latin America*, 23rd edition, Los Angeles: UCLA.

Lewis, I.A. and Schneider, W. (1982). "Is the Public Lying to the Pollsters?" *Public Opinion*.

Verba, S. (1969). "The Uses of Survey Research in the Study of Comparative Politics: Issues and Strategies." (in Stein Rokkan et al, *Comparative Survey Analysis*, pp. 57-118).

Erwin K. Scheuch, "The Cross-Cultural Use of Sample Surveys: Problems of Comparability," in Stein Rokkan et al, *ibid.*, pp. 176-209.

Stokes, S.C. (1991). "Politics and Latin America's Urban Poor: Reflections from a Lima Shantytown," *Latin American Research Review*, 26 (2): 75-101.

Verba, Schlozman, K. and Brady, H. (1995). *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Assignment

Write a 3-4 page research proposal that could draw from existing survey data. You may want to compare attitudes in two or more countries, propose a study of changing attitudes within a single country, examine the relationship between social class, ethnicity, gender, or age to a particular set of attitudes. In your memo be precise as to the questions you propose to answer, hypotheses you wish to test, and the suitability of the data for your proposed study.

- Gaining Access
- Maintaining field notes
- Ethics of fieldwork

Required

Rabinow, P. (1977). *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
[Ch. 4 and 5]

Barrett, C. and Cason, J.W. (1997). *Overseas Research: A Practical Guide*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press.
[Ch. 5 and 6]

Emerson, R., Fretz, R. and Shaw, L. (1995). "Processing Fieldnotes: Coding and Memoing." (in *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 142-168.)

Read, B., MacLean, L.M. and Cammett, M. (Fall 2006) "Symposium: Field Research: How Rich? How Thick? How Participatory?" *Qualitative Methods*. 4(2) 9-18.

Piore, M. (2006). "Qualitative Research: Does it Fit in Economics?" *European Management Review*. 3: 17-23.

Recommended:

Aberbach, J., et. al. (1975). "Exploring Elite Political Attitudes: Some Methodological Lessons." *Political Methodology*. 2:1-27.

Assignment:

Write a brief essay discussing the potential ethical issues raised by your proposed research project. What are the issues? How do you propose to resolve them?

Faculty Panel:

Suzanne Berger
Michael Piore

November 20
December 4
December 11

Research Proposal Presentations

Required

Przeworski, A. and Salomon, F. (1988). "On the Art of Writing Proposals: Some Candid Suggestions for Applicants to Social Science Research Council Competitions."

Assignment

Prepare a 1 or 2 page single-spaced summary of your research proposal similar to the "Thesis Colloquium" abstracts circulated in the Department of Political Science. The summary should briefly indicate the research question, the hypotheses, the methods to be employed, and what the expected contribution of the research would be to the body of literature related to your topic.

A total of 30 minutes of class time will be devoted to each proposal. You must limit your presentation to 15 minutes, at which time the instructor will stop you. Fifteen additional minutes will be reserved for class discussion. It is therefore important that all students have read the proposed summaries and come to class prepared to offer constructive comments to their classmates.

Copies of your proposal should be placed in the mail boxes of all students in the class and handed to the instructor no later than the Friday preceding the Tuesday class at which you are scheduled to make your presentation.

Final papers are due no later than December 11.