

SO220 Research Design and Qualitative Methods in the Social Sciences

Seminar Leader: [Dr. Elena B. Stavrevska](#)

Course Times: Tue 17:00 – 18:30, Fri 10:45 – 12:15

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Office Hours: Fri 15:15 – 16:45

Course Description

Enabling us to uncover evidence, analyze it and develop theories that help us comprehend politics and society, research is a core component of social science. As such, it ought to be guided by a rigorous design and appropriate methodology. Using examples from different social science disciplines, including anthropology, political science, international relations, history and sociology, the goal of this course is to familiarize students with the essentials of research design and a number of qualitative methodological tools, as well as to enable them to critically evaluate published studies from a methodological perspective and to develop qualitative designs for their own research endeavors. The first part of the course offers an introduction to different philosophical approaches to social science research and the elements of research design. It addresses issues of formulating topics and research questions, developing hypotheses, situating the research in existing literature, selecting cases and applying suitable methods to study the chosen phenomenon. The second part will focus on a range of qualitative methods of data collection, analysis and interpretation, including comparative, longitudinal and case study research, interviewing, archival research, participant observation, ethnography and discourse analysis. Importantly, the course will also look at ethical considerations in conducting research and the researcher's role in the process.

Objectives

The course aims to:

- provide students with an overview of key issues concerning research design in social sciences;
- introduce students to a variety of qualitative methods;
- equip them with the tools and skills to select appropriate research design and methods best suited for the project;
- provide them with an opportunity to practically apply a number of qualitative methods.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, the students are expected to be able to:

- understand the different approaches and methodological traditions, as well as their implication in social science research;
- formulate a viable research question and develop a suitable research design;
- select and apply different concepts of social science research design and appropriate qualitative methods in their projects;
- understand the possibilities and limitations of different qualitative methods;
- perform qualitative data-gathering and qualitative data-analysis;
- reflect on one's own positionality and use ethical guidelines in planning a research project;
- succinctly present their research proposals and provide constructive feedback to others.

Requirements

Attendance

Students' attendance AND active participation is critical in this course. Attendance at ALL classes is expected. More than two absences (that is absences from two sessions of 90 minutes) in a semester will significantly affect the participation grade for the course. Please consult the Student Handbook for regulations governing periods of illness or leaves of absence. Students are expected to attend classes, raise questions, provide critical and constructive commentary on the assigned readings, and actively engage in classroom discussions. Students will be assessed based on their class participation and their practical and written assignments.

The class participation includes:

- general contribution to class discussions and raising questions regarding the topics,
- submitting three research questions at the end of week 3,
- 10-minute presentation of a research proposal,
- 10-minute oral feedback on another student's research proposal.

The requirements and evaluation criteria for each of the above will be discussed at the beginning of the semester. Students will present the drafts of their research proposals in week 13. For this assignment, the class will alphabetically be divided in two groups: with half of the students presenting during one session and the other half, during the other session that week. Additionally, every student will alphabetically be assigned to review and provide feedback on one of their colleague's research proposal.

All students are required to do all the readings and come to class prepared. Students' participation will be assessed based on their active engagement and contribution in the classroom.

Practical and Writing Assignments

The students will have a total of three writing assignments:

1. **Report on a interview assignment, worth 20% of the final grade, due by Friday, November 3, 23:59**
 - This is a practical individual assignment, which is due at the end of the fall break.
 - Each student is expected to design an interview guide and conduct a semi-structured interview with another person on a topic of their choosing.
 - The assignment includes writing a report on the interview process and submitting it together with the interview guide. The report should include a description of the preparation and the conducting of the interview.
 - The concept and the structure of an interview guide, along with the interview process will be discussed in week 8.
2. **Report on a discourse analysis assignment, worth 20% of the final grade, due by Friday, November 17, 23:59.**
 - This is a practical individual assignment, which is due at the end of week 10.
 - Each student is expected to select a text, movie, speech or song and conduct a discourse analysis.
 - The written analysis should clearly indicate or provide a link to the analyzed material.
 - The concept and the structure of a discourse analysis, together with some examples, will be discussed in week 9.

3. **Research proposal (1,500-2,000 words), worth 30% of the final grade, due by Thursday, December 21, 23:59**
 - The research proposal is an individual writing assignment, which is due at the end of completion week.
 - Each student is expected to choose a topic independently or in consultation with the instructor.
 - The research proposal should include: (1) a discussion on the topic, the research goal and the chosen logic of inquiry, (2) a clearly formulated research question, (3) a suggested research design that would best address the question, and (4) a discussion on the methodological approach and the evidence that will be used.
 - Students are required to send to the instructor and an assigned peer reviewer a draft of the research proposal in week 12 (November 28 and December 1). The drafts will be presented in class and received feedback during week 13.

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

Written assignments that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Hand-ins that are more than 24 hours late will not be accepted.

Grade Breakdown

- Active class participation – 15%
- First practical assignment (interview) – 20%
- Second practical assignment (discourse analysis) – 20%
- Presentation of research proposal – 10%
- Providing feedback on another student's research proposal – 5%
- Research proposal – 30%

Schedule

Classes start on Monday, September 4 and run until Thursday, December 21 with fall break planned from October 30 – November 3, 2017. Completion week is from December 18 to 21. Students are required to be on campus during completion week.

There are no textbooks for this course. All readings will be made available through Google Classroom, which will be shared with the students at the beginning of the semester. Students are responsible to check Google Classroom on weekly basis in order to download and read course materials regularly. The instructor reserves the right to change any reading listed below depending on students' feedback on the degree of difficulty of assigned readings, as well as students' expressed interests throughout the semester.

Week 1: Approaches to Social Science

Tuesday, September 5

Discussion on course structure, syllabus, and assignments. No assigned readings.

Friday, September 8

- Della Porta, Donatella and Michael Keating. 2008. "How Many Approaches in the Social Sciences? An Epistemological Introduction." In *Approaches and Methodologies in Social Sciences*, edited by Donatella Della Porta and Michael Keating. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 19–39.
- Howard S. Becker. 1998. "Tricks." In *Tricks of the Trade: How to Think about Your Research While You're Doing It*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 9–20.

Week 2: Design Selection

Tuesday, September 12

- Creswell, John W. 2008. "The Selection of Research Design." In *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 3rd edition. Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 3–21.
- Schmitter, Peter. 2008. "The Design of Social and Political Research." In *Approaches and Methodologies in Social Sciences*, edited by Donatella Della Porta and Michael Keating. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 263–295.

Friday, September 15

- Hennink, Monique, Inge Hutter, and Ayay Bailey. 2011. "The Nature of Qualitative Research." In *Qualitative Research Methods*. London: Sage Publications, 8–28.
- Hennink, Monique, Inge Hutter, and Ayay Bailey. 2011. "The Design Cycle." In *Qualitative Research Methods*. London: Sage Publications, 29–60.

Week 3: Research Questions and Hypotheses

Tuesday, September 19

- Booth, Wayne C., Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph M. Williams. 2008. "From Topics to Questions." In *The Craft of Research*, 3rd edition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 35–50.
- Creswell, John W. 2008. "Research Questions and Hypotheses." In *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 3rd edition. Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 129–144.

Friday, September 22

No class

Assignment: Based on the readings of the week and personal interests, prepare three research questions and share them with the class in a Google document by Friday at noon.

Week 4: Literature Review and Theory

Tuesday, September 26

- Creswell, John W. 2008. "Review of the Literature." In *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 3rd edition. Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 23–48.

Friday, September 29

- Creswell, John W. 2008. "The Use of Theory." In *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 3rd edition, 49–72.

Week 5: Concepts

Tuesday, October 3

Federal holiday (no class)

Friday, October 6

- Howard S. Becker. 1998. "Concepts." In *Tricks of the Trade: How to Think about Your Research While You're Doing It*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 152–198.

Week 6: Case Selection and Case Study

Tuesday, October 10

- Gerring, John. 2004. "What is a Case Study and What Is It Good For?" *American Political Science Review* 98(2): 341–354.
- Della Porta, Donatella. 2008. "Comparative Analysis: Case-Oriented versus Variable-Oriented Research." In *Approaches and Methodologies in Social Sciences*, edited by Donatella Della Porta and Michael Keating. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 198–222.

Friday, October 13

- George, Alexander L. and Andrew Bennett. 2005. "Carrying Out the Case Studies." In *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*, edited by Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 89–108.

Week 7: Process-Tracing and Causality

Tuesday, October 17

- George, Alexander L. and Andrew Bennett. 2005. "Process-Tracing and Historical Explanation." In *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*, edited by Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 205–232.

Friday, October 20

- Bennett, Andrew. 2010. "Process Tracing and Causal Inference." In *Rethinking Social Inquiry: Diverse Tools, Shared Standards*, 2nd edition, edited by Henry E. Brady and David Collier. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 207–219.
- Vennesson, Pascal. 2008. "Case Studies and Process Tracing: Theories and Practices." In *Approaches and Methodologies in Social Sciences*, edited by Donatella Della Porta and Michael Keating. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 223–239.

Week 8: Interviews and Focus Groups

Tuesday, October 24

- Hennink, Monique, Inge Hutter, and Ayay Bailey. 2011. "In-Depth Interviews." In *Qualitative Research Methods*. London: Sage Publications, 108–134.
- Soss, Joe. 2006. "Talking Our Way to Meaningful Explanations: A Practice-Centered View of Interviewing for Interpretive Research." In *Interpretation and Method: Empirical Research Methods and the Interpretive Turn*, edited by Dvora Yanow and Peregrine Schwartz-Shea. Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 127–149.
- Herzog, Hanna. 2005. "On Home Turf: Interview Location and Its Social Meaning." *Qualitative Sociology* 28(1): 25–47.

Friday, October 27

- Hennink, Monique, Inge Hutter, and Ayay Bailey. 2011. "Focus Group Discussions." In *Qualitative Research Methods*. London: Sage Publications, 135–168.

Assignment: Design an interview guide and conduct a semi-structured interview with another person. Submit a written report on the interview process, along with the guide, by Friday, November 3, 23:59.

Fall break (October 30 – November 3)

Week 9: Discourse Analysis

Tuesday, November 7

- Jaworski, Adam and Nikolas Coupland. 1999. "Introduction: Perspectives on Discourse Analysis." In *The Discourse Reader*, edited by Adam Jaworski and Nikolas Coupland. London: Routledge, 1–40.

Friday, November 10

- Gee, Paul. 2014. "Language as Saying, Doing and Being." In *The Discourse Studies Reader: Main Currents in Theory and Analysis*, edited by Johannes Angermuller, Dominique Maingueneau, and Ruth Wodak. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 234–243.
- Escobar, Arturo. 1995. "Power and Visibility: Tales of Peasants, Women, and the Environment." In *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*. Princeton University Press, 154–211.

Assignment: Do a discourse analysis of a selected text, movie, speech or song. Submit the written analysis by Friday, November 17, 23:59.

Week 10: Textual Analysis and Narrative Analysis

Tuesday, November 14

- Hennink, Monique, Inge Hutter, and Ayay Bailey. 2011. "Data Preparation and Developing Codes." In *Qualitative Research Methods*. London: Sage Publications, 203–232.
- Hennink, Monique, Inge Hutter, and Ayay Bailey. 2011. "Textual Data Analysis." In *Qualitative Research Methods*. London: Sage Publications, 233–267.

Friday, November 17

- Franzosi, Roberto. 1998. "Narrative Analysis – Or Why (and How) Sociologists Should Be Interested in Narrative." *Annual Review of Sociology* 24: 517–554.
- Bevir, Mark. 2006. "How Narratives Explain." In *Interpretation and Method: Empirical Research Methods and the Interpretive Turn*, edited by Dvora Yanow and Peregrine Schwartz-Shea. Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 281–290.

Week 11: Material Analysis

Tuesday, November 21

- O'Toole, Paddy and Prisca Were. 2008. "Observing Places: Using Space and Material Culture in Qualitative Research." *Qualitative Research* 8(5): 616–634.
- Yanow, Dvora. 2006. "How Built Spaces Mean: A Semiotics of Space." In *Interpretation and Method: Empirical Research Methods and the Interpretive Turn*, edited by Dvora Yanow and Peregrine Schwartz-Shea. Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 349–366.

Friday, November 24

- Hill, Michael R. 1993. In *Archival Strategies and Techniques*. Newbury Park: Sage Publications, 1–50.

Week 12: Ethnography

Tuesday, November 28

- Goffman, Erving. 1989. “On Fieldwork.” *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 18(2): 123–132;
- Schwartz-Shea, Peregrine and Dvora Yanow. 2012. “The Rhythms of Interpretive Research I: Getting Going.” In *Interpretive Research Design: Concepts and Processes*. London: Routledge, 54–77.

Friday, December 1

- Kapiszewski, Diana, Lauren M. MacLean, and Benjamin L. Read. 2015. “Site-intensive Methods: Ethnography and Participant Observation.” In *Field Research in Political Science: Practices And Principles*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 234–264.
- Burawoy, Michael. 1998. “The Extended Case Method.” *Sociological Theory* 16(1): 4–33.
- Fujii, Lee Ann. 2010. “Shades of Truth and Lies: Interpreting Testimonies of War and Violence.” *Journal of Peace Research* 47(2): 231–241.

Week 13: Research Proposal Review

Tuesday, December 5 and Friday, December 8

- No readings

Assignment: Prepare a 10-minute presentation of your research proposal and a maximum 10-minute feedback on another student’s proposal that you have been assigned. Half of the students will present on Tuesday and the other half on Friday. Should send a draft research proposal to the instructor and their assigned peer reviewer seven days before their respective presentations (November 28 and December 1, respectively).

Week 14: Researcher’s Role

Tuesday, December 12

- Rose, Gillian. 1997. “Situating Knowledges: Positionality, Reflexivities and Other Tactics.” *Progress in Human Geography* 21(3): 305–320.
- Burawoy, Michael. 2003. “Revisits: An Outline of a Theory of Reflexive Ethnography,” *American Sociological Review* 68(5): 645–679.

Friday, December 15

- Hennink, Monique, Inge Hutter, and Ayay Bailey. 2011. “Ethical Issues in Qualitative Research.” In *Qualitative Research Methods*. London: Sage Publications, 61–79.
- Schwartz-Shea, Peregrine and Dvora Yanow. 2012. “Designing for Trustworthiness: Knowledge Claims and Evaluations of Interpretive Research.” In *Interpretive Research Design: Concepts and Processes*. London: Routledge, 91–114.

Completion Week (December 18–21)

Research proposals due by Thursday, December 21, 23:59.