SEMINAR ON QUALITATIVE METHODS

Deborah Larson
Office Hours M 12-1, Thursday 3-4

Course Description

The goal of this seminar is to enable students to create and critique the use of case studies for theory-building. The seminar will explore the uses and limitations of case studies, methods for conducting research, modes of inference, and types of research designs. The methodology should be relevant for students in the social sciences broadly—not only political science, but also sociology, public policy, public administration, economics, or urban planning.

The seminar will begin with a discussion of when researchers might want to use case studies as opposed to large-N quantitative studies or formal models. What are the uses and limitations of case studies for answering different types of questions? What is a case? We will next explore the importance of conceptualization as the foundation for qualitative research. We will then consider alternative qualitative methods for formulating and testing hypotheses, including cross-case comparison, process tracing, and the congruence method.

Based on these research tools, students should be able to formulate a research design using qualitative methods for a field paper, journal article, or dissertation. We will discuss how to choose and frame a research topic. The course will then consider alternative research designs, including “before-after,” deviant cases, crucial cases, or JS Mill’s method of agreement and difference.

Each week, along with the methodological articles, we will read and discuss an article in political science that illustrates one or more of the ideas or designs considered that week. Students are encouraged to bring other examples of case studies to class.

Course Requirements:

- Participate in seminar discussions.
- Present a critical précis of the readings for one week.
- Present a research design for a topic of your choosing to the class for feedback and comments at the last period (6-10 pages). The suggestions and class discussion should help you revise the paper for course credit. If you give me a rough draft, I will provide comments before the final submission.
- Submit a research design paper (6-10 pages) one week after the last class. The paper should be a plan for research. You do not have to carry out the research or present results.
Readings marked with an * are required; other citations are optional. Required journal articles will be available on the class web page.

Six books have been ordered from the bookstore and are suggested for purchase:


I. Introduction (October 1)

II. Philosophy of Science and Epistemological Issues (October 8)


*George and Bennett, Case Studies and Theory Development, 17-22.

*Brady and Collier, Rethinking Social Inquiry, chs. 2, 3. Consult glossary as needed.


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

III. Conceptualization (October 15)


IV. Comparative Case Studies (October 22)

*George and Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development*, pp. 151-62.


V. Single-Case Studies—Process Tracing and the Congruence Method (October 29)

*George and Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development*, chs. 9, 10 (181-232)


*Brady and Collier, *Rethinking Social Inquiry*, chs. 9, 10.


King, Keohane, and Verba, pp. 219-28.


VI. Case Selection and Selection Bias (November 5)

* King, Keohane, and Verba, Designing Social Inquiry, pp. 129-46.


* Brady and Collier, Rethinking Social Inquiry, ch. 5, 89-98.


Goertz, Social Science Concepts, ch. 7.


**November 12—Veteran’s Day Holiday**

VII. Research Design (November 19)

*George and Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development*, chs. 4 and 6, and pp. 166-67.


King, Keohane, and Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry*, 118-21, 176-84.


VIII. Historical Methods and Writing up the Cases (November 26)

*George and Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development*, ch. 5.

*Colin Elman and Miriam Fendius Elman, *Bridges and Boundaries: Historians, Political Scientists, and the Study of International Relations*, chaps. 11, 12, 15, 16.


IX. **Student Presentations of Research Designs** (December 3)

OTHER SOURCES:

Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research*

Taylor, *Introduction to Qualitative Research*

James Maxwell, *Qualitative Research Design*

Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin, *Basics of Qualitative Research*

A. Strauss, *Qualitative Analysis*