PS-694: QUALITATIVE & MIXED METHODS RESEARCH

Fall 2016
Class Day & Time: Monday, 10-12 pm
Classroom Location: 5664 Haven Hall

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Email: yuenang@umich.edu
Office Hours: Monday, 12-1 pm or by appointment

Version: September 10, 2016

Course Overview

This course introduces you to the epistemology and application of qualitative methods, as well as the design of mixed-methods research. Highlights of the course include: (1) exploration of a variety of approaches within QMMR (qualitative and mixed methods research), (2) particular attention on the practical mechanics of doing interviews and fieldwork, in addition to analytic concerns, (3) critical consideration of the criteria for evaluating the quality of qualitative research, including practices to achieve rigor and transparency, (4) overview of recent debates and innovations in QMMR.

Over the course of the semester, you will develop a dissertation or graduate-level project that employs QMM, to be presented on the last day of class. In order to practice some of the methods in this course, it is useful to have your own practice project in mind, even if it’s tentative or rough. Evolving a different project by the end of class is totally fine, and indeed, a sign of learning. But if you really can’t think of a project at the beginning, select an existing study and put yourself in the shoes of implementing it.

Assigned readings

All journal articles can be downloaded free from the UM library website. If only 1-2 chapters are assigned from a book, it will be scanned and posted on Canvas. Books below have more than 2 chapters assigned; you may either purchase or check them out from reserve at the library.

Assignments

- Attendance and Participation (20%)

Students are expected to complete readings, be coming to class, attend regularly, and participate constructively in class discussions.

- Weekly problem sets (50%)

A problem set is assigned every week, but you do not have to do all of them. My grading scheme is designed to reflect a trade-off between your quantity and quality of work.

This is how it works: I grade problem sets between 0-3 points. The grade for an average, reasonably good response is 2. If your paper is polished and exceptionally thoughtful, you may score up to 3 points. A total of 8.5 points equals a perfect and maximum score on your response paper assignment. This means that if you score an average of 2 points on your submissions, you will score a total of 8 points (or 94/100 points).

For each problem set, your response should be about two-pages, single-spaced. It cannot exceed 3 pages, single-spaced.

DUE: Thursday at 1 pm preceding class on Monday. For example, if you intend to submit a problem set for Week 2 (Sep 19), your submission is due on Thursday, Sep 15.

Post your response on Canvas (Assignment) with this title: PS_Week[n]_[lastname].

- Research proposal (30%)

Write and present a research proposal using qualitative and/or mixed methods, maximum of 3,000 words (including abstract, text and figures, but excluding references). State the word length at the end of your proposal. Graduate students are encouraged to use this opportunity to develop your dissertation or thesis project. You must consult with me during regular office hours or set up an appointment at least once during the semester. I urge you to do this sooner than later.

A research proposal addresses these three questions –

1) Your research question or objectives
2) Why it is important or worth studying
3) How you plan to answer the question. In particular, discuss the role of QMM in your project, and how you plan to implement your proposed methods.

DUE: December 14 (Wed), 5 pm. Post your response on Canvas (Assignment) with this title: 694_RP_[lastname].

General policies

Late policy: I do not accept late submissions for the response assignment. For the research proposal, I lower your grade by 10% for every day that your assignment is turned in late. Note that even if you’ve posted your paper only a few minutes late, I
consider that as late by a day. Unless you received prior approval from me, I will not accept your research proposal if it is more than three days late. Please double-check to make sure that your work has been posted on Canvas. Email me your work if you encounter technical problems.

Word limit policy: Please follow the word limit indicated for each assignment. It is intended to help you learn to write within a restricted space. I deduct points if you exceed the word limit.

**Grade Scale**

Final grades for the course will be determined as follows: A (95-100); A- (90-94); B+ (87-89); B (83-86); B- (80-82); C+ (77-79); C (73-76); C- (70-72).

In computing final grades, I do not round off. For example, 94.9 is A-, not A.
### Summary of Class Schedule

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<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Agenda</th>
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<td>1</td>
<td>9/12</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>9/19</td>
<td>What is the qualitative vs. quantitative divide really about?</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
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<td>Process-tracing and causal inference</td>
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<td>4</td>
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<td>Online participation (optional): 2nd Annual Mixed Methods</td>
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<td>Conference [to be confirmed]</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>10/24</td>
<td>Rigor and transparency in qualitative research</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>10/31</td>
<td>NO CLASS (replace with talk by James Scott, attendance optional</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>11/7</td>
<td>Mixed methods</td>
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<td>11/14</td>
<td>Mapping coevolution</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>11/21</td>
<td>NO CLASS (sign up for individual meetings to discuss project)</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>11/28</td>
<td>Guest speaker OR Proxy interviewing</td>
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Readings & Discussion

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Recommended readings


Discussion questions

First, introduction to course objectives, assignments, schedule, etc.

What do you understand by qualitative research? What purposes does qualitative research serve? How do we evaluate and achieve rigor in qualitative research?

List the sequence of steps in the process of a research project, from its inception to completion.

- Are these steps universal across projects? Or do they vary by one’s context of study, line of inquiry, research background, and so forth? What are the implications of this variance for your project as a graduate student?

- What unique role does qualitative research play in the sequence that you identify above? By comparison, what role does quantitative research play?

What makes a good research question? How do scholars come up with good questions?

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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>9/19</td>
<td>What is the qualitative vs. quantitative divide really about?</td>
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Required


Supplemental

Daniel Little, Varieties of Social Explanation: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Social Science 11–38.

Discussion questions

KKV argues that qualitative methods should be subject to the same logic and criteria of rigor as statistical methods. Do you agree? Why or why not?

Goertz & Mahoney argue that qualitative and quantitative methods constitute two "alternative cultures," "each has its own values, beliefs and norms" and "each is associated with distinctive research procedures and practices." Do you agree that the distinction between qualitative and quantitative methods concerns different "cultures"?

Brieman is a pioneer of machine learning methods, a statistical method that, instead of testing hypotheses that are preselected by humans, uses machine-based algorithms to uncover hidden patterns in data. In what ways does Brieman’s essay on “two cultures” challenge KKV’s position? How is his conceptualization of “two cultures” different from Mahoney & Geortz? What are the implications of his epistemology for the way we do research?

Problem Set WK#2

Write a response in clear prose on any one, two, or all three of the questions above.

| 3 | 9/26 | Process-tracing and causal inference |

Required
Bennett & Checkel, “Process-Tracing” (Chap 1), In Process Tracing: From Metaphor to Analytic Tool (Bennett & Checkel, eds.)
Geortz & Mahoney, “Within-case vs. cross-case” (Chap 7), A Tale of Two Cultures.

Supplemental
Bennett, “Disciplining our conjectures: systemizing process tracing with Bayesian analysis” (Appendix), In Process Tracing
Geortz & Mahoney, “Causal mechanisms and process tracing” (Chap 8) + “Counterfactuals” (Chap 9), A Tale of Two Cultures.
Paul Pierson, Politics in Time, Introduction, Chap 2 (Timing & Sequence), Chap 3 (Long-term processes)
Discussion questions

A core objective of qualitative research is to identify causal mechanisms within cases through process-tracing.

How should process-tracing be done? How can we distinguish between good and bad process-tracing? What best practices will you establish to evaluate the quality of process-tracing?

What are the strengths and limitations of cross-case and within-case causal analysis? How might these two types of analysis be combined in a single study? Dunning suggests a mixed-methods approach; what problems might one encounter in implementing this approach?

What is the role of temporality in process-tracing? Does process-tracing capture the effects/significance of temporality in ways that standard regression analyses do not?

Problem Set WK#3

Select two studies that address a similar theme/argument using process-tracing and statistical methods respectively. What are the relative strengths and limitations of each approach? How might these two approaches be combined in a single study?

Required

Clifford Geertz, “Thick Description” (Chap 1), The Interpretation Of Cultures.
Edward Schatz, “Ethnographic immersion and the study of politics” (Intro), in Political Ethnography.
James Scott, Preface + “Small Arms Fire” (Chapter 1), Weapons of the Weak
Alice Goffman, Preface + Chap 1, Fugitive Life in an American City.

Supplemental

Clifford Geertz, “Notes on the Balinese Cockfight,” The Interpretation Of Cultures.
Melani Cammett, “Using proxy interviews to address sensitive topics,” In Interview Research in Political Science.
Christina Chavez, “Conceptualizing from the Inside: Advantages, Complications, and Demands on Insider Positionality.” Qualitative Report 13, no. 3.
Discussion Questions

What does Geertz mean by “thick description,” as opposed to description in general? In other words, what makes a description “thick”? How is thick data different from big data?

What does ethnography seek to accomplish? How are its objectives different from last week’s literature on process-tracing and comparative historical analysis?

Why is positionality so important in ethnography? What should you know and do about positionality in your own research?

Problem Set WK#4

Select two studies that address a similar theme/argument using either (a) ethnography vs. process-trACING (as reviewed last week), or (b) ethnography vs. statistical methods respectively. Do different approaches arrive at different insights on the same issue? Is there room for combining these methods in a single study?

Required

Layna Mosley, “Introduction: Just talk to people?,” In Interview Research in Political Science (Mosley, ed.)

Martin, “Crafting interviews to capture cause and effect” (Chap 5), In Interview Research.

Appendix, Sample materials for interview research, In Interview Research.

Bleich & Pekkanen, “How to report interview data” (Chap 4), In Interview Research.


Supplemental

All the other chapters in Interview Research in Political Science are very useful. Read them if you can.

Kapiszewski, MacLean & Read, “Interviews, oral histories, and focus groups” (Chapter 6), Field research in political science.

Robert M. Emerson, Rachel Fretz, and Linda Shaw, Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes, Chap 2 (Jotting notes), Chap 3 (creating scenes), Chap 6 (Coding & Memo-ing).

YY Ang. “From building to preserving markets” (Chapter 5), How China Escaped the Poverty Trap.


**Discussion questions**

We will focus on the practical aspects of interviewing, that is, HOW to do interviews.

How to design interview questions: How do you translate research question into interview questions? How do you choose between open vs. semi-structured interviews? What if your respondents don’t follow your questions?

How to obtain interviews: Discuss different avenues of establishing contacts and their effects on your quantity and quality of interviews.

How to capture data from interviews: Oral responses in interviews are data—thick data—and must therefore be recorded, either digitally or through note-taking. (Some people find this surprising: “I thought you just talk and be done with it!”). If recording is not possible or desirable, how should we take notes? How should we organize interview transcripts in order to facilitate analyses and be transparent and accountable?

**Discussion questions (if we have time)**

How to process and code interview data: Once you’ve transcribed interviews, how do you process them? I will introduce qualitative analysis software as a pattern-sorting tool.

How should we cite interviews in our analyses: Consider different citation methods and their respective pros and cons; consistency is one key.

**Problem Set WK#5**

Option A: Focusing on your project, translate the key research question/s into a sample of interview questions. Specify who you will interview and why, as well as your strategies for reaching out to these respondents. Be as concrete as you can.

Option B: Focusing on your project, identify and justify your best practices for transcribing, organizing, and citing interviews. Be as concrete as you can.

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**Required**


Kapiszewski, MacLean & Read, *Field research in political science*, Chapter 3 (Preparing for fieldwork), Chapter 4 (Managing in the field), Chapter 10 (Retooling in the field).

Heimer, “Field sites and research design,” In *Doing Fieldwork in China*. 
Supplemental


Kapiszewski, MacLean & Read, *Field research in political science*, Chapter 8 (Surveys), Chapter 9 (Experiments).

Chapters on “Challenges of Interview Research,” In *Interview Research in Political Science* (Mosley, ed.)

Discussion questions

One often hears/reads about such claims: “I’ve done fieldwork in X.” But what exactly qualifies as fieldwork? Why should we do fieldwork? How should it be done?

How to prepare for fieldwork, especially your first field trip in a foreign context: What do you need to think about, plan, and do?

How to design fieldwork, especially as it coevolves with your research: How many trips should you make? How long each trip? What are your objectives each trip? How might fieldwork change your project, and as your project evolves, how do you adjust your fieldwork?

How to keep yourself safe during fieldwork, especially if you are a woman?

How to cope with challenges during fieldwork, especially in difficult environments: What challenges may arise during fieldwork, and how can you cope with them? What are some strategies for getting around socio-political restrictions and suspicion of outsiders?

Problem Set WK#6

Imagine that you’re writing a research grant for your practice project, and you must convince funders that you have a concrete, feasible, and thoughtful plan for conducting fieldwork. Write this fieldwork plan within the given page limits. Address the practical and logistical issues above (not all but some of them).

| 7 | 10/24 | Rigor and transparency in qualitative research |

Required

“Defining excellence in qualitative research: group report for political science,” NSF Report (2015), Workshop on Interdisciplinary Standards for Systematic Qualitative Research


Symposium on DA-RT in Comparative Politics Newsletter, Spring 2016.
Browse website “Qualitative Data Depository” at https://qdr.syr.edu/deposit.

Browse ICPSR website, “Guide to data preparation and archiving,” https://www.icpsr.umich.edu/icpsrweb/content/deposit/guide/chapter3qual.html

Supplemental

Ragin, Nagel & White, NSF (2003), Report on Workshop on Scientific Foundations of Qualitative Research, “General guidance” + “Recommendations”


Discussion Questions

This week, we discuss how to achieve rigor and transparency in qualitative research, as well as recent debates in the political science discipline.

The National Science Foundation (2013, pp. 17-18) specifies a list of criteria for evaluating the quality of qualitative research. Do you agree with this list? What will you add to or remove from this list?

The DA-RT initiative has been and remains debated among QMMR researchers. Which issues are being debated, and why? Where do you think the discipline is headed, and how might this affect your research project?

Problem Set WK#10

Imagine that you’re the editor of a flagship political science journal and must issue rules about rigor and transparency in qualitative research. What rules will you make, and why?

For example, consider the following issues:

- What constitutes qualitative data? Where and how should qualitative researchers deposit their data?
- What type of data should and can be made public? How can we balance transparency with confidentiality and anonymity of respondents?
- What else should QMM researchers do to make their research as “replicable” as possible?
- What standards should the discipline set in terms of research ethics, in addition to IRB rules?
This week, we will discuss a variety of MMR designs, focusing on recent work.

**Required**


**Supplemental**


**Problem Set WK#9**

Select one of the assigned readings and discuss the following:

- Which methods are used, and for what purposes? How are they “mixed” together?
- What advantages does this mixed-methods research strategy offer, as compared to a single-methods strategy? Are there disadvantages?
- Can this strategy be fruitfully applied to your project—why or why not? What are the challenges of executing this strategy?
Required

Ang, *How China Escaped the Poverty Trap*, Chap 1 (Mapping coevolution), Chap (map single case), Conclusion (comparative analysis), Appendix A (steps and data collection)

Supplemental


Discussion questions

This is a research seminar week to introduce and discuss my QMM method for mapping coevolution—that is, sequences of mutual adaptation between two domains.

How is “mapping coevolution” different from process-tracing in general, tracing gradual institutional change (Thelen & Mahoney), and regression analysis of any given pair of variables?

What data must we collect in order to map coevolution? What are the challenges of and strategies for collecting such data, either as text or numbers?

What are some avenues for blending this qualitative approach with statistical methods in an MMR design?

What are your suggestions on refining and applying this method to other contexts of study?

Recommended readings


Howard S. Becker, “Terrorized by the Literature,” in *Writing for Social Scientists*

Activities

Present your research proposal in class. Instead of using power-point, make a clear verbal presentation. You’re welcome to use extra handouts or write on the board. Each presentation will be followed by comments and questions from the class.