

## PO 621—Qualitative Methods (Spring 2005)

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Office Hours: T 1:30-2:30; W 10-12; or by appointment

### Course Description

This seminar is an introduction to the use of qualitative methods in political science. Qualitative methods are not only appropriate to the study of politics, but are in fact used quite widely, particularly in certain subfields, such as comparative politics and public administration. Political scientists have been slow, in comparison to other disciplines, to reflect and write about their use of such methods. Yet the methods have clear standards for case selection, research design, and procedures for gathering and analyzing data. In the last decade, political scientists have begun to be more self-conscious about such standards and procedures, and this course is an introduction to that literature.

The seminar combines theoretical discussions with hands-on, practical experience. The course begins with a review of the broad political, philosophical and ethical debates surrounding the use of qualitative methods in political science. We then turn to questions of research design and funding for qualitative research. We will spend the remainder of the semester covering the “nuts and bolts” of qualitative research. Students will gain experience in three techniques for data gathering (interviewing, archival research, and participant observation). We will also examine a range of strategies for recording and analyzing qualitative data and writing up qualitative research results.

### Course Requirements and Evaluation

1. Seminar Participation: Class meetings will follow a seminar format. Regular attendance and thoughtful participation in class discussions will be integral to the success of the seminar. Students are expected to attend all seminar meetings and to complete all course assignments in a timely manner. Any exceptions should be cleared with the instructor, preferably in advance. 20% of final grade.
2. Weekly Thought Papers: Prior to each seminar meeting, students will prepare a one-page thought paper reflecting on issues raised in the week’s reading assignment and identifying topics for further consideration. Thought papers should be posted on WebCT no later than 5pm on the day before class meetings. Students should submit thought papers for at least 9 class meetings to gain full credit. 10% of final grade.
3. Field Exercises: Students will complete two of three field exercises associated with the different techniques for gathering qualitative data. For each exercise, students will prepare a 5-page analysis of their experiences to be discussed in class on the due dates. Specific guidelines for each field exercise to be handed out separately. 40% of final grade (20% each exercise).
4. Research Proposal and Presentation: As a final project, students will prepare a research proposal with a substantial qualitative research component. The topic should be selected in consultation with the instructor and the proposal will be tailored according to the guidelines of an appropriate funding organization. 30% of final grade.

**\*\*MISSING MORE THAN ONE CLASS AND/OR FAILURE TO COMPLETE ANY ASSIGNMENT ARE GROUNDS FOR A FAILING GRADE.**

## **Readings**

The following books have been ordered for the course and should be available in the bookstore.

Coffey, A., and Atkinson, P. (1996) *Making Sense of Qualitative Data*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Creswell, J. W. (2003) *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches, 2nd edition*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Fenno, J., Richard E. (1990) *Watching Politicians: Essays on Participant Observation*. Berkeley: Institute of Government Studies, University of California at Berkeley.

Hill, M. R. (1993) *Archival Strategies and Techniques*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

King, G., Keohane, R. O., and Verba, S. (1994) *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Rubin, Herbert J., and Irene S. Rubin. 2005. *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data, 2nd edition*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Strauss, A., and Corbin, J. (1998) *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory, 2nd edition*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE.

Yin, Robert K. 2003. *Case Study Research: Design and Methods, 3rd edition*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE.

Additional readings (marked with an \*) will be made available electronically through WebCT.

## **Tentative Schedule of Seminar Topics**

1/20: Qualitative methods in political science (no thought papers required)

1/27: Qualitative research design I

2/3: Qualitative research design II

2/10: Ethics/Getting Funded

2/17: Interviewing I

2/24: Recording and coding qualitative data

3/3: No class (International Studies Association meeting)

3/10: Interviewing II (Field Exercise #1 Due)

3/24: Archival research I

3/31: Analyzing qualitative data

4/7: Archival research II (Field Exercise #2 Due)

4/14: Participant observation I

4/21: Presenting qualitative data

4/28: Participant observation II (Field Exercise #3 Due)

5/5: Presentations of research proposals

5/11: Research proposals due