Social Science Qualitative Research Methods

FES 513a

Fall 2004

Important Information

Credit Hours: 3

Meets: Thursdays, 9:00-12:00 at 380 Edwards Street
Instructor: Dr. Amity Doolittle
Office: Basement of 210 Prospect
Phone: 432-3660
Office hours: TBA
Email: amity.doolittle@yale.edu

Texts

Textbook: Available at Book Haven, York Street, Phone #787-2848


Course pack: Tyco, 262 Elm Street, Ph. 562-6256

We will use several chapters from both books throughout the course, and both are well worth purchasing for reference. Students who wish to buy only one of the books may do so, and can use copies of both books that the instructor will put on reserve at the Forestry library. The Babbie book is better for those more interested in quantitative methods (particularly sociological approaches) and the Bernard book is better on qualitative methods (particularly anthropological approaches).

Course Description

This course is designed to provide a broad introduction to issues of social sciences research methods and design. Consideration is given to both quantitative and qualitative approaches to research, although more emphasis is placed on qualitative methods. No prior knowledge of methodology or statistics is expected or assumed. The course is intended for both doctoral students who are in the beginning stage of their dissertation research, as well as for masters students developing methodologies or working on research proposals for their thesis projects.
The course differs from other courses on research design in that it is decidedly interdisciplinary in nature (including drawing on literature from anthropology, geography, political science and sociology) and it consciously address the unique nature of social science research within environmental studies. Two assertions are considered throughout the class. The first assertion is that some of the most important questions facing environmental studies have such complex answers that traditional positivist scientific approaches have difficulty being applied. Recent trends aimed at giving primacy to quantitative methods have exacerbated these difficulties, with the result that the big and really important questions are rarely posed, let alone answered. A second, and slightly opposing view, is that the growing nature of the environmental crisis facing the world's biosphere has led to frantic 'policy prescription' initiatives designed to address the problem, despite little or no evidence that such designs will actually accomplish their goals, or whether they may actually have perverse effects. According to this reasoning, scholars need to undertake more dispassionate, rigorous analysis to understand better what the causes of the problem really are, and better analyze potential effects of proposed policy alternatives. We seek to understand the validity of both claims, and if accurate, what their direct and indirect effects might be in shaping our choices over research designs and methods.

During the semester, we will explore three interrelated dimension of research, one focuses on the theoretical foundations of science and research, another focuses on the various methods available to researchers for data collection and analysis, and finally we will complete exercises in the practical application of various methods.

**Course Objectives**

- To understand better competing approaches to research design and methods, and their philosophical differences.
- To get better acquainted with specific research methodologies, including in person interviews, survey design, field observation, comparative political studies, and case studies.
- To facilitate students in making informed choices over research design and methodological choices for the questions they seek to answer, and to judge and evaluate the quality of projects and their methodologies.

**Course Requirements**

Class Participation

Every student is expected to have completed the readings prior to class and actively participate in class discussions

Field Assignments

Learn by doing. There will be three field assignments where you can spend time by doing participant observation, interviewing and surveying.
Short Essays

There will be four short essays designed to explore and critique the readings in detail.

Final Term Paper

One major term paper is required. This can be a 15-20 page research paper were you explore any one of the topics chosen from the array of methods listed on the syllabus. Alternatively you may design a 10-12 page research [proposal for funding for you summer research.

A short 1-2 page synopsis of the long paper will be due Oct. 21 and should focus on describing the research question, the methods to be explored, and what format the final paper will take. This short synopsis will enable the instructor to better assist students ahead of time with the longer paper, due in December.

Grading Details

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>% of grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class participation</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 short essays</td>
<td>20</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 field assignments</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final term paper/research proposal</td>
<td>40</td>
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Course Policies

- Students who need any special accommodations should make an appointment to discuss with the instructor as soon as possible.
- Academic honesty: Students are expected to pursue their academic work with honesty and integrity. Plagiarism will not be tolerated.
- Communication in course: Verbal and written communication (including electronic) must be conducted in a way that treats others with respect and honesty. Criticism is encouraged that speaks to arguments and points, while recognizing the value of each individual.

Readings

**Part I. Building Blocks and Foundations**

**Week 1, September 2.**

**Positioning Your Research: Theory and Paradigm in Social Science Research**

Babbie, Ch. 2, “Paradigms, Theory, and Research” and Ch. 3, “The Idea of Causation in Social Research”

**Week 2, September 9**

**Explanation and Understanding in Social Science Research: The Qualitative - Quantitative and Other Divides**

Russell, Ch. 10, “Organizing the Research”.


Articles to compare for short essay assignment #1, due in class on September 9th

Kepe, T and I Scoones (1999) "Creating grasslands: Social institutions and environmental change in


**Week 3, September 16**

**Formulating Research Questions and Testing Hypothesis**

Babbie, Ch. 4, “Research Design”

Bernard, Ch. 2, “The Foundations of Social Research”


Article to critique for short essay assignment #2, due in class on September 23rd

(alternate articles can be found on week 6 [Lowe] and week 9 [Doolittle])


**Week 4, September 23**

**Ways to Choose a Fieldsite/Study Subject & Research Ethics, Politics and Relationships with Communities Studied**
Russell, Ch. 3, “Preparing for Research”


**Week 5, September 30**
**Sampling, Measurement, Validity and Reliability**

Babbie Ch. 5, “Conceptualization, Operationalization and Measurement”, Ch. 6, “Indexes, Scales and Typologies”, and Ch. 7. “The Logic of Sampling”

Bernard, Ch. 6, “Sampling” and Ch. 8, “Nonprobability Sampling and Choosing Informants”


**PART II - Research Methods in Practice**

**Week 6, October 7**
**Participant Observation**

Field Exercise #1:

Participant observation due in class on October 14th

“Guidelines for Field Notes and Journals”

Bernard, Ch. 13, “Participant Observation”

Babbie, Ch. 10, “Qualitative Field Research”

Russell, Ch. 13, “Ethnographic Approaches”


Alternative article to critique for short essay assignment #2, due in class on September 23rd

Week 7, October 14
Case Study and Comparative Research Methods


Cunningham, J. Barton (1997). "Case study principles for different types of cases." Quality and Quantity 31: 401-423.


Week 8, October 21
The Art of the Interview

Field Exercise #2:
Interviewing due in class on October 28th

Bernard, Ch. 9, “Interviewing: Unstructured and Semi-structured”

Russell, Ch. 12, “Interviewing”


Week 9, October 28
Other Qualitative Methods (Mapping, PRA, PAR, Oral History, Archival Research)
Short Essay #3:

Analyzing an interview due in class on November 4th. Interview transcripts are on reserve in the library.

Russell, Ch. 15, “Action Research”


Alternative article to critique for short essay assignment #2, due in class on September 23rd


**Week 10, November 4**

Field Exercise #3: Surveys due in class on November 11th

Surveys and Questionnaires

Babbie, Ch. 9, “Survey Research”

Bernard, Ch. 10, “Structured Interviewing: Questionnaires.”

Russell, Ch. 14, “Surveys”


**PART III. — Data Analysis and Writing Up**

**Week 11, November 11**

**Analysis of Qualitative Data and Ethnographic Writing**

Bernard, Ch. 16, “Introduction to Qualitative and Quantitative Analysis” and 17 “Qualitative Analysis - Text Analysis”

Babbie, Ch. 13, “Qualitative Data Analysis”


Short Essay #4: Analyzing Oral Histories due in class on December 2nd. Interview transcripts are on reserve in the library.

**November 18: NO CLASS (IUCN Meeting in Bangkok)**

**November 25: NO MEETING (Thanksgiving)**

**Week 12, December 2**

**From Research Proposal to Publication**
