Qualitative Methods
Political Science 694

Winter 2006

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

As an effort to encourage problem-driven research, this course focuses on qualitative methods and the problems that are best addressed using these methods. Among other benefits, qualitative methods allow us to examine closely causal mechanisms at close empirical proximity. Within the literature, “qualitative methods” has referred to a) small-n research design, b) more direct interrogation of the evidence instead of distant proxies, and c) methods that focus on mechanisms and processes, rather than correlations. This course will examine all three of these aspects of qualitative methods, focusing on causal inference as the main goal of social science. It also considers some problems of inference raised by qualitative methods and some strategies for dealing with them.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

1. Class Participation: 25%. Each student is expected to attend class regularly and to contribute to the discussion based on assigned readings.

2. Paper(s): 75%. Each student is required to submit five papers (8-10 pages each). Assignments for each paper will be distributed two weeks before its due date.

COURSE READINGS

The following books are available for purchase and on reserve:


A Coursetools site will used to distribute discussion questions, updates of the syllabus, and other communiqués.

**Philosophy of Science and Causality**

**Jan. 11**  
**Week 1. Introduction: Pursuing Problem-Driven Research**

**Jan. 18**  
**Week 2. Logical Positivism & Falsification**


**Recommended:**


**Jan. 25**  
**Week 3. Causal Inference: Probabilistic and Deterministic Approaches to Causation**


Recommended:


**Monday, Jan. 30 **  
**FIRST PAPER DUE BY EMAIL AT 5PM**

Research Design

**Feb. 1**  
**Week 4. Correlations vs. Causal Mechanisms: What We Can Learn from Small and Large-\(n\) Research?**


Recommended:


**Feb. 8 ** Week 5. Small-\(n\) Research Design: Critiques


**Feb. 15 ** Week 6. Small-\(n\) Research Design: Responses


Campbell, Donald. 1975. “‘Degrees of Freedom’ and the Case Study.” *Comparative Political Studies* 8: 178-193.


*Recommended:*


**Monday, Feb. 20**  
*SECOND PAPER DUE BY EMAIL AT 5PM*

**Feb. 22**  
*Week 7. Concept formation and stretching*


(Includes response by Michael Coppendge).
Recommended:

Gerring, *Social Science Methodology*, ch. 3.

March 1  *Winter Break—No Class*

Monday, Mar. 6  *THIRD PAPER DUE BY EMAIL AT 5PM*

Evidence: More Direct Interrogation Instead of Distant Proxies (Applications and Evaluation)

Mar. 8  *Week 8. Agents, Decisions, and Intentions: Elite Interviews and Documents*


Mar. 15  *Week 9. Structures and Constraints: Content Analysis and Archival Data*


chapters of Dan Carpenter’s *The Forging of Bureaucratic Autonomy*

**Mar. 22**  
**Week 10. Processes and Interpretation: Participant Observation and Ethnography**


**Monday, Mar. 27**  
**FOURTH PAPER DUE BY EMAIL AT 5PM**

**Mar. 29**  
**Week 11. Counterfactuals**


April 5   Week 12: Dynamic Processes and Mechanisms


Apr. 12   Week 13: Temporality and Sequencing


Apr. 19  Week 14: Macro-Historical Analysis


Recommended: