



# Seminar: Introduction to Qualitative Methods

**2<sup>nd</sup> Term, Academic Year 2019-2020**

**Tuesdays, 09:00-11:00**  
**Seminar Room 2, Badia Fiesolana**

Instructor: [Jeffrey T. Checkel](#)

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Office Hours: Mondays, 10:00-12:00 (Please book a time through Adele Battistini.)

Registration: Not required. This is a compulsory seminar for all 1st-year researchers.

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## Description

This is a course about how to evaluate and conduct rigorous, epistemologically plural qualitative research. It will both introduce you to key concepts and methods – cause and case studies, positionality and ethnography, say – and show how they work in practice. Seminar sessions will be divided in two – a conceptual introduction and overview that is then followed by examples drawn from key topics and sub-fields within SPS. The goal is not for you to become methodologists, but to be smart consumers and users of qualitative methods in your own studies and reading.

The course has two parts. We begin with foundational issues. Methods can flow from different philosophical starting points, with process tracing and discourse approaches – for example – being quite distinct techniques for gathering and evaluating data. They draw upon contrasting epistemologies that attune them to certain types of research questions, while limiting their ability to shed light on others. In this first part, we also consider causation, theory and ethics in a similar way, tracing how differing philosophical assumptions shape their understanding and use – and their relation to method.

The bulk of the course is then an introduction to a number of qualitative methods. Each seminar session introduces a particular technique, provides a critical net assessment, and shows how the method works in practice. The latter is accomplished by drawing upon empirical research in the social and political sciences.

The seminar is worth 20 credits.

## Format

This is a reading intensive seminar, where the bulk of your effort will be reacting to / debating each week's assigned readings. Most weeks, I will get us started with a brief (30 minute) introduction to the topic/method at hand. However, the majority of each session will be devoted to class and group-based discussion and debate.

## Seminar Readings

- Books & Chapters in Books: Most books are available electronically from the EUI Library. In the reading list below, these are indicated by (**E-Book**). (The direct hyperlink to the book is provided whenever possible.)
- Difficult-to-Access Materials: This includes articles from newsletters, EU Commission documents, and books/chapters only available in paper format. Nearly all of these have been uploaded to SharePoint.
- Journal Articles: These are easily obtained electronically from the EUI Library.

If you encounter any problems accessing seminar readings, please contact Adele Battistini.

## Requirements

There are three mandatory requirements.

- 1) Seminar Debates/Discussions: Active participation in them.
  - ➔ With the exception of Week #1, this means all reading must be done before any given session.
- 2) Group Preparation of Discussion Points: Once or twice over the course of the term.
  - ➔ Group Composition: There are 37 students. Please form five groups with five members each, and two groups with 6 members. Each of the 7 groups should sign up as discussion leader for one of the 9 course weeks (Sessions 2-10, below). As there are more weeks than groups, two groups should take responsibility for 2 sessions each.
  - ➔ Group Assignment: If your group is responsible for a particular session, then you will take the lead in our discussions that day. For this to work, please do as follows. By 1200/noon the day before our Tuesday seminar, upload to SharePoint your collectively agreed responses (5-7 pages, double-spaced) to a given week's discussion questions. And your responses can certainly go beyond the questions on the syllabus, raising other issues, or weaknesses, or points of controversy.
- 3) Critical Review: Due at the beginning of Week 9, 03.03.20.
  - ➔ It should be 5-7 pages in length (double-spaced). Choosing any topic or method covered in the syllabus, you will critically assess the current state of debate over, applications of, or the strengths and weaknesses of it. In preparing the review, you are required to read deeper into the relevant literature. It is not sufficient to summarize what we already have read and discussed in class!

In choosing your topic, be strategic. If you are a qualitative researcher, pick a method or topic (ethics, say) that will likely play a key role in your dissertation. If you are a quantitative researcher, perhaps choose one of the more frequently used qualitative methods (case studies or interviewing, say), so you can better evaluate research done in that tradition.

## Elective Term Paper

If you plan on submitting a term paper for the course, please consult with me no later than week #4 (28.01.20).

## Schedule

- Session 1 (7 January) – Philosophies of Social Science
- Session 2 (14 January) – Causation & Theory
- Session 3 (21 January) – Research Ethics
- Session 4 (28 January) – Case Studies
- Session 5 (4 February) – Comparative Historical Analysis
- Session 6 ( 11 February) – Process Analytics: Process Tracing & Social Practice
- Session 7 (18 February) – Textual and Discourse Analysis
- Session 8 (25 February) – Fieldwork and Ethnography
- Session 9 (3 March) – Interviewing
- \*\*10 March – No Class\*\*
- Session 10 (17 March) – The Cutting Edge: Mixed Methods & Research Transparency

## Seminar Topics & Readings

### Session 1 - Readings on Philosophies of Social Science

#### *Nuts and Bolts*

Wight, Colin, “Philosophy of Social Science and International Relations,” in Walter Carlsnaes, Thomas Risse and Beth Simmons, Editors, *Handbook of International Relations, 2nd Edition* (London: Sage Publications, 2013) – Chapter 2.

della Porta, Donatella and Michael Keating, Editors, *Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences: A Pluralist Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) – Chapters 1-2. ([E-Book](#))

Hopf, Ted, “The Limits of Interpreting Evidence,” in Richard Ned Lebow and Mark Lichbach, Editors, *Theory and Evidence in Comparative Politics and International Relations* (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) – Chapter 3.

#### *Applications*

Johnson, James, “Consequences of Positivism: A Pragmatist Assessment,” *Comparative Political Studies* 39/2 (2006): 224-52.

Hall, Peter, “Aligning Ontology and Methodology in Comparative Politics,” in James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer, Editors, *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) – Chapter 11. ([E-Book](#))

### Discussion Questions

- What is philosophy of social science and why does it matter?
- What is positivism? What is interpretism? How do they differ?
- How do these philosophical starting points shape the questions we ask and the theories we use?
- How do philosophical starting points influence our thinking about cause, theory, data, ethics and methods?

### Session 2 - Readings on Causation & Theory

#### *Nuts and Bolts*

Mahoney, James, “After KKV. The New Methodology of Qualitative Research,” *World Politics* 62/1 (2010): 120-147.

Van Evera, Stephen, “Hypotheses, Laws, and Theories: A User’s Guide,” in *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997) – Chapter 1. ([E-Book](#))

Bauböck, Rainer, “Normative Political Theory and Empirical Research,” in Donatella della Porta and Michael Keating, Editors, *Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences: A Pluralist Perspective* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) – Chapter 3. ([E-Book](#))

Hedstroem, Peter and Petri Ylikoski, “Causal Mechanisms in the Social Sciences,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 36 (2010): 49–67.

### *Applications*

Cox, Robert, “Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory,” in Robert Keohane, Editor, *Neorealism and Its Critics* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1986) – Chapter 8.

Price, Richard and Christian Reus-Smit, “Dangerous Liaisons? Critical International Theory and Constructivism,” *European Journal of International Relations* 4/3 (1998): 259-294.

### **Discussion Questions**

- What is cause? (There’s a simple question - ☺.)
- How do situated understanding, causal mechanisms, cause-effect, and correlation play (differing) roles in helping us explain and understand the social world?
- What are the roles of deduction and induction in theory development?
- What are the differences among normative, problem-solving theory and critical theory?
- What is the relation between theory and method?

### **Session 3 - Readings on Research Ethics**

#### *Nuts and Bolts*

European Commission, DG Research and Innovation, “[Ethics in Social Science and Humanities](#)” (Brussels: European Commission, October 2018).

Van Evera, Stephen, “Professional Ethics,” in *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997) – Chapter 6. ([E-Book](#))

#### *Applications*

Wood, Elisabeth Jean, “The Ethical Challenges of Field Research in Conflict Zones,” *Qualitative Sociology* 29/3 (2006): 373-86.

Cronin-Furman, Kate and Milli Lake, “Ethics Abroad: Fieldwork in Fragile and Violent Contexts,” *PS: Political Science & Politics* 51/3 (July 2018): 607-614.

### **Discussion Questions**

- How is the relation between epistemology and ethics?
- What are ethics and what roles do they play at different points in the research process?

- What are the ethical standards that social scientists *must* observe when producing and collecting data for their research?
- Do these standards need to be updated or modified given one’s research context – elite interviews in Brussels versus fieldwork among vulnerable populations (Roma in Hungary, say)?
- Ethics do not matter for quantitative researchers. Discuss.

#### **Session 4 - Readings on Case Studies**

##### *Nuts and Bolts*

George, Alexander and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005) – Chapters 1, 4-5.

Gerring, John, *Case Study Research: Principles and Practices, Second Edition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017) – Chapters 1-3, 5, 7-8, 11.

##### *Applications*

Blattman, Christopher, “Children and War: How ‘Soft’ Research Can Answer the Hard Questions in Political Science,” *Perspectives on Politics* 10/2 (2012): 403-413.

“Data Access and Research Transparency in the Qualitative Tradition” and “Transparency: The Revolution in Qualitative Research,” *PS: Political Science & Politics* 47/1 (2014): 43-53.

##### **Discussion Questions**

- What is a case study? What kinds of questions and puzzles is it especially helpful in answering?
- Case studies are always built on a processual, mechanism-based understanding of cause. Discuss.
- What does it mean to speak of validity and transparency in case study research?
- What are the narrative, methodological and data attributes of a rigorously executed case study?
- Are quantitative techniques incompatible with case studies?

#### **Session 5 - Readings on Comparative Historical Analysis**

##### *Nuts and Bolts*

Mahoney, James and Kathleen Thelen, Editors, *Advances in Comparative Historical Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015) – Chapters 1, 6, 8, 9 ([E-Book](#))

##### *Applications*

Gibson, Christopher, *Movement-driven Development: The Politics of Health and Democracy in Brazil* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2019) – Chapters 1, 4 ([E-Book](#))

##### **Discussion Questions**

- Comparative historical analysis (CHA) is a method uniquely well placed to capture temporal dynamics. Discuss.
- If case studies play key roles in CHA, what are the typical within-case methods employed by these scholars?
- What role do path dependence and critical junctures play in CHA?

- How would you recognize a critical juncture if it were to walk through the door?

## **Session 6 - Readings on Process Analytics: Process Tracing & Social Practice**

### ***Nuts and Bolts - Positivist***

Bennett, Andrew and Jeffrey T. Checkel, Editors, *Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015) – Chapters 1, 10, Appendix. ([E-Book](#))

Mahoney, James, “Mechanisms, Bayesianism, and Process Tracing,” *New Political Economy* 21/5 (2016): 493-499.

Zaks, Sherry, “Updating Bayesian(s): A Critical Evaluation of Qualitative Bayesian Inference,” Mimeo, Department of Political Science, University of Southern California (July 2019).

### ***Nuts and Bolts - Interpretive***

Pouliot, Vincent, “Practice Tracing,” in Andrew Bennett and Jeffrey T. Checkel, Editors, *Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015) – Chapter 9. ([E-Book](#))

Norman, Ludvig, “[Interpretive Process Tracing and Causal Explanations](#),” *Qualitative & Multi-Method Research: Newsletter of the American Political Science Association Organized Section for Qualitative and Multi-Method Research* 13/2 (2015): 4-9.

### ***Applications***

Schwartz, Rachel and Scott Straus, “What Drives Violence against Civilians in Civil War? Evidence from Guatemala’s Conflict Archives,” *Journal of Peace Research* 55/2 (2018): 222–235.

Pouliot, Vincent, *International Security in Practice: The Politics of NATO-Russia Diplomacy* (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2010) – Chapters 3, 4. ([E-Book](#))

## **Discussion Questions**

- What is process tracing and how does it differ from historical chronologies?
- What role do causal mechanisms and social practices play in process/practice tracing?
- What makes for a rigorous application of process tracing?
- For many, formalization (Bayesianism, set theory) is the cutting edge in process tracing. What are the pluses and minuses of such efforts?

## **Session 7 - Readings on Textual and Discourse Analysis**

### ***Nuts and Bolts***

Milliken, Jennifer, “The Study of Discourse in International Relations: A Critique of Research and Methods,” *European Journal of International Relations* 5/2 (1999): 225-54.

Neumann, Iver, “Discourse Analysis,” in Audie Klotz and Deepa Prakash, Editors, *Qualitative Methods in International Relations: A Pluralist Guide* (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008) – Chapter 5. ([E-Book](#))

Hopf, Ted, “Constructivism at Home,” in *Social Construction of International Politics: Identities and Foreign Policies, Moscow, 1955 and 1999* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002) – Chapter 1. ([E-Book](#))

## *Applications*

Epstein, Charlotte, *The Power of Words in International Relations: Birth of an Anti-Whaling Discourse* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2008) – Chapters 1, 5.

## **Discussion Questions**

- What is discourse as a method and how might it be useful for social science researchers?
- What role do social power and productive power play in discourse analysis?
- How would you recognize a good, systematic application of discourse methods if they were to walk through the door?
- Discourse analysis has an agency problem. Discuss.

## **Session 8 - Readings on Fieldwork and Ethnography**

### *Nuts and Bolts*

Kapiszewski, Diana, Lauren MacLean and Benjamin Read, *Field Research in Political Science: Practices and Principles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015) – Chapters 1, 3, 4, 7. ([E-Book](#))

Geertz, Clifford, “*Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture*,” in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (NY: Basic Books, 1973) – Chapter 1. ([E-Book](#))

Schatz, Edward, “Introduction: Ethnographic Immersion and the Study of Politics,” in Edward Schatz, Editor, *Political Ethnography: What Immersion Contributes to the Study of Power* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009) – Chapter 1. ([E-Book](#)) ([One-User License](#))

### *Applications*

Gusterson, Hugh, “Ethnographic Research,” in Audie Klotz and Deepa Prakash, Editors, *Qualitative Methods in International Relations: A Pluralist Guide* (NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008) – Chapter 7. ([E-Book](#))

Wood, Elisabeth Jean, “Ethnographic Research in the Shadow of Civil War,” in *Insurgent Collective Action and Civil War in El Salvador* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003) – Chapter 2. ([E-Book](#))

## **Discussion Questions**

- What is ethnography and how does it differ from conducting a case study?
- What is the difference between cultural ethnography and political ethnography?
- When can you ‘stop’ your ethnographic research?
- What matters more to an ethnographer: Interviews or participant observation?
- How does a researcher decide what is ethical when she is in the field?
- Access and positionality play key – and very differing – roles in ethnography. Discuss.

## **Session 9 - Readings on Interviewing**

### *Nuts and Bolts - Positivist*

Mosley, Layna, Editor, *Interview Research in Political Science* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013) – Introduction, Chapters 1, 3, 9 ([E-Book](#))

### *Nuts and Bolts – Interpretive*

Fujii, Lee Ann, *Interviewing in Social Science Research: A Relational Approach* (London: Routledge, 2017) ([E-Book](#))

### ***Applications***

Leech, Beth, Frank R. Baumgartner, Jeffrey M. Berry, Marie Hojnacki and David C. Kimball, “Lessons from the ‘Lobbying and Policy Change’ Project,” in Layna Mosley, Editor, *Interview Research in Political Science* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013) - Chapter 11 ([E-Book](#))

Fujii, Lee Ann, “Shades of Truth and Lies: Interpreting Testimonies of War and Violence,” *Journal of Peace Research* 47/2 (2010): 231–241.

### **Discussion Questions**

- What are the main types of interview techniques?
- In what ways are positivist and interpretive interviewing different?
- How does one deal with lies and dissimulation when interviewing?
- An interviewer (her gender, nationality, the questions she asks) always affects and changes the interviewee. Discuss.

## **Session 10 – Readings on The Cutting Edge: Mixed Methods & Research Transparency**

### **Mixed Methods**

#### ***Nuts and Bolts***

Lieberman, Evan, “Nested Analysis as a Mixed-Method Strategy for Comparative Research,” *American Political Science Review* 99/3 (2005): 435-452.

Ahmed, Amel and Rudra Sil, “When Multi-Method Research Subverts Methodological Pluralism - Or, Why We Still Need Single-Method Research,” *Perspectives on Politics* 10/4 (2012): 935-53.

#### ***Applications***

Symposium, “[Bridging the Gap? Connecting Qualitative and Quantitative Methods in the Study of Civil War](#),” *Qualitative Methods: Newsletter of the American Political Science Association Organized Section for Qualitative and Multi-Method Research* 6/1 (2008): 13-29.

Dunning, Thad, “Improving Process Tracing: The Case of Multi-Method Research,” in Andrew Bennett and Jeffrey T. Checkel, Editors, *Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015) – Chapter 8. ([E-Book](#))

Hopf, Ted and Bentley B. Allan, Editors, *Making Identity Count: Building a National Identity Database* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016) – Chapters 1, 2. ([E-Book](#))

### **Transparency**

Symposium, “Openness in Political Science,” *PS: Political Science & Politics* 47/1 (2014): 19-83.

Symposium, “[Data Access and Research Transparency \(DA-RT\)](#),” *Comparative Politics Newsletter: The Organized Section in Comparative Politics of the American Political Science Association* 26/1 (Spring 2016): 10-64.



Journal Editors' Transparency Statement (JETS) → <http://www.dartstatement.org/2014-journal-editors-statement-jets>.

Qualitative Transparency Deliberations → <http://www.qualtd.net/>

Monroe, Kristen Renwick, “The Rush to Transparency: DA-RT and the Potential Dangers for Qualitative Research,” *Perspectives on Politics* 16/1 (2018): 141-48.

### **Discussion Questions**

- Mixed methods are all the rage, but they are not easy to execute. Discuss.
- When is it appropriate to use a mixed-method design? When is it not?
- What are the epistemological foundations of the debate over research transparency?
- What are the pluses and minuses of using active citation and constructing a transparency index?
- There is no such thing as a free lunch in social science research: More effort devoted to research transparency means less time for theory development, ethics and the like. Discuss.