

Western University
Department of Political Science
FOUNDATIONS OF QUALITATIVE METHODS
Political Science 9593B
Winter 2023

Instructor: Martin Horak
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Office Hours: Wednesdays 2:30-3:30, or by appointment on Zoom
Office Location: SSC 7237

Class Time and Location: Wednesdays 10:30-12:30, SSC 7210

Course Description and Objectives:

The term ‘qualitative methods’ encompasses a wide variety of empirical research strategies in political science, ranging from historical documentary research to elite interviews and immersive ethnographic work. This course provides graduate students with an overview of the logical foundations and practical applications of a range of qualitative research practices.

The course aims to develop both theoretical understanding and practical research skills. By the end of the course, you will understand the epistemological underpinnings of different qualitative research approaches in political science. You will understand models of causation and issues of case selection associated with small-n research. Through reading, discussion, and hands-on assignments, you will learn about – and have an opportunity to apply – a variety of concrete data gathering techniques, including documentary research, interviews, and participant observation; and you will be introduced to practices in qualitative data analysis, with an emphasis on NVivo-assisted qualitative coding. Finally, you will understand how qualitative and quantitative approaches to political inquiry can be – and are being – brought together in the rapidly evolving practice of multi-method research in political science.

This course is wide ranging, but it is an introduction, and it is not comprehensive. We will discuss several commonly used qualitative methods, but others will be treated only in passing, if at all. Subjects that will not be addressed in detail include discourse analysis, set theory, Bayesian analysis and qualitative social media research, among others.

Students who are interested in further developing their qualitative research skills are encouraged to talk to the instructor, who can help them to identify further resources such as short courses.

Course Materials:

You are not required to purchase any books for this course. Almost all the course readings are available electronically through Western Libraries. Those that are not will be posted under “Resources” on the course OWL site. However, if you are considering using qualitative methods in your own work, I would encourage you to consider purchasing your own copy one or more of the following texts. We will be reading portions of each of these books in the course:

Andrew Abbott. 2014. *Digital Paper: A Manual for Research and Writing with Library and Internet Materials* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press).

Diana Kapiszewski, Lauren M. MacLean, and Benjamin L. Read. 2015. *Field research in political science: Practices and principles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

James Mahoney and Kathleen Thelen, eds. 2015. *Advances in Comparative-Historical Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)

Layna Mosley, ed. 2013. *Interview Research in Political Science* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press).

Jason Seawright. 2016. *Multi-Method Social Science: Combining Qualitative and Quantitative Tools* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

Edward Schatz, ed. 2009. *Political Ethnography: What Immersion Contributes to the Study of Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press)

Marc Trachtenberg. 2009. *The craft of international history: A guide to method* (Princeton: Princeton University Press).

You **are** required to **purchase a UWO student license to NVivo**, the qualitative data analysis (QDA) software that we will be using. Licenses are \$40.00 and are valid until late July 2023.

To purchase a license, go here: <https://computerstore.uwo.ca/product/nvivo1819s>

Course Format:

We will meet on Wednesdays from 10:30 –12:30, with a brief break half-way through class. This is a mixed-format class featuring short lectures, seminar discussion, and hands-on methods workshops (Week 7 and Week 10). We will also have guest experts in selected weeks.

A typical (non-workshop) class will begin with a short (15-30 minute) lecture by me; after that, students who have chosen that week will take turns leading discussion, and we will conclude either with open discussion moderated by me, or with a guest presenter. To do well in this class, *you must come prepared having completed all the readings each week*. The course is reading-intensive, so make sure that you budget time accordingly.

Evaluation:

Seminar participation (15%)

You are all expected to be active, thoughtful and analytical participants in class discussion, and to come prepared with questions and insights on the reading material for each week. You are also expected to participate actively and productively in our two in-class methods workshops.

Discussion leading (10%)

At the end of our first class, each of you will sign up for one of the following weeks: 2,3,4,5,6,8,9 or 11. A maximum of three students will sign up for each week.

Two days before class in your chosen week, you will post a thoughtful and thought-provoking discussion about the reading material for the week on the “Forums” section of the OWL site. In class, each of the two or three students signed up for the week will then take turns leading discussion on their posted question for about ten minutes.

Methods training exercises (25% each – choose any three)

You will choose any **three** of the following assignments to complete, depending on your interests and schedule. Full guidelines for each assignment will be distributed early in the course.

1. **Methodological review of a work of comparative historical analysis.** Choose a comparative historical book from a list that I will provide. Write a methodological review, focusing on a critique of case selection and causal arguments.
2. **Interviewing a scholar.** Choose a recent single-authored work of political science (article or book) that is based on empirical qualitative research. Conduct a semi-structured Zoom interview of no more than 30 minutes with the author of this work, in which you ask them about their methodological choices and research process. I will secure ethics approval for this assignment for the class, but it will be your responsibility to follow all approved procedures before, during and after the interview. You will use transcription software to transcribe the interview, and you will write a brief review of the author’s work, drawing on and incorporating what you found out during your interview. You will submit both the transcription and the review.
3. **Observation of a political meeting.** Choose an upcoming in-person or online public meeting of a governmental decision-making body (a city council, legislature, special-purpose agency, etc.). Before the meeting, conduct documentary research on the mandate, procedural arrangements, and personnel of the body. Based on relevant academic literature and your documentary research, identify some concrete objectives for your observation and observe the meeting, taking field notes. Write up a brief narrative account and analysis. Submit both the field notes and the narrative account.

4. **Primary document analysis.** Identify a set of primary documents (archival memos and papers, transcripts of meetings by a decision-making body, policy documents, political speeches, etc.) that are relevant to answering a research question that you have devised. Read and qualitatively code the documents using NVivo and write up a narrative commentary on the results of the exercise and insights from the coding.
5. **Multi-method research design.** Choose a research question that interests you and that might be amenable to multi-method treatment. Develop a concise design document for the research, justifying your methodological choices, and discussing how the quantitative and qualitative elements of the research design relate to each other.

Due dates and submission:

Each of your three methods training exercises will be submitted on OWL. All due dates are on Mondays. In most cases, the exercises are due about two weeks after the relevant methodological material is discussed in our course; however, the interview assignment is subject to a one-month timeline given the practical steps involved in scheduling an interview. Due dates are as follows:

Assignment	Due Date
Methodology review of CHA book	Feb 13
Interview with a scholar	Apr 3
Observation of a meeting	Mar 27
Primary document analysis	Apr 10
Multi-method design	Apr 17

Deadlines, instructor communication and accommodations:

Late penalties for assignments are 2% per day, weekends included. However, if you anticipate problems meeting deadlines, please let me know well in advance (ie, at least a week before the relevant deadline) and we will make reasonable accommodations. If you are facing challenges with the material in this course, please do not hesitate to reach out and I'll be happy to meet, Zoom or e-mail with you to help.

POL 9593 Weekly Schedule

Week 1 (Jan 11): Situating ‘qualitative methods’: goals, approaches, and research process

James Mahoney and Gary Goertz, 2006, “A Tale of Two Cultures: Contrasting Quantitative and Qualitative Research,” *Political Analysis* 14: 227-249.

[review for those who were in Lebo’s 9502 last term]

Schram, Sanford F., Bent Flyvbjerg, and Todd Landman. 2013. “*Political* political science: A phronetic approach.” *New Political Science* 35(3): 359-372.

Thomas, George. 2005. “The qualitative foundations of political science methodology.” *Perspectives on Politics* 3(4): 855-866.

Yom, Sean. 2015. “From methodology to practice: Inductive iteration in comparative research.” *Comparative Political Studies* 48(5): 616-644.

** students choose weeks for discussion leading **

Week 2 (Jan 18): Small-n work: case studies and case selection strategies

*George, Alexander L. and Andrew Bennett. 2005. “Case Studies and Theory Development”. Chapter 1 in Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press).

- Read pages 17-34 only.

Flyvbjerg, Bent. 2006. “Five misunderstandings about case-study research”. *Qualitative inquiry* 12(2): 219-245.

Seawright, Jason and John Gerring. 2008. “Case Selection Techniques in Case Study Research: A Menu of Qualitative and Quantitative Options.” *Political Research Quarterly* 61(2): 294-308.

[review for those who were in Anderson’s 9501 last term]

Gerring, John. 2017. “Qualitative methods.” *Annual review of political science* 20: 15-36.

- read pp.21 – 24, on case selection

Mahoney, James and Gary Goertz. 2004. “The possibility principle: Choosing negative cases in comparative research.” *American Political Science Review* 98(4): 653-669.

** students choose methods training exercises **

Week 3 (Jan 25): Temporality and causation in comparative historical analysis

Hall, Peter. 2003. "Aligning Ontology and Methodology in Comparative Research." Chapter 11 in James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer, eds., *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences* (New York: Cambridge University Press).

Thelen, Kathleen and James Mahoney. 2015. "Comparative-historical analysis in contemporary political science". Chapter 1 in James Mahoney and Kathleen Thelen, eds. *Advances in Comparative-Historical Analysis*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press): 3-36.

Faletti, Tulia and James Mahoney. 2015. "The comparative sequential method". Chapter 8 in James Mahoney and Kathleen Thelen, eds. *Advances in Comparative-Historical Analysis*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press): 211-239.

Capoccia, Giovanni. 2015. "Critical junctures and institutional change". Chapter 6 in James Mahoney and Kathleen Thelen, eds. *Advances in Comparative-Historical Analysis*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press): 147-179.

Further reading:

Chapters 2-5 and 7 of *Advances in Comparative-Historical Analysis* are all useful reading for those interested in comparative historical work.

Week 4 (Feb 1): The design and practice of process tracing

Beach, Derek. 2016. "It's all about mechanisms—what process-tracing case studies should be tracing". *New Political Economy* 21(5): 463-472.

*Bennett, Andrew, Tasha Fairfield and Hillel David Soifer. 2019. "Comparative methods and process tracing." *American Political Science Association Organized Section for Qualitative and Multi-Method Research, Qualitative Transparency Deliberations, Final Report of Working Group III.1*.

Ricks, Jacob I. and Amy H. Liu. 2018. "Process-tracing research designs: a practical guide". *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 51(4): 842-846.

Week 5 (Feb 8): Documents and archives: researching the written record

Abbott, Andrew. 2014. *Digital Paper: A Manual for Research and Writing with Library and Internet Materials*. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press).

- Read Chapters 1 (“Introduction”), 3 (“Fundamentals”), and 7 (“Reading”).

Lustick, Ian S. 1996. “History, historiography, and political science: Multiple historical records and the problem of selection bias.” *American Political Science Review* 90(3): 605-618.

Trachtenberg, Marc. 2009. “Working with Documents”. Chapter 5 in Marc Trachtenberg, *The craft of international history: A guide to method* (Princeton: Princeton University Press): 140-168.

Further reading:

The rest of *Digital Paper* is a very useful read - especially for those who expect to be working heavily with library-based sources, but in fact, for all researchers.

Week 6 (Feb 15): Interview research: purpose, preparation, and ethics

Mosley, Layna. 2013. “‘Just talk to people’? Interviews in Contemporary Political Science”. Introduction in Layna Mosley, ed. *Interview Research in Political Science*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press): 1-28.

Lynch, Julia. 2013. “Aligning sampling strategies with analytic goals”. Ch 1 in Layna Mosley, ed. *Interview Research in Political Science*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press): 31-44.

MacLean, Lauren. 2013. “The power of the interviewer”. Ch 3 in Layna Mosley, ed. *Interview Research in Political Science*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press): 67-83.

Mikecz, Robert. 2012 “Interviewing Elites: Addressing Methodological Issues”. *Qualitative Inquiry* 18(6): 482-493.

Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans, Ch. 1 (Ethics Framework). <https://ethics.gc.ca> (click on English then “Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans – TCPS 2 (2018)”)

[review for those who were in Anderson’s 9501 last term]

** no class on March 1 **

Week 7 (Mar 8): Workshop I: designing an interview protocol

Leech, Beth. 2002. "Asking Questions: Techniques for Semistructured Interviews". *PS: Political Science and Politics* 35(4): 665-668.

van Thiel, Sandra. 2014. "Interviews." Section 8.4 of Chapter 8 in *Research Methods in Public Administration and Public Management: An Introduction*. 1st ed. London, UK: Routledge, pp.93-100.

Solarino, Angelo M., and Herman Aguinis. "Challenges and best-practice recommendations for designing and conducting interviews with elite informants." *Journal of Management Studies* 58.3 (2021): 649-672.

In this workshop, you will work in small groups to develop a script and protocol for a semi-structured interview. The research objectives and anticipated interview subjects will be given to you as part of the workshop instructions. We will then review, compare and critique the interview scripts produced.

Week 8 (Mar 15): Field research, ethnography and observational research

Kapiszewski, Diana, Lauren M. MacLean, and Benjamin L. Read. 2015. Chapter 1 in *Field research in political science: Practices and principles*. Cambridge University Press.

Wood, Elizabeth Jean. 2006. "The Ethical Challenges of Field Research in Conflict Zones". *Qualitative Sociology* 29: 373-386.

Allina-Pisano, Jessica. 2009. "How to tell an axe murderer: An essay on ethnography, truth, and lies." In Edward Schatz, ed., *Political Ethnography: What Immersion Contributes to the Study of Power*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press): 53-73.

*Schwartz-Shea, Peregrine and Samantha Majic, eds. 2017. "Symposium: Ethnography and Participant Observation: Political Science Research in this "Late Methodological Moment". *PS: Political Science and Politics* 50(1).

- Read contributions by Schwartz-Shea and Majic, Forrest, Brodtkin, Schatz and Kang.

Wolfinger, Nicholas H. 2002. "On writing fieldnotes: strategies and background expectancies". *Qualitative Research* 2(1): 85-95.

Week 9 (Mar 22): Approaches to qualitative data analysis

Abbott, Andrew. 2014. *Digital Paper: A Manual for Research and Writing with Library and Internet Materials*. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press).

- Read Chapter 9 (“Midphase Analysis”).

Gibbs, Graham. 2018. *Analyzing qualitative data (2nd ed)*. (London: SAGE Publications).

- Read Chapters 2 and 3.

Kapiszewski, Diana, Lauren M. MacLean, and Benjamin L. Read. *Field research in political science: Practices and principles*. Cambridge University Press, 2015.

- Read Ch 10 (“Coding and analyzing data in the field”) – read pp. 332-348 and skim the rest of the chapter.

*Herrera, Yoshiko M. and Bear F. Braumoeller. 2004. “Symposium: Discourse and Content Analysis”. *Qualitative methods*, 2(1). Read the piece by Hardy, Harley and Phillips (pp. 19-21).

Week 10 (Mar 29): Workshop II: Qualitative coding with NVivo

Gibbs, Graham. 2018. *Analyzing qualitative data (2nd ed)*. (London: SAGE Publications).

- Read Chapter 4, Chapter 6 (up to ‘models’ only), Chapter 8, Chapter 9 (skip discussions of programs other than NVivo in Chapters 8 and 9), Chapter 7.

In preparation for this workshop, I will make available to you a set of interview transcripts from old research of mine. You will import these into your copy of NVivo and work through the following set of basic NVivo tutorials before the class:

<https://www.qsrinternational.com/nvivo-qualitative-data-analysis-software/support-services/customer-hub/getting-started/nvivo-tutorials>

Week 11 (Apr 5): Multimethod research: why and how?

Goerz, Gary. 2016. "Multimethod Research". *Security Studies* 25(3): 3-24.

Seawright, Jason. 2016. "Better Multimethod Design: The Promise of Integrative Multimethod Research". *Security Studies* 25(3): 42-49.

Lieberman, Evan. 2015. "Nested analysis: towards the integration of comparative-historical analysis with other social science methods". Chapter 9 in James Mahoney and Kathleen Thelen, eds. *Advances in Comparative-Historical Analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 240-263.

Seawright, Jason. 2016. "Multi-Method Case Studies". Chapter 8 in Jason Seawright, *Multi-Method Social Science: Combining Qualitative and Quantitative Tools* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press): 171-191.

Further reading:

Lieberman, Evan. 2010. "Bridging the Quantitative-Qualitative Divide: Best Practices in the Development of Historically Oriented Replication Databases". *Annual Review of Political Science* 13: 37-59.

Humphreys, Macartan and Alan M. Jacobs. 2015. "Mixing Methods: A Bayesian Approach." *American Political Science Review* 109 (4): 653-73.

In addition, those interested in multi-method work should read more of *Multi-Method Social Science*.