DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

Seminar: Intermediate Qualitative Methods

1st Term, Academic Year 2026-2027

Mondays, 9.00-11.00 (Seminar Rooms 2, 3, 4, Badia Fiesolana)

First Seminar Session: 28.09.26
Last Seminar Session: 30.11.26 / 07.12.26[1]

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Seminar Canvas Page: https://learning.eui.eu/courses/1106

Description

This seminar is an intermediate/advanced class on qualitative methods; it builds upon but goes beyond the SPS introductory qualitative methods course. We begin – Part I – with three sessions on foundational issues: philosophy and ethics. Philosophically, the action in recent years has been more at the level of ontology than epistemology; we thus consider the widespread adoption of relational ontologies and their implications for theory, method and ethics. For research ethics, we explore both its multiple meta-theoretical foundations (de-ontological / consequentialist / feminist / post-colonial) and its varying practice across qualitative and quantitative-computational methods and experimental designs.

In Part II – the seminar's core – we drill down and explore the contours and debates over a selection of key qualitative methods. These include sessions on field work and multi-sited approaches; interpretive interview methods (relational, life history, ethnographic); discourse textual methods (genealogical, critical, post-structural); and advanced methods for capturing process, albeit with the latter understood in quite different ways (Bayesian process tracing, practice tracing, following methods).

We conclude – Part III – by zooming back out from particular methods. One session thus explores the debate over research transparency and its implications for all qualitative methods. Our last meeting then zooms out to the level of practice, with researchers debating their operationalization of a qualitative method/topic in a half-day workshop.

[1] Depending on the seminar size and researcher preferences, our last class – the brainstorming workshop – may run for two sessions – hence the two possible end dates.

The seminar is worth 20 credits.

Learning Outcomes

- An understanding of the varying links among philosophy, research ethics and your choice and ethical use of a particular method/design.
- For the key qualitative methods – field work and multi-sited approaches; interpretive interview methods; discourse textual methods; advanced process methods – an appreciation of the method's content, its strengths and weaknesses, and its philosophical and ethical foundations.
- An understanding of transparency in its various meta-theoretical flavours and its growing importance for all qualitative methods.

Format

The class will be run as a seminar, where debate and discussion are the norm. For Sessions 2– 9, response memos – prepared by 1-2 researchers for each session – will inform and guide our debates. At the beginning of each session, we will use these memos, as well as input from other seminar participants to craft a 'bottom up' agenda for that day's topic and readings.

For session 10 – our brainstorming workshop – researchers take ownership of a particular qualitative method (post-structural discourse analysis, say) or topic (the ethics of on-line ethnography, for example), which are then debated and critiqued in 30-minute slots. The raw material for the workshop will be an 8-10 page essay – which is typically an elaboration of an earlier response memo.

Readings

Key texts for the seminar include the following.

- Bennett, Andrew and Jeffrey T. Checkel, Editors, *Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015)

- Cyr, Jennifer and Sara Wallace Goodman, Editors, *Doing Good Qualitative Research* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024)

- Der Derian, James and Alexander Wendt, Editors, *Quantum International Relations: A Human Science for World Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022)

- Fairfield, Tasha and Andrew E. Charman, *Social Inquiry and Bayesian Inference: Rethinking Qualitative Research* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022)

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

- Hansen, Lene, *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War* (London: Routledge, 2006)

- Iltis, Ana S. and Douglas MacKay, Editors, *The Oxford Handbook of Research Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024)

- Katzenstein, Peter J., Editor, *Uncertainty and its Discontents: Worldviews in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022)

- Procter, Caitlin and Branwen Spector, Editors, *Inclusive Ethnography: Making Fieldwork Safer, Healthier and More Ethical* (London: Sage Publications, 2024)

- Simmons, Erica and Nicholas Smith, Editors, *Rethinking Comparison: Innovative Methods for Qualitative Political Inquiry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021)

Seminar readings are accessible in a variety of ways.

- Books & Chapters in Books: Most books are available electronically from the EUI Library. In the reading list below, these are indicated by **(E-Book)**; this provides the direct hyperlink to the book.

- Journal Articles: These are easily obtained electronically through the EUI Library.

If you encounter any problems accessing seminar readings, please contact Pia Dittmar.

Requirements

There are three requirements; to receive credit for the seminar, you need a passing mark in all three.

1) **Seminar Discussions**: This is a PhD seminar, and your active participation on a regular basis is required and mandatory. I cannot stress enough the (pedagogic) importance of this requirement.

2) **Response Memos**: Each researcher must prepare two response memos, choosing from the topics and readings covered in two of the eight available sessions (2–9). Each memo should be three pages (double-spaced); it should assess, critique and raise questions on one or more of the readings for a given week.

   The memos should be circulated by 12.00/noon on the Friday before our Monday meeting. These memos – and their authors (☺) – will then guide and structure our discussions.

3) **Qualitative Methods in Action**: For our brainstorming workshop (session #10; Monday, 30 November / Monday, 7 December), each researcher should prepare an 8-10 page essay. For most of you, this longer essay will simply be an elaboration of an earlier response memo. These essays should be circulated by 12.00/noon on Friday, 27 November.

   Do not sweat these essays! They are intended as first efforts to make operational – in full draft form – some method (relational/ethnographic interviewing, say) or topic (the

tricky ethics of using social media and big data) about which you care deeply, or need for the thesis.

Schedule

- Session 1 (28 September) – Philosophy of Social Science / Relational Ontologies: Implications for Theory, Method & Ethics
- Session 2 (5 October) – Ethical Foundations: Consequentialist, De-Ontological, Feminist, Post-Colonial, Relational
- Session 3 (12 October) – Ethical Practices: Qualitative, Quantitative-Computational, Experimental
- Session 4 (19 October) – Accessing the Field: Multi-Sited Approaches
- Session 5 (26 October) – Interpretive/Immersive Interview Methods: Relational, Life History, Ethnographic
- Session 6 (2 November) – Discourse Methods: Genealogical, Critical, Post-Structural
- Session 7 (9 November) – Process Methods I (Critical-Realist/Neo-Positivist): Process Tracing, Bayesian Process Tracing
- Session 8 (16 November) – Process Methods II (Interpretive): Practice Tracing, Following Methods
- Session 9 (23 November) – Research Transparency & Qualitative Methods
- Session 10 (30 November / 7 December) – Qualitative Methods in Action: Brainstorming Workshop

Seminar Topics & Readings

Session 1 – Philosophy of Social Science / Relational Ontologies: Implications for Theory, Method & Ethics

Checkel, Jeffrey T., "Why "From Case to Phenomenon"? Reflections & Implications," in Maxine Both, Ophelia Nicole-Berva and Juliette Saetre, Editors, "Symposium – From Case to Phenomenon: Incorporating the Multi-Sited Approach in Political Science," *QMMR: Qualitative and Multi-Method Research* 23/1 (Spring 2025): 72-79.

Emirbayer, Mustafa, "Manifesto for a Relational Sociology," *The American Journal of Sociology* 103/2 (1997): 281-317.

Jackson, Patrick and Daniel Nexon, "Relations Before States: Substance, Process and the Study of World Politics," *European Journal of International Relations* 5/3 (1999): 291-332.

Katzenstein, Peter J., Editor, *Uncertainty and its Discontents: Worldviews in World Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022) – Chapters 1, 3. **(E-Book)**

Katzenstein, Peter J., "Theories, Models and Methods," in Katzenstein, *Entanglements in World Politics: The Power of Uncertainty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2026) – Chapter 3. **(E-Book)**

Murphy, Michael, "On Quantum Social Theory and Critical International Relations," in James Der Derian and Alexander Wendt, Editors, *Quantum International Relations: A*

Human Science for World Politics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022) – Chapter 12. **(E-Book)**

Session 2 – Ethical Foundations: Consequentialist, De-Ontological, Feminist, Post-Colonial, Relational

Christensen, Garret, Jeremy Freese and Edward Miguel, "What Is Ethical Research?" and "Conclusion," in Christensen, Freese and Miguel, *Transparent and Reproducible Social Science Research: How to Do Open Science* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2019) – Chapters 2, 12. **(E-Book)**

Barnfield, Matthew, "Misinformation in Experimental Political Science," *Perspectives on Politics* 21/4 (2023):1210-1220 (https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592722003115).

Zanotti, Laura, "The Moral Failure of the Quest for Certainty," in James Der Derian and Alexander Wendt, Editors, *Quantum International Relations: A Human Science for World Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022) – Chapter 18. **(E-Book)**

Butti, Elena, "Safe and Ethical Ethnography: Looking Inwards," in Caitlin Procter and Branwen Spector, Editors, *Inclusive Ethnography: Making Fieldwork Safer, Healthier and More Ethical* (London: Sage Publications, 2024) – Chapter 2. **(E-Book)**

Lindemann, Hilde, "Feminist Ethics of Care and Responsibility," in Hilde Lindemann, *An Invitation to Feminist Ethics, Second Edition* (NY: Oxford University Press, 2019) – Chapter 6. **(E-Book)**

Simmons, Erica and Nicholas Smith, "Theory and Imagination in Comparative Politics: An Interview with Lisa Wedeen," in Erica Simmons and Nicholas Smith, Editors, *Rethinking Comparison: Innovative Methods for Qualitative Political Inquiry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021) – Chapter 13. **(E-Book)**

Session 3 – Ethical Practices: Qualitative, Quantitative-Computational, Experimental

Delamont, Sara and Paul Atkinson, "The Ethics of Ethnography," in Ron Iphofen and Martin Tolich, Editors, *Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research Ethics* (London: Sage Publications, 2018) – Chapter 7. **(E-Book)**

Fozdar, Farida and Mark Israel, "Sociological Research Ethics: Contributions and Controversies," in Ana S. Iltis and Douglas MacKay, Editors, *The Oxford Handbook of Research Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024) – Chapter 26. **(E-Book)**

Williams, Matthew, Peter Burnap, and Luke Sloan, "Towards an Ethical Framework for Publishing Twitter Data in Social Research: Taking into Account Users' Views, Online Context and Algorithmic Estimation," *Sociology* 51/6 (2017): 1149-1168.

Spector, Branwen and Theodora Sutton, "Social Media as Method," in Caitlin Procter and Branwen Spector, Editors, *Inclusive Ethnography: Making Fieldwork Safer, Healthier and More Ethical* (London: Sage Publications, 2024) – Chapter 9. **(E-Book)**

Desposato, Scott, "The Ethical Challenges of Political Science Field Experiments," in Ana S. Iltis and Douglas MacKay, Editors, *The Oxford Handbook of Research Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024) – Chapter 24. **(E-Book)**

Carpenter, Charli, Alexander Montgomery and Alexandria Nylen, "Breaking Bad? How Survey Experiments Prime Americans for War Crimes," *Perspectives on Politics* 19/3 (2021): 912-924.

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The references below provide state-of-the-art European and American efforts to operationalize core ethical principles for empirical social science, be it conducting research or publication. They are not required reading, but will likely be a valuable resource for your research going forward.

European Commission, DG Research and Innovation, "Ethics in Social Science and Humanities" (Brussels: European Commission, October 2018).

American Political Science Association, "Principles and Guidance for Human Subjects Research" (Washington, DC: Spring APSA Council Meeting, 4 April 2020).

American Political Science Review, "Submission Guidelines - Preparing Your Materials – Ethics."

Session 4 – Accessing the Field: Multi-Sited Approaches

Simmons, Erica and Nicholas Smith, Editors, *Rethinking Comparison: Innovative Methods for Qualitative Political Inquiry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021) – Chapters 1, 3, 6, 8, 12. **(E-Book)**

Both, Maxine, Ophelia Nicole-Berva and Juliette Saetre, Editors, "Symposium – From Case to Phenomenon: Incorporating the Multi-Sited Approach in Political Science," *QMMR: Qualitative and Multi-Method Research* 23/1 (Spring 2025): 24-79.

Session 5 – Interpretive/Immersive Interview Methods: Relational, Life History, Ethnographic

Wood, Elisabeth, Daniel Mattingly, Egor Lazarev, "Reflections on Teaching the Qualitative Field Research Class at Yale," *QMMR: Qualitative and Multi-Method Research* 23/2 (Fall 2025) (https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.17806822).

MacLean, Lauren, "The Power of the Interviewer," in Layna Mosley, Editor, *Interview Research in Political Science* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013) – Chapter 3. **(E-Book)**

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

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)**

Pearlman, Wendy, "Interviewing Vulnerable Populations," in Jennifer Cyr and Sara Wallace Goodman, Editors, *Doing Good Qualitative Research* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024) – Chapter 18. **(E-Book)**

Session 6 – Discourse Methods: Genealogical, Critical, Post-Structural

Weinstein, Tania Islas, "Discourse Analysis," in Jennifer Cyr and Sara Wallace Goodman, Editors, *Doing Good Qualitative Research* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024) – Chapter 35. **(E-Book)**

Vucetic, Srdjan, "Genealogy as a Research Tool in International Relations," *Review of International Studies* 37/3 (2011): 1295-1312.

Hansen, Lene, *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War* (London: Routledge, 2006) – Chapters 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. **(E-Book)**

Windfeld, Frederik Carl, Marius Hauge Hvithamar and Lene Hansen, "Gothic Visibilities and International Relations: Uncanny Icons, Critical Comics, and the Politics of Abjection in Aleppo," *Review of International Studies* 50/1 (2024): 3-34 (https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210522000547).

Session 7 – Process Methods I (Critical-Realist/Neo-Positivist): Process Tracing, Bayesian Process Tracing

Bennett, Andrew and Jeffrey T. Checkel, Editors, *Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015) – Chapters 2, 6, 7, 8. **(E-Book)**

Gonzalez-Ocantos, Ezequiel and Juan Masullo, "Aligning Interviewing with Process Tracing," *Sociological Methods & Research* 51/1 (2026): 219-67 (https://doi.org/10.1177/00491241241258229).

Fairfield, Tasha and Andrew E. Charman, *Social Inquiry and Bayesian Inference: Rethinking Qualitative Research* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022) – Chapters 1, 8. **(E-Book)**

Book Symposium: Tasha Fairfield and Andrew Charman. 2022. *Social Inquiry and Bayesian Inference*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, *QMMR: Qualitative and Multi-Method Research* 21/2 (Fall 2023): 51-77.

Session 8 – Process Methods II (Interpretive): Practice Tracing, Following Methods

Checkel, Jeffrey T., "Process Tracing – Between Broadening and Deepening," Methods Seminar, Department of Social Policy and Intervention, University of Oxford, May 2023.

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)**

Pouliot, Vincent, *International Pecking Orders: The Politics and Practice of Multilateral Diplomacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016) – Appendix. **(E-Book)**

Adler-Nissen, Rebecca and Alena Drieschova, "Track-Change Diplomacy: Technology, Affordances, and the Practice of International Negotiations," *International Studies Quarterly* 63/3 (2019): 531–545.

Marcus, George, "Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995): 95-117.

Kunz, Sarah, "Following the Expatriate: Theoretical and Methodological Starting Points," in Kunz, *Expatriate: Following a Migration Category* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2023) – Chapter 1. **(E-Book)**

Söderberg, Nora, "Multi-Sited Research Disrupted: Chokepoints and the Panama Canal," *Qualitative Research* 25/6 (2025): 1195-1215 (https://doi.org/10.1177/14687941241297515).

Session 9 – Research Transparency & Qualitative Methods

Rinke, Eike Mark and Alexander Wuttke, " Open Minds, Open Methods: Transparency and Inclusion in Pursuit of Better Scholarship," *PS: Political Science & Politics* 54/2 (2021): 281-84.

Jacobs, Alan, et al, "The Qualitative Transparency Deliberations: Insights and Implications," *Perspectives on Politics* 19/1 (2021): 171-208.[2]

Kapiszewski, Diana, "Research Transparency in Qualitative Inquiry," in Jennifer Cyr and Sara Wallace Goodman, Editors, *Doing Good Qualitative Research* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2024) – Chapter 37. **(E-Book)**

Kapiszewski, Diana and Elisabeth Wood, "Ethics, Epistemology, and Openness in Research with Human Participants," *Perspectives on Politics* 20/3 (2022): 948-964.

Session 10 – Qualitative Methods in Action: Brainstorming Workshop

No assigned reading; instead, all seminar participants should read and comment upon all workshop essays.

[2] While not required reading, the working group reports in Appendix 2 of the Jacobs' article provide excellent, meta-theoretically plural advice on operationalizing transparency for a broad array of qualitative methods.