Qualitative Research Methods

Professor Jack S. Levy
304 Hickman Hall; (732) 932-1073;
jacklevy@rci.rutgers.edu
http://www.rci.rutgers.edu/~jacklevy/
Office Hours: Tuesdays 11-1pm & by appointment

This is a combination of a research seminar and course in research design. The research design component will focus on qualitative methods. The research seminar component is open as to method. Students will present a research design on a topic of their choice, utilizing any method or combination of methods they think is appropriate. More advanced students can present a more complete piece of research. The focus is empirical. All research projects in this seminar must involve the empirical testing/validation/exploration of a theoretical argument. Given the research focus, the seminar will not be open to first-year students. I hope that the seminar will be useful both to second year students who have just begun to think about a research project and to dissertation students who are more engaged in research. We have to go with existing course numbers, so the seminar will be listed under the course number PS627 and title “Topics in International Politics.”

Many things motivated me to develop this course, but three stand out. First, too many students in our program (and in some other programs as well) get to the dissertation stage without having done any research, with negative consequences for the dissertation and for the student's future job prospects. Second, I believe that research design is potentially the single most important course students can take in graduate school. The research design component of our first year methods sequence is very good, as is the entire sequence. The research design section is conceived, as it should be, as a survey of different methodological approaches, but that does not allow enough time to go into depth into any particular approach. The Department offers several statistics courses and a couple of courses on rational choice modeling. It has no course on qualitative methods, although topics falling within that broad subject may be covered in various courses.

My third motivation in developing this course is to expose students to selected topics in qualitative methodology, a topic that has been attracting increasing attention in the discipline, particularly in the last few years. That interest is reflected in increasing methodological self-consciousness in qualitative research, in articles and books on qualitative methodology, in the new section of the American Political Science Association on Qualitative Methods, and in the emergence of the Training Institute on Qualitative Research Methods (IQRM) at Arizona State University. A more personal indicator of the growing interest in qualitative methods is that over the last couple of months I have been asked to write four different essays on qualitative methods.

But let me repeat. The qualitative methods focus pertains only to the "research design" component of the course. Student research projects can utilize any method.
Let me emphasize that this course is not a broad survey of qualitative methodologies. For one thing, the field of qualitative methodology incorporates a vast range of topics, and we do not have the entire semester to devote to them. Given the need to be selective, I have decided to focus primarily on those subjects getting most attention at the IQRM training institute, which I think reflects the new wave of work on qualitative methodology that is beginning to impact many fields in the discipline, especially comparative politics and international relations. More specifically, the focus is primarily on what might be labeled "positivist methods," broadly defined, with considerably less attention to "interpretivist" methods (though I am not convinced that the two are as incompatible as is often asserted). I have scheduled one guest lecture on interpretivist methods, and have another speaker on the subject of “measuring identity.”

The course will have two formal requirements:

1) Each student will present a research design. Ideally, I am looking for something like a dissertation proposal or grant proposal. My expectations will vary depending on the student's status in the program. I assume that advanced students will present their dissertation research, but the presentation of another research project would also be acceptable. The research design should include a statement of the question or puzzle you want to investigate, a survey of the literature and its limitations, your preliminary explanation for the puzzle, and your design for bringing empirical evidence to bear on your theoretical argument.

2) A written version of the presentation, one that incorporates feedback from the presentation.

As for grades, figure 30% presentation, 70% written version. In addition, the quality and quantity of contributions to class discussion will have a decisive effect on borderline grades.

Auditors are encouraged, but not required, to present a research design.

Required Books (at Douglass bookstore)


COURSE OUTLINE AND READING

This is tentative, and may change depending on speakers.

1. Course Introduction (January 17)

Course description

Sociology of the profession

2. (January 24) no meeting

3. Philosophy of Science (January 31)

Social Science and History


The Covering Law Debate in Historiography


4. **Philosophy of Science - Evaluating Theories** (February 7)


George and Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*, chap. 12.

Optional

If you have not read selections from Popper and Kuhn, you should do so before you take your exams or go on an interview.


5. **Causal Explanations** (February 14)

**Conceptions of Causality**

King, Keohane, and Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry*, chap. 3.

George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*, chap. 7.


**Optional**


**Counterfactuals**

Optional


**Complex Causation**


Optional


**Threats to Validity**


6. **Case Study Research Designs – I (February 21)**

George and Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development*, chap. 1 (plus preface), 3-6, 8-9


Optional


Donald Campbell, 1975. “‘Degrees of Freedom’ and the Case Study.” *Comparative Political Studies* 8: 168-93.


7. **Case Study Research Designs – II (February 28)**

**Critique of Mill’s Methods**


**Case Selection**


**Optional**


Process-Tracing

George and Bennett, Case Studies and Theory Development, chap. 10.

Typological Theory

George and Bennett, Case Studies and Theory Development, chap. 11.

8. Interpretivism (March 7)

Speaker: Jan Kubik


King, Keohane, and Verba, Designing Social Inquiry, pp. 36-43.


Spring Break (March 14)

9. no meeting (March 21, ISA)

10. no meeting (March 28, post-ISA)

Reading: Brady and Collier, Rethinking Social Inquiry
11. **Concepts and Measurement** (April 4)

presentation: David Mislin, "From Reds to Rogues: How Americans Identify Threats"

King, Keohane, and Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry*, chap. 5.


Optional


12. **Complex Causation** (April 11)

**Two-Level Theory**


**Macro-Historical Comparisons, Critical Junctures, and Path Dependency**


Optional


**Boolean Approaches**

Charles Ragin, *The Comparative Method*, chap. 6-8.

**Fuzzy Set Approaches**


**Optional**


13. **Multi-method research** (April 18)

speaker: Patricia Young

**Multiple Paths to Knowledge**


Sidney Tarrow, “Bridging the Quantitative-Qualitative Divide.” In King, Keohane, and Verba, chap. 10.

King, Keohane, and Verba, “The Importance of Research Design.” In King, Keohane, and Verba, chap. 11.
Multi-method Approaches


Analytic Narratives


Optional


Applications

George and Bennett, Case Studies and Theory Development, chap. 2.


Optional


Presentation:

Donald S. Sylvan, “Measuring Identity in the Study of Israeli-Palestinian Relations”

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Other Presentations (week to be decided)

Patricia Young
David Mislan
Additional Sources


