Course description

This graduate seminar introduces the analytic tools used in empirical political science research. We will focus on the methods of non-quantitative work, although we will also consider how scholars integrate qualitative and statistical analysis. The relevant material for understanding “qualitative methods” is vast. This class offers a sampler of prominent techniques and works, not a comprehensive survey of the field. Readings and discussions will focus on case selection, historical research, multi-method approaches, and fieldwork. Due to time constraints, ethnography and interviewing techniques will receive less attention.

Students taking the course are expected to arrive promptly, prepared for a lively discussion. Each week we will have two kinds of readings to discuss. The first will be the main texts, which I have selected in advance, covering research methods and qualitative analysis. The second type of reading, which we will turn to in the last hour of each week’s seminar, will be an article-length text of research (it can be a scholarly article, a book chapter, or something else) selected by a student in the class. Led by the student who chose the material, we will critique the text. This exercise will give enable us to assess the benefit of our other readings for evaluating works of interest. For a few seminar sessions, noted below, there will no choice of the week.

I consider full-time graduate study sixty hours of work per week; a seminar comprises fifteen hours of that load. Students should expect to spend an average of twelve hours per week on the readings and assignments, plus three hours in class. If at any time you feel you are devoting more than an average of fifteen hours per week to the seminar, or if you are experiencing extraordinary difficulty, come see me. At the end of the syllabus, I offer some suggestions on effective reading.
Grading and Assignments

Participation in first half of semester, 25%; Participation in second half of semester, 25%; Three book reviews, 30% total; Exam (May 1), 20%

Participation: A = 25/25; B = 22/25; C = 19/25. Students who play an active and respectful role in advancing discussion and show a careful understanding of the readings will receive an A in participation. Students who answer appropriately when called upon and periodically contribute without prompting will receive a B in participation. Students who appear unprepared for class or do not meaningfully advance seminar discussions will receive a C in participation.

Over the course of the semester students will write three 1200-word book reviews. At least one of the reviews must cover one of the example texts assigned for the class (marked with an * below.) At least one the reviews must be on a book the student has not previously read and that is not a required text for this course. Reviews on books assigned in class are due no later than 9am the day prior to the class in which the book will be discussed. For example, a review of Thad Dunning’s Crude Democracy would need to be submitted by 9am Monday, March 5.

Reviews should follow the style of Perspectives on Politics, the discipline’s primary forum for book reviews. As the Perspectives editor instructs prospective reviewers, reviews should “(1) carefully describe the central features of the book’s analysis and the logic and structure of its argument, and (2) assess the book’s contributions to its field(s) and the relevant theoretical literatures in this domain, and identify its major shortcomings and/or special contributions.” Each review will be worth ten points and graded based on the standards used in the field of evaluate published book reviews. An “A” review will be ten points. An “A-/B+” review will be nine points. A “B/B-” review will be eight points. A “C” review will be seven points.

There will be one, closed-book no-notes exam. It will be structured as a mock preliminary exam. Unlike in actual preliminary exams, however, I will present beforehand a list of questions from which the actual exam questions which be drawn. The exam will consist of two questions relating to research methods and qualitative analysis. Students will have four hours, from 9:30am until 1:30pm on Thursday, May 1, to compose their answers, on their own computers, and email them to me. Each question will be graded on a 10-point scale: a “passing” answer will be worth ten points, a “low pass” eight points, and a “failing” answer five points.
Books for purchase

Note: These texts are available from the University Co-Op or Amazon.com at the following link: http://www.amazon.com/Qualitative-Methods/lm/RW9L2YLAEEUT3


Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences (Boston, MA: MIT Press, 2005).


Week 1, January 17

Introduction: Why study methods?

In-class film: *Shattered Glass* (2003)

Week 2, January 24

Methods and theory: What do political scientists do?


Ian Shapiro, “Problems, Methods, and Theories in the Study of Politics, or What’s Wrong with Political Science and What to Do about It,” *Political Theory* 30(4), August 2002, 596–619.


**Week 3, January 31**

Case selection: What can we learn from a small number of examples?

John Stuart Mill, “Of the Chemical, or Experimental, Method in the Social Sciences,” from *A System of Logic* [1843], http://www.laits.utexas.edu/poltheory/mill/sol/sol.b06.c07.html.


Choice of the week: TBD by student

**Week 4, February 7**

The quantitative critique:: How can statistics inform qualitative research?


Choice of the week: TBD by student
Week 5, February 14

The rebuttal: What are the advantages of qualitative research?


Choice of the week: TBD by student

Week 6, February 21

The post-modern critique: What kind of knowledge should we be accumulating?


Choice of the week: TBD by student

Week 7, February 28

Multi-method research: What do we gain (or lose) by mixing approaches?


Choice of the week: TBD by student

**Week 8, March 6**

*Last day to submit first book review*

An example of multi-method research


Choice of the week: TBD by student

**SPRING BREAK. NO CLASS ON MARCH 13.**

**Week 9, March 20**

“Process tracing”: How do political scientists establish causality within cases?


Choice of the week: TBD by student
Week 10, March 27

Nuts and bolts of historical research: What do historians do?


Choice of the week: TBD by student


Week 11, April 3

*Change of venue:* We will convene at 9:30am in the lobby of the LBJ Library for an introduction by Senior Archivist Regina Greenwell

An example of archival research


Choice of the week: none

Week 12, April 10

Interviewing and fieldwork: How do we collect information from people?
Guest visit by Professor Glenn Frankel, Director of the UT School of Journalism


Glenn Frankel, “A Short Journey From Friend to Foe; Cities Linked by Attack Shared Hopes for Peace,” Washington Post, April 14, 2002


Recommended online exercise: Complete the IRB course for Group 1: Social/Behavioral Research.
http://www.utexas.edu/research/rsc/humansubjects/training/index.html

Choice of the week: none

Week 13, April 17

Last day to submit second book review

Examples of in-depth fieldwork (1).

Guest visit by Professor Boone

Choice of the week: none

**Week 14, April 24**

*Last day to submit third book review*

Examples of in-depth fieldwork (2).


Choice of the week: TBD by student

**Week 15, May 1**

Exam
Suggestions on Effective Reading

Graduate students have the seeming luxury of being able to spend large amounts of time reading texts. This work, however, should be as arduous as it is enjoyable. Letting information flit through your synapses, passive reading, can be a pleasant way to pass the time while basking in the glow of self-edification. Actually making sense of that information – and retaining those reactions for discussion a week later – can pose a stiffer challenge. Given the amount of reading we will do in this course, I recommend spacing out the readings in reasonable increments. Thoughtful reading takes time and energy. It is less taxing and more productive to read over several days than to compress all the reading into a couple of nights.

Next, think about what you are reading during the process; if you find yourself turning pages numbly, take a break, and then refocus on the author’s chain of thought. When reading look for the author’s argument and the evidence she uses to support it: What is the main claim she makes? With whom is she disagreeing? Then consider your reactions to the author’s work: Does this make sense to you? Why or why not? What are the weaknesses of the argument? Jot down thoughts you want to raise in class. Use highlighters only as a supplemental tool. Write your reactions to the text in the margins. Then archive your notes, such as by keeping a log on your computer – a useful way for returning to the information later when you are preparing for comps or composing a dissertation prospectus.

At some point after you have read, taken notes, and organized your notes, set them aside and see if you can summarize the author’s argument in a few sentences. You may then want to take five minutes and write down this summary, particularly if you are reading several different texts in a given week. Remember that the goal of close reading is not just to have touched the pages, but to be able to say something about the material and evaluate it.

Suggestions on Effective Writing

Read “Fussy Professor Starbuck’s Cookbook of Handy-Dandy Prescriptions for Ambitious Academic Authors or Why I Hate Passive Verbs and Love My Word Processor.” http://people.stern.nyu.edu/wstarbuc/Writing/Fussy.htm

I am grateful to Professor Charles Kurzman of the UNC-Chapel Hill Sociology Department (http://kurzman.unc.edu/teaching/) for linking to Professor Starbuck’s Cookbook.