Overview
This seminar explores a variety of research strategies available to students of politics, concentrating on those that make use of empirical evidence but do not require quantification of data. The seminar is built around three general goals. First, you should leave this course with a working knowledge of standard approaches to qualitative research design, data collection, and analysis. By comparing different qualitative approaches to one another, as well as to relevant quantitative methods, we will try to identify the particular combination of possibilities and problems that each method offers for specific types of research projects. Second, this seminar provides an opportunity to discuss a number of general issues related to the meaning, logic, and conduct of social science inquiry. Particularly in the early part of the course, we will take up general questions associated with epistemology, rhetoric, standpoint, interpretation, ethics, politics, conceptualization, theory development, validity, inference, and so on. My own view is that these topics should concern researchers regardless of their choices among methods. Third, this course includes a significant “how to” component focusing on questions of technique. No discussion or practice exercise can fully prepare a student for the experience of field research. But over the course of the semester, students should become familiar with the basic skills and techniques researchers use to gather and make sense of qualitative data. My hope is that we will all learn something about how to use (and not abuse) particular research strategies.

Class Meetings
The course will be structured as a seminar. I will bring some prepared remarks to each meeting, but we will devote most of our class time to discussion. For this format to work, you will need to read with a critical eye and come prepared to talk about how the readings relate to your substantive interests. Also, I invite you to think broadly about suitable topics for discussion. At root, this course is about what social scientists do and why one might or might not want to make some of these practices a part of one’s life. Any issue related to this topic strikes me as fair game. Finally, I want to stress at the outset that each of us knows a different subfield of research, and each of us is at a different point in the process of learning about methodology. For a seminar of this sort to work, people need to feel comfortable asking simple questions and occasionally saying, “I don’t get it.” Please do what you can to make this possible.

Seminar Leadership
Each seminar meeting will begin with a brief student presentation on the week’s assigned readings. Working in a group of two or three, students will take the first 20 minutes to identify and critique key elements of the readings. Seminar leaders should work together on their presentation and put some thought into the best ways to lay the groundwork for a productive seminar discussion. Following the
presentation, we will take 30 minutes for students to add to, respond to, and build on the seminar leaders’ comments. I will offer clarifications and help facilitate this discussion. But my goal for the first hour of class is to focus on the issues that students have reacted to most strongly. After this hour, I will assume more control over our agenda, pursuing some combination of lecture and guided discussion on topics we have not covered completely in the first half of class. Each student will be responsible for seminar leadership twice during the semester.

*Written Work*

Students in this seminar (including those who are auditing) are responsible for two writing assignments.

**The “Apples and Oranges” Essay**: Write a brief critical essay (6-8 pages) comparing two published studies that share a common research question but employ different types of qualitative data. (For example, you might compare a study of bureaucratic discretion based on agency documents to a study of bureaucratic discretion based on in-depth interviews.) Please note that the studies you choose for this assignment cannot be taken from the assigned readings for the seminar. Also, bear in mind that the purpose of your essay is not to summarize the published studies. Your essay should offer a critical evaluation of how well the researchers have *chosen*, *executed*, and *presented* their methods of data collection and analysis. Please note that this paper functions as a kind of “midterm” for this class. The goal of the assignment is to write a comparative analysis that offers general insights into the researchers’ methods and demonstrates a critical understanding of relevant course materials from weeks 1 through 9. The paper will be due on **Friday, November 1, by 3:00pm**. It should be 6-8 pages in length and will count for 25 percent of your final grade. Late papers will be penalized one-third of a letter grade for each day after the due date.

**The “Make Your Own Project” Project**: This is a more substantial assignment that will require steady work throughout the semester. You may choose one of two options.

**Plan A: The Research Design**. Propose a thorough design for a do-able, dissertation-size research project that addresses an important question in your field of interest. During week 4 (Sept. 16-20), we will have a one-on-one meeting to discuss your preliminary research question. You will need to bring a printed copy of the research question to my office hours. During week 8 (Oct. 21-25), we will meet to discuss your progress in reviewing relevant literature. You should bring a bibliography that identifies (separately) relevant works you have read and plan to read. Your full research design (15-20 pages) will be due on **Monday, December 9**. It should include a clear statement of your research question and its significance, a focused review of relevant literature, a detailed description of your research strategy, a discussion of feasibility and ethics, and estimates of the project’s timetable and funding needs.

**Plan B: The Practicum**: For a research question of your own choosing, collect and analyze four relevant qualitative observations. Your observations must include at least two different types of data, and at least one of your observations must be based on an in-depth interview or focus group. During week 4 (Sept. 16-20), *prior* to any observations, we will have a one-on-one meeting to discuss your preliminary research question. You will need to bring a printed copy of the research question to my office hours and a preliminary draft of your consent letter (see Sieber, pp.34-37). During week 8 (Oct. 21-25) or earlier, we will need to meet to review your interview or focus-group protocol (see Rubin and Rubin). You should give me a copy of your protocol several days in advance of our meeting so that I can prepare comments. The final report on your practicum will be due on **Monday, December 9**. It should include (a) a statement of your research question and its significance, (b) a substantive analysis of what you’ve found, (c) a comparative evaluation of your methods, and (d) a critical evaluation of your own attempts to employ them. In an
appendix, you should provide your consent letter, your interview or focus-group protocol, and any transcripts, fieldnotes, or document summary sheets used in your analysis.

Grades
Seminar Leadership Counted toward participation
Drafts and Scheduled Meetings Counted toward participation
Seminar Participation 20%
“Apples and Oranges” Essay 30%
“Make Your Own Project” Project 50%

Readings
My apologies in advance: this course has a heavy reading load. Many of the readings are available in a file box that I’ve placed in the grad student room. The books for this class are available for purchase at the AU campus bookstore.

The following books have been ordered as required:

The following books have been ordered as recommended. With one exception (McAdam 1988), relevant material from these books has been included in course file box.
I. Commonality and Difference in Empirical Research

Week 1: Aug. 27

Goals and Approaches in Social Science Research: Commonality and Difference

Scientific Struggles: Purpose, Politics, and Perestroika
Are “Qualitative” Methods Qualitatively Different?
Studies that Make a “Scholarly Contribution”: More than 31 Flavors

Week 2: Sept. 3

Positive, Interpretive, and Critical Social Science

Positivist

Interpretivist

Critical
Week 3: Sept. 10

**Empirical Linkages: Causal and Relational**

**Alternative Views of Causation**


**Interpretive Research and Causal Accounts**


**Beyond Cause: Relational Social Science**


Week 4: Sept. 17

**Evaluative Criteria for Qualitative Research**

**Positive and Interpretive Criteria**


**Applications: Positive, Interpretive, and Critical**

II. Field Research: Gathering, Evaluating, and Learning from Qualitative Data

Week 5: Sept. 24
Into the Field: Ethics, Identities, Goals, and Experiences

Nuts and Bolts of the Field

Experiences of Entering and Negotiating the Field

A Grounded Theory Approach to the Field

Ethics, IRBs, and Research Protocols

Week 6: Oct. 1
Participant Observation

Participating, Observing, and Extending

Nuts and Bolts of Fieldnotes

Contrasting Examples

Fall Break: Oct. 7-8
Week 7: Oct. 15

Interviews & Focus Groups

Methodological Comparisons and Some Nuts and Bolts

Interviews and Focus Groups for Alternative Purposes

Week 8: Oct. 22

Documents and Other Social Artifacts

Archival Research as a Field Experience

Documentary Difficulties

Documentary Diversities

Week 9: Oct. 29

Challenges and Strategies for Qualitative Data Analysis

III. Approaches to Design in Qualitative Research

Week 10: Nov. 5
Case Study Research

Single Cases from a Statistical Standpoint

Introduction to Case Study Methods

A Case of What? And When is a Case Not Just a Case?

Week 11: Nov. 12
Comparative Case Studies

Alternative Positivist Approaches to Comparing Cases

Interpretive Comparisons

Week 12: Nov. 19
Historical Analysis

What Use is History?

Challenges and Promises of Historical Explanation

Discourse, Action, and Institutions in Historical Analysis
Week 13: Nov. 26

Comparative History

Macrocausal Analysis in Perspective


Alternative Approaches


Week 14: Dec. 3

Social Science in the Dissertation and Beyond: Writing, Doing, Being


