“... ‘science’ is not a set of methods...; it is ultimately a commitment to explore and attempt to understand a given segment of empirical reality. The means employed in pursuing this goal should be secondary: in good science, methods are fit to the subject matter rather than subject matter being truncated or distorted in order to fit it to a preordained notion of ‘scientific method.’” (Almond and Genco, 1977)

This is a course for graduate students interested in employing qualitative methods in political science research. By qualitative methods, we mean methods that involve small numbers of intensive observations, and that do not rely on statistical tests for drawing causal inferences. The goal of the course is to help students develop proficiency in the use of qualitative methods in two respects. The first is to understand and be able to articulate the assumptions about the political world and arguments about scientific knowledge on which qualitative approaches in political science are grounded. We will devote particular attention to the question of how research designs involving relatively small numbers of intensive observations can be used to develop and test theory in political science. The second type of proficiency the course will help students develop involves basic knowledge of the principal techniques used by political scientists who do qualitative research. Our objective is to help students develop the methodological tools needed to pursue rigorous qualitative research for the dissertation, either as a supplement to quantitative analyses or as the principal research strategy.

**Required Texts:**

- King, Keohane, and Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*
- Fenno, *Watching Politicians: Essays on Participant Observation*
- Rubin and Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data*
- Derthick and Quirk, *The Politics of Deregulation*

All additional readings are either on reserve in the Graduate Commons, or are available on the web.

**Attendance:** Seminar attendance is mandatory. If extraordinary circumstances require that you miss a seminar session, please notify Doner or Strahan in advance (or as soon as possible).

**Papers:** A 2-3 page memo on the student’s substantive research interests will be due for the first seminar meeting. Two types of papers are required over the course of the semester.
A 2-3 page critical summary of each week’s reading assignment will be due each Wednesday by noon. A qualitative research design of approximately 25 pages in the area of the student’s (probable) dissertation topic will be due at the end of the semester. A 3-5 page proposal indicating the topic of the research design, and a tentative bibliography will be due on **February 26**. The final research design paper will be due on **May 4**.

**Grading:** Class participation: 25%; Weekly critical summaries: 25%; Qualitative research design: 50%.

**Weekly Topics / Schedule**

I. **Introduction: Why should political scientists learn qualitative methods? (Jan. 18)**

**Discussion Questions:**

1. To what extent is the world of politics different from the physical world? From the world of economics?
2. Should political science be value free? What are the criteria for deciding on a topic of study in political science? Do political scientists have an obligation to focus on some questions or issues rather than others? What is the interest to political science of events that occur infrequently (e.g. crises, revolutions)?
3. How should the researcher balance concerns of substantive importance with those of methodological tractability or innovation?

**Assignment**

Draft a 2-3 page memo on your substantive research interests and possible applications of qualitative methods in this area. Come prepared to discuss the contents of the memo and the readings below.

**Reading**


**Recommended:**


II. “Small N” qualitative research: Goals and Strategies I (Jan. 25)
Discussion Questions:
1. What is the goal of the interpretive method? How do you know if you have the interpretation right?
2. What is the range of theoretical objectives political scientists can legitimately pursue? To which objectives are small n research designs best suited?
3. Can the study of outlying or anomalous cases advance the development of theory?

Reading:
Taylor, Philosophy and the Human Sciences, Chap. 1, “Interpretation and the Sciences of Man.”
George, “Case Studies and Theory Development: The Method of Structured, Focused Comparison” in Lauren, ed., Diplomatic History: New Approaches
Laitin, “Disciplining Political Science” American Political Science Review 89 (June 1995), pp. 454-456

III. “Small N” qualitative research: Goals and Strategies II (Feb. 1)
Discussion Questions:
1. What is the range of small-n strategies through which one can pursue different theoretical objectives? How do the different strategies contribute to different theoretical objectives?
2. How and why do the authors differ regarding the possibilities for testing theoretical explanations with small-n designs? What assumptions underlie the arguments that theories can or cannot be tested with a small number of cases?

Reading:
Eckstein, “Case Study and Theory in Political Science” in Greenstein and Polsby, eds., Handbook of Political Science, Vol. 7
Lijphart, “Comparative Politics and the Comparative Method” American Political Science Review 1971: 682-693
Introduction” (pp. 1-8); Ch. 1 (pp. 11-29); Ch. 7 (pp. 106-118); “Commonalities and Variations” (pp. 119-132).

IV. Problems in Qualitative Research: Descriptive Inference, Causal Inference and Overdetermination (Feb. 15)
Discussion Questions:
1. What are descriptive and causal inference? How are they related?
2. Why are inferences drawn from small numbers of observations inherently problematic for KKV-- even for purposes of description?
3. What do KKV and Lieberson see as the major pitfalls in using small n designs to draw causal inferences?

4. What do KKV mean by causation? How do "probabilistic" and "deterministic" understandings of causation differ? How can we determine which view of causation is appropriate for the phenomenon we want to study? On what basis do KKV determine that causation is probabilistic?

5. How does our understanding of causation affect the canons of research design we favor? In particular, what does each view of causation imply regarding the numbers of cases or observations required to establish the presence of a causal effect?

Reading:
King, Keohane and Verba, Designing Social Inquiry, pp. 3-114, 118-122, 208-230
Lieberson, “Small N’s and Big Conclusions: An Examination of the Reasoning in Comparative Case Studies Based on a Small Number of Cases” Social Forces 70 (Dec. 1991) 307-320

V. Qualitative approaches to causation and causal inference I (Feb. 22)
Discussion Questions:

1. What views of causation exist in political science beyond the simple idea of covariation?

2. What are the major alternatives to KKV’s “statistical” view of causal inference? How do an “ontic” understanding of causation or assumptions about causal complexity lead to different research strategies? What assumptions about probabilistic vs. deterministic causation underlie these alternative approaches?

3. What ideas about causation underlie work by scholars of the historical institutionalist school?

4. What ideas about causation underlie work by scholars of the historical institutionalist school?

Reading:
McKeown, “Case Studies and the Statistical Worldview” International Organization 53 (Winter 1999), pp. 161-190:
Ragin, The Comparative Method, Chap. 2

RESEARCH DESIGN PROPOSAL DUE FEB. 26

VI. Qualitative approaches to causation and causal inference II/ Process tracing (March 1)
Discussion Questions:
1. To what extent can the use of counterfactuals strengthen small-n designs? What are the characteristics of a plausible counterfactual argument?
2. What is process tracing? How is it informed by theory? What is its relationship to causal inference? To journalism and other narrative accounts?
3. Why is sequence important in explanations of some political outcomes?
4. What is a “critical juncture”? What causal mechanisms underlie theories incorporating “path dependence”?

Reading:
Khong, “Confronting Hitler and Its Consequences,” in Tetlock and Belkin, eds., Counterfactual Thought Experiments in World Politics, pp.95-118.
George and McKeown, “Case Studies and Theories of Organizational Decisionmaking” in Coulan and Smith, eds., Advances in Information Processing in Organizations.
Fenno, “Observation, Context, and Sequence” in Fenno, Watching Politicians, pp. 113-128
Collier and Collier, Shaping the Political Arena, Chap. 1 “Critical Junctures and Historical Legacies,” pp. 27-39

VII. Problems in Qualitative Research: Case Selection (March 8)
Discussion Questions:
1. Why do KKV view random selection as the best case selection strategy? If random selection is not possible or advisable, what alternative strategies can be used?
2. What problems can arise due to selection bias? To what extent can these be avoided in small n research designs?
3. What is a case? How is a “case” different from an “observation”?

Reading:
King, Keohane and Verba, Designing Social Inquiry, pp. 115-149
Ragin and Becker eds., What is a Case?, pp. 1-15, 217-225
Collier and Collier, Shaping the Political Arena: Critical Junctures, the Labor Movement and Regime Dynamics in Latin America, “Overview,” pp. 3-23
Peters, Comparative Politics: Theory and Methods, Chaps. 2 & 3
VIII. Doing Qualitative Research: Concept Development, Operationalization and Coding (March 22

Discussion Questions:

1. Under what circumstances might concept development become a focus of political science research?
2. What is the link between concept development on the one hand, and measurement and coding on the other?
3. When developing concepts, is there a danger of judging the validity of a concept on the same data that generated the concept?
4. What is conceptual stretching? How can it be avoided?

Reading:

Peters, Comparative Politics: Theory and Methods, Chap. 4


IX. Illustrative research: comparative work (March 29)

Reading
Other reading TBA
X. Illustrative research: Derthick and Quirk on the politics of deregulation (April 5)
Reading
Derthick and Quirk, The Politics of Deregulation

XI. Qualitative research techniques: interviewing and participant observation I (April 12)
Discussion Questions:
1. Why interview or directly observe political actors? What research goals can be advanced?
2. How is interviewing different from other techniques such as survey research?
3. How well does one have to understand those being interviewed?
4. To what extent are validity and reliability central concerns in interview research?
5. What are “experience-near” and “experience-distant” concepts? How should the two be related in interview/observational research?
6. How does interviewing fit within the methods of process-tracing and structured focused comparison?
XII. Qualitative research techniques: interviewing and participant observation (April 19)
Discussion Questions:
1. What personal qualities are needed when using oneself as “an instrument investigation”?
2. What is the balance between structure and improvisation when interviewing? To what extent can we establish a clear set of rules or “canons” for doing good interview research?
3. What personal/ethical issues can arise when doing interviewing or participant observation?

Reading:
Rubin and Rubin, Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing Data, Chaps. 5, 7, 9-11
Fenno, Watching Politicians, Chaps. 1-3
Simpson, The Tie That Binds, Chaps. 1, 2, Appendix A

XIII. Qualitative Research Techniques: Using Archival and Historical Evidence (April 26)
Discussion Questions:
1. Why use historical evidence in qualitative political science research?
2. What are the distinctive problems that can arise when using historical evidence? To what extent can we develop rules or strategies to resolve or manage these problems?

Reading:

Mayhew, American’s Congress; Actions in the Public Sphere, James Madison through Newt Gingrich, Introduction, Chaps. 1, 2, 6

Solnick, Stealing the State: Control and Collapse in Soviet Institutions, Chap. 4

XIV. Student presentations of qualitative research designs (Date TBA)

FINAL RESEARCH DESIGN PAPER DUE MAY 4 BY 4:00 P.M.