Syllabus
PSCI 6900: Qualitative Methods (CRN 15579)
Spring 2013

Professor:
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Phone: 387-5692
Email: susan.hoffmann@wmich.edu
Office hours: Mon: 3:30-5:30, Thurs: 2-4, and by appointment

Class meetings: Thursday, 4 to 6:30 pm, PSCI conference room

Course description:
This seminar is designed to acquaint students of political phenomena with a variety of strategies for research design, data collection, and data analysis which are empirical, but do not rely centrally on quantification. I have three goals in view. First, to gain a working knowledge of alternative strategies: What possibilities and problems do various qualitative methods hold for particular kinds of questions? Secondly, there is a “how-to” component: how does one implement a research design, that is, actually gather data and analyze it? That said, we will not train intensively in any one approach to data gathering and analysis. We are trading depth for breadth, and even so, we will not get to all of the promising, interesting strategies and techniques political scientists may deploy productively. Recommendations for further reading are included, so each of you may begin to develop intensive expertise in areas of your choosing. Third, we will identify and discuss some of the larger questions of the meaning, logic, and conduct of inquiry in social science. Throughout the course, we will remain cognizant of questions that underlie methodology including ontology, epistemology, standpoint, politics and sociology of knowledge, ethics, and validity.

Reading:
I have ordered the following books through the WMU bookstore:


Journal articles assigned are available on the web through the WMU library for the most part. Book chapters, unpublished pieces or otherwise difficult to access materials will be on elearning.
Course requirements:

*Weekly questions and in-class participation (10% of final grade):*
This course is a seminar and I have included a wide range of material in an effort to meet various needs and interests. I know some of this material well and have experience with some of the strategies, but I have not implemented all of the techniques nor read all of this literature. We are in this together and your help is required! Please come to each class meeting prepared to discuss the reading. *Please write one or two questions that you can raise during the discussion.* You can introduce your questions at appropriate points in the discussion and I may ask you now and then what question you’d like to put on the table. I will collect your questions each week when you leave. Please type these; handwritten submissions will not be accepted.

*Co-discussion leader (10% of final grade):* Each student will sign up for a week as co-discussion leader with me. Plan to visit my Monday office hours the week you are up. *Have the reading done and bring, on paper, your ideas about how the discussion of the material can proceed.* Include the main topics in the reading and questions we might use to highlight those topics and get the conversation moving. Sign-up for a co-discussion date will be during the second seminar meeting. Some weeks are not eligible and will be so indicated on the sign-up form.

*15 minute presentation (15% of final grade):*
Please select a substantive study (article or book) to present which relies on a research design or data gathering technique covered in the course. This study may not be a required reading for the course, but you may choose one of the suggested readings; you may also present a work that is not on our syllabus, perhaps a piece you are reading in another seminar or something from the reading list for a comprehensive exam. I’ll start circulating a sign-up sheet in Week 2 on which to specify your study and identify the session in which it falls. (A couple of the weeks do not lend themselves to this approach and will not be eligible choices.) Please plan to finalize your choice by January 31. I want one presentation per class (not multiple presentations on the same day), so first person to sign up for a particular week will have it. Criteria for evaluating the presentation include clarity, keeping formal remarks within the 15-minute time limit, and content (the question of your study and the researcher’s conclusion, the design or data gathering technique used in the study, *how* the technique is implemented and supports the conclusion). Please provide a little handout or write on the board to help us follow your talk.

*HSIRB training (5% of final grade):*
Please complete the on-line HSIRB training before the class in which it is covered and turn in evidence of completion in class. If the assignment is late, you will receive a score of 0 for the assignment. Nevertheless, you must complete the training. If the training is not completed, you will receive an incomplete for the course.

*Two papers (Each for 30% of final grade):*
Please write two 6-8 page papers. Each is to be a critique, with an emphasis on a methodological evaluation of substantive findings, of two research pieces (books or articles) dealing with the same substantive question in different ways. (Pieces selected may not be on the required list for this course and may not include the article or book you presented in class.) What I want is a critical look at how the same question can be approached empirically in different ways.
The first paper should focus on two studies that use different types of research design (e.g., case study, comparative cases, historical, comparative historical, natural experiment, large N…). The second paper should focus on studies deploying different data collection and analysis strategies (elite interviews, participating or non-participating observation, focus group, survey…). While the substantive studies you use will not be from required course reading, the methodological literature to which you refer shall be from among our required and recommended readings; please refer to a minimum of three methodological readings.

At least one study considered in each paper must rely primarily on qualitative methodologies, and all of your studies may be qualitative. If you pick a study with a quantitative methodology for comparison, take care to make your discussion crystal clear to a reader who does not do high-powered quantitative work. I have training in quantitative methods, but it’s been a long time since I’ve used anything beyond descriptive statistics.

In choosing studies for these two assignments, I encourage you to draw upon work in your own field: use these papers as an opportunity to come to grips with studies that you may be able to use in literature reviews for masters theses, dissertation proposals, or grant applications; or use them as opportunities to scrutinize ways in which you may want to design your own research or gather and analyze data in your own projects.

First paper due March 14; brief presentation of this paper in class. Second paper due April 25.

**Grading scale:**

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<th>Grade</th>
<th>Score Range</th>
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<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>94-100</td>
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<td>BA</td>
<td>88-93</td>
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<td>B</td>
<td>83-87</td>
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<td>D</td>
<td>65-69</td>
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<td>E</td>
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**Academic integrity:**

Students are responsible for being aware of and understanding the policies and procedures in the Graduate Catalog that pertain to academic integrity. Consult the instructors prior to submission of an assignment if you are uncertain about an issue of academic honesty.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Topics</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1: Jan 10</strong></td>
<td>Overview of the course.</td>
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| **2: Jan 17** | What makes qualitative research “scientific?” The debate  
**Recommendations for further reading:**  
Henry E. Brady and David Collier, eds. *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards*. 2d ed. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield. *Note that there are two editions of this title. They have different chapters.*  
| **3: Jan 24** | **Concepts: Fundamental building blocks**  
**Example:**  
### Jan 24 (cont)

**Recommendations for further reading:**


### Part II: Research design as analytic framework

#### 4: Jan 31

**Cases I: Using a case to develop or test a theory**


*Example:*


**Recommendations for further reading:**


*Examples:*


#### 5: Feb 7

**Cases II: Using a case to analyze causal mechanisms**


*Example:*


#### 6: Feb 14

**Comparing cases I: Variables, correlation, and logics of control**

| Date: 7: Feb 21 | **Comparing Cases II: Configurations, typologies and logics of conjunction**  
**Examples:**  
**Recommendations for further reading:**  
|  | **Historical analysis**  
**Examples:**  


**Recommendations for further reading:**


James Mahoney. 2003. “Strategies of Causal Assessment in Comparative Historical Analysis.” Ch. 10 in Mahoney and Rueschemeyer, eds. *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences*.


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**Mar 4-8**

**SPRING BREAK**

**9: Mar 14**

**First paper due**

5-10 minute presentations of the first paper. What two studies did you select? What designs did they deploy? What did you conclude about how well the respective designs served the researchers’ purposes?

**Part III: Gathering and analyzing evidence**

**10: Mar 21**

**Entering the field: Purposes, identities, experiences and ethics**


HSIRB

Guest: Julia Mays, Research Compliance Coordinator, Office of the VP for Research, WMU

*Before class:* Complete web-based training for social and behavioral research (Group 1)

Available at: [https://www.citiprogram.org](https://www.citiprogram.org). Please complete the modules required for the basic course for social and behavioral researchers.

**Recommendations for further reading:**


**11: Mar 28**

**Being There: Participating and non-participating observation (ethnography)**


**Examples:**


**Recommendations for further reading**


Examples:


**Interviewing elites**


Examples:


**Recommendations for further reading:**


Symposium on elite interviewing in *PS: Political Science and Politics.* December 2002.


**Examples:**


13: Apr 11 **Focus groups**

**Examples:**

**Recommendations for further reading:**


**Examples:**


14: Apr 18 **Reading residues: Archival documents and other social artifacts (Secondary sources, still and moving images, audio recordings, architecture)**


*Example:*


**Recommendations for further reading:**


*Examples:*


**Thurs, Apr 25, 5-7 p.m.** **Final exam block**  There will not be a final exam, but 2nd paper is due.