Western Michigan University  
Spring Semester 2006  
Syllabus for Political Science 6900  
Qualitative Methods (Call No. 12446)

Instructor of record  
Sybil Rhodes  
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Office hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays, 12:00-2:30 pm, and by appointment

Co-instructors  
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Course location and meeting time  
Wednesday evenings, 6:30-9:00 p.m.  
Seminar room, Department of Political Science, Friedmann Hall

Course description  
Over the past few years, political scientists have conducted a lively and often raucous  
debate about the relative value of different methods in our discipline. One of the positive effects  
of this debate has been a new emphasis on the value of graduate courses on qualitative methods.  
(Not too long ago, the phrase “methods classes” was used to refer solely to traditional courses on  
statistical analysis.) The development of the present seminar is both a response to this movement  
and a reflection of our department’s commitment to methodological pluralism, communication  
across the disciplinary subfields, and scholarly rigor. Our principle objectives for the course are  
1) to expose students to the most recent methodological discussions in our discipline, and 2) to  
promote methodological innovation and provide opportunities to enhance the overall caliber of  
qualitative research done in our department.

Our first task in the course will be to identify the major terms of the most recent  
methodological debates about qualitative research design and issues of inference and  
interpretation. We next take a closer look at some issues surrounding conceptualization and then  
turn to a variety of approaches to data collection and data analysis.

Course requirements  
Class participation (25% of final grade)  
Participation in each seminar meeting is essential. Each week one or two students will  
serve as co-discussant/s, meaning you will help lead the discussion for that week. Your  
performance as a co-discussant will be reflected in your overall participation score. An instructor  
may choose to contact you prior to the class meeting to coordinate your leadership of the  
discussion. If you do not coordinate earlier, plan to meet with the instructor in charge of the  
discussion for your week twenty minutes before class begins on your assigned day.

Please note that the workload in this class is designed to help you develop and refine your  
own viewpoint with regard to methodological debates and improve your own research; for this  
reason, we are not requiring weekly summaries of the readings or other typical assignments. We
do, however, expect that you will fulfill your professional obligation to complete the readings and come to class prepared to comment on them. Failure to participate and contribute to the class will substantially affect your grade.

**Memo about your interest in the course (1-2 pages) (5% of final grade)**

This memo is due the second week of the course. It should outline your substantive research interests and explain any preliminary ideas you may have about a research design involving qualitative methods. You also may wish to include questions or comments about general issues surrounding qualitative research. In other words, let us know what you most would like to get out of the course.

**A short qualitative research design (3-5 pages) (20% of final grade)**

This short paper is due the seventh week of the course. It should present a more developed discussion of your qualitative research design in progress. Be sure to include an explanation of the theoretical and substantive importance of your proposed research and a tentative bibliography.

**A complete qualitative research design with methodological literature review (20-25 pages) (50% of final grade)**

This paper is due on Monday, April 24, at 5 pm. It must include a well-developed section in which you defend your chosen use of qualitative methods and respond to possible criticisms and concerns from the various schools of thought about methods that we cover in the course. In other words, the paper should include a methodological “literature review” that includes references to works we have read in the class as well as others you have identified as significant for your own work. In defending your own choice of a methodology, this review must take active positions with regard to some of the methodological issues that we cover in the class. This assignment also should include comments on the methodologies employed in several of the most important existing works that are relevant to your own topic (particularly works whose conclusions you wish to build upon, refine, or refute). It is strongly recommended that you write a piece of this assignment each week in sequence with our coverage of the various issues and approaches in the class.

**Alternative assignment (2 methodological critiques of 10-12 pages) (70% of final grade)**

A small subset of students who have not yet begun their own research projects for understandable reasons (e.g., students beginning their first semester of graduate study) may elect to write two critiques of existing works that employ qualitative methods in lieu of the short and long research design papers. Students who wish to exercise this option must obtain approval from the instructors by the third week of class.

**Required readings**

The four books listed below are required are available at the Bernhard Center bookstore. All other required readings will be made available through an online course reader or through other arrangements we will discuss in class.


**Academic integrity**
All students are responsible for being aware of and understanding the policies and procedures in the Graduate Catalog (pp. 24-26) that pertain to academic integrity. Consult the instructors prior to the submission of an assignment if you are uncertain about an issue of academic honesty.

**Course schedule**

1. January 11
   Introductions. Overview of course. Sign up for co-discussant dates.
   Discussion leaders: Emily Hauptmann, Susan Hoffmann, Sybil Rhodes

   **I. Debates about research design, inference, and interpretation**

2. January 18
   The place of qualitative methods in the discipline today.
   Discussion leaders: Emily Hauptmann and Sybil Rhodes

   *Course interest memo due.*

**Required reading**

**Recommended reading**

3. January 25
   KKV’s challenge to qualitative researchers. Two methods, one logic of inference?
   Discussion leader: Sybil Rhodes

**Required reading**

**Recommended reading**
The reviews of KKV published in the June 1995 issue of APSR.  

4. February 1
Qualitative positivists’ challenge to KKV.
Discussion leader: Sybil Rhodes

**Required reading**
*Note the useful glossary of methodological terms.*

**Recommended reading**
*On selection bias*
Ian Lustick. 1996, “History, Historiography, and Political Science: Multiple Historical Records and the Problem of Selection Bias.” *APSR* 90(3)

*On Bayesian inference, multiple causality and the cases versus variables question*

5. February 8
Interpretivist methods: introduction and overview
Discussion leader: Emily Hauptmann

**Required reading**
Symposium on interpretivism. 2003. *Qualitative Methods: Newsletter of the APSA Organized Section on Qualitative Methods.* (Fall) 2-28.  

**Recommended reading**

6. February 15
Examples of interpretive methods.
Discussion leader: Emily Hauptmann

Required reading

Recommended reading

II. Issues surrounding conceptualization

7. February 22
Concept formation
Discussion leader: Sybil Rhodes

Short qualitative research design due.

Required reading

Recommended reading

March 1: No class (spring break)

8. March 8
Ordinary language and symbolic analysis.
Section leader: Emily Hauptmann

**Required reading**

**Recommended reading**

March 15
No class because of instructors’ conference participation. Please use this time to complete the readings for our two class meetings next week.

9. March 22
Process tracing and typological theory.
Discussion leader: Sybil Rhodes

**Required reading**

**Recommended reading**

**III. Approaches to data collection and analysis**

10. March 24 (Special Friday session: 5-7:30 pm, possibly followed by dinner outing)
Survey research and focus groups.
Guest speaker: Carlos Gervasoni (Universidad Torcuato Di Tella; Universidad Católica Argentina; University of Notre Dame)

**Required reading**
Recommended reading


11. March 29
Elite interviewing
Discussion leader: Susan Hoffmann

Required reading


Required reading:


12. April 5
Non-participant observation.
Discussion leaders: Susan Hoffmann and Sybil Rhodes

Required reading


Recommended reading

13. April 12
Archival and textual analysis
Discussion leaders: Emily Hauptmann and Sybil Rhodes

**Required reading**

**Recommended readings**

14. April 19
Grounded research
Discussion leader: Susan Hoffmann

**Required reading**
Anselm Strauss. 1987. *Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (Chs 1, 3 and 5)

**Recommended reading**

15. Exam week
Complete qualitative research design due Monday, April 24th, 5 pm.