



Seminar: Introduction to Qualitative Methods

2nd Term, Academic Year 2020-2021

Mondays, 09:00-11:00
Seminar Room 2, Badia Fiesolana

For SPS researchers only

First Seminar Session: 11.01.21
Last Seminar Session: 15.03.21

Instructor: [Jeffrey T. Checkel](#)

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Office Hours: Mondays, 12:00-14:00 (Please book a time through Adele Battistini.)

Contact: Adele Battistini (Adele.Battistini@eui.eu)

Form of Instruction: This class will likely be held as a combination of on-line/Zoom and in-class/hybrid sessions – dependent on developments in the Covid pandemic.

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 (45 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. For the latter, we will split the class in two, with SPS Part-Time Professor [Caitlin Proctor](#) leading one of the groups.

Seminar Readings

Books to be read – mostly key sections - include the following.

- Bennett, Andrew and Jeffrey T. Checkel, Editors, *Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015)
- Fujii, Lee Ann, *Interviewing in Social Science Research: A Relational Approach* (London: Routledge, 2017)
- George, Alexander and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005)
- Gerring, John, *Case Study Research: Principles and Practices, Second Edition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017)
- Kapiszewski, Diana, Lauren MacLean and Benjamin Read, *Field Research in Political Science: Practices and Principles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015)
- Mahoney, James and Kathleen Thelen, Editors, *Advances in Comparative Historical Analysis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015)
- Mosley, Layna, Editor, *Interview Research in Political Science* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013)
- Van Evera, Stephen, *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997)