Graduate Seminar: Advanced Qualitative Methods
(990501)

Fall Semester 2023

Instructor:
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Office Hours (Virtual or In-Person): Mondays, 2:00-4:00pm

Course Times and Location:

October 2nd – December 18th, 2023
Mondays, 9:45am-12:30pm
South Hall, Seminar Room West

Course Description:

This course provides an overview of qualitative research methodology and methods in relation to IR, and it will provide students with hands-on knowledge of techniques they may want to apply in their own research. The social sciences have come into existence as a distinct field of scientific enquiry at the beginning of the 20th century. Since then, the qualitative/quantitative distinction has become a productive methodological divide. The course is divided into three sections. During the first section, we will discuss the variety of ontological and epistemological assumptions underlying qualitative research and their impact on our research design, as well as ethical questions related to qualitative research. In the second section, we will take a look at various approaches to qualitative research design (i.e., comparative approach vs. single case study). Finally, students will explore a range of different methods of data collection and analysis (e.g., interviewing, discourse analysis, ethnographies) both theoretically and practically.

Intended Learning Outcomes:

By the end of this seminar, students should gain:
- familiarity with qualitative empirical research, its most important assumptions and basic concepts;
- knowledge of various approaches in qualitative research as well as several data collection and data analysis techniques;
- an ability to select a suitable research design and methodology depending on the research question and to design an empirical qualitative research project; and
- an ability to evaluate qualitative research and reflect upon quality criteria.

Course Organization:

We will meet on a weekly basis, and our sessions will be a mix of discussion of the **required readings**, **short inputs** from the instructor, **active application** of the learning material, and **Q&A with guest experts** sharing their practical experiences with qualitative methods. Please see the session plan below, but note that it is subject to change. Please also consult the up-to-date version on Teams:

Sessions	Date and Time	Type	Location	Topic and Literature
Ontology, epistemology, and ethical implications				
Week 1, Sessions 1-2	Monday, Oct 2nd 9:45am-12:30pm	Seminar	Constructor University, South Hall, Seminar Room West	Introduction to qualitative research: Philosophical assumptions and interpretive frameworks _Required Reading_: Creswell, J.W. & Poth, C.N. (2018). Philosophical assumptions and interpretive frameworks. In _Qualitative inquiry and research design_ (pp. 15-39). Sage Publications.
Week 2, Sessions 3-4	Monday, Oct 9th 9:45am-12:30pm	Seminar	Constructor University, South Hall, Seminar Room West	Ethics in qualitative research _Required Reading_: Wood, E.J. (2006). The ethical challenges of field research in conflict zones, _Qualitative Sociology, 29_(3): 373-386. Ackerly, B. (2008). Reflexivity in practice: Power and ethics in feminist research on international relations. _International Studies Review, 10_(4): 693-707.
Week 3, Sessions 5-6	Monday, Oct 16th 9:45am-12:30pm	No class. Work on your _Preliminary Idea for a Qualitative Research Project_. Instructor consultation available.		

				Qualitative research designs	
Week 4, Sessions 7-8	Monday, Oct 23rd 9:45am-12:30pm			Comparative approaches: Case studies *Required Reading*: Bennett, A. & Elman, C. (2016). Case study methods in the international relations subfield. *Comparative Political Studies*, *40*(2): 170-195. Klotz, A. (2008). Case selection. In A. Klotz & D. Prakash (Eds.) *Qualitative methods in international relations: A pluralist guide* (pp. 43-58). Palgrave Macmillan UK.	
Week 5, Sessions 9-10	Monday, Oct 30th 9:45am-12:30pm	Seminar	Constructor University, South Hall, Seminar Room West	Single case study: Process tracing *Required Reading*: Bennett, A. (2010). Process tracing and causal inference. In H.E. Brady & D. Collier (Eds.) *Rethinking social inquiry: Diverse tools, shared standards* (pp. 207-219). Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. Collier, D. (2011). Understanding process tracing. *PS: Political Science & Politics, 44*(4), 823–830.	
				Qualitative methods	
Week 6, Sessions 11-12	Monday, Nov 6th 9:45am-12:30pm	Seminar	Constructor University, South Hall, Seminar Room West	Interviews I: Approaches, techniques, practicalities Guest Experts Q&A: Priya Singh & Irmak Sel, BIGSSS *Required Reading*: Brinkmann, S. (2014). Unstructured and semi-structured interviewing. In P. Leavy (Ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of qualitative research* (pp. 424-456). Oxford University Press. Rathbun, B. C. (2009). Interviewing and qualitative field methods: Pragmatism and practicalities. In J.M. Box-Steffensmeier, H.E. Brady, & D. Collier (Eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of political methodology* (pp. 685-701). Oxford University Press.	

Week 7, Sessions 13-14	Monday, Nov 13th 9:45am-12:30pm	Seminar	Constructor University, South Hall, Seminar Room West	Interviews II: Analysis *Suggested Reading*: Hermann, M.G. (2008). Content analysis. In A. Klotz & D. Prakash (Eds.) *Qualitative methods in international relations: A pluralist guide* (pp. 151-167). Palgrave Macmillan UK. Roulston, K. (2013). Analyzing interviews. In U. Flick (Ed.) *The SAGE Handbook of qualitative data analysis* (pp. 297–312). SAGE Publications. Saldana, J. (2021). An introduction to codes and coding. In *Coding manual for qualitative researchers*. SAGE Publications.
Week 8, Sessions 15-16	Monday, Nov 20th 9:45am-12:30pm	Seminar	Constructor University, South Hall, Seminar Room West	Discourse analysis Guest Expert Q&A: To be confirmed *Required Reading*: Milliken, J. (1999). The study of discourse in international relations: A critique of research and methods. *European Journal of International Relations, 5*(2): 225-54. Fairclough, N. (2001). Critical discourse analysis as a method in social scientific research. In R. Wodak & M. Meyer (Eds.) *Methods of critical discourse analysis* (pp. 121–38). SAGE Publications.
Week 9, Sessions 17-18	Monday, Nov 27th 9:45am-12:30pm	Seminar	Constructor University, South Hall, Seminar Room West	Ethnographies Guest Expert Q&A: To be confirmed *Required Reading*: Gusterson, H. (2008). Ethnographic research. In A. Klotz & D. Prakash (Eds.) *Qualitative methods in international relations: A pluralist guide* (pp. 93-113). Palgrave Macmillan UK. Vrasti, W. (2008). The strange case of ethnography and international relations. *Millenium: Journal of International Studies, 37*(2): 279-301.

				Archival research
Week 10, Sessions 19-20	Monday, December 4th 9:45am-12:30pm	Seminar	Constructor University, South Hall, Seminar Room West	Guest Expert Q&A: To be confirmed *Required Reading*: Dunn, K.C. (2008). Historical representations. In A. Klotz & D. Prakash (Eds.) *Qualitative methods in international relations: A pluralist guide* (pp. 78-92). Palgrave Macmillan UK.
Week 11, Sessions 21-22	Monday, December 11th 9:45am-12:30pm	No class. Work on your *Research Design Plan*. Instructor consultation available.		
Week 12, Sessions 23-24	Monday, December 18th 9:45am-12:30pm	No class. Work on your *Research Design Plan*. Instructor consultation available.		

Assessment for the 9 CP Version:

The assessment in this version of the course consists of three components: (1) preliminary idea for a qualitative research project *(20% of grade)*; (2) a research design plan *(40% of grade)*; and (3) an interview research report *(40% of grade)*.

Assessment for the 6 CP Version:

The assessment in this version of the course consists of two components: (1) preliminary idea for a qualitative research project *(20% of grade)*; and (2) a research design plan *(80% of grade)*.

Graded Components:

Preliminary Idea for a Qualitative Research Project

The aim is to generate a preliminary research question and idea for a potential qualitative research project, which you will then build upon throughout the semester. If you plan on conducting a qualitative study for your thesis, you may wish to use this as preparation for that work. You will work individually to briefly sketch out your initial ideas for a qualitative research project (about **500 words**). It should include initial thoughts about a research question and why it would be important to answer this question. This does not (yet) require an extensive review of the literature[1], but should be based on your knowledge and classwork thus far in the MAIR program. It should include some initial justifications for why the question is appropriate for qualitative research, and some reflections on where it may fit in terms of the interpretive frameworks discussed in the course.

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[1] However, this will be required in the upcoming final Research Design Plan.

Please submit a written document via Turnitin in Word or PDF form. Your preliminary idea is due **Friday, October 20th at 12:00pm (noon)**. Extensions will only be given in cases of prior notification of illness or personal emergency according to MAIR policies. If you need an extension that does not fit the above criteria, you may choose to submit up to 12 hours after this deadline, but please be aware that there will be 10% deducted from the grade.

Research Design Plan

The aim of the Research Design Plan is to build on your preliminary idea for a qualitative research project and demonstrate what you have learned about qualitative research by applying it to a research question of your own choosing. You will work individually to develop a qualitative research design plan (about **2,500 words**).[2] It should include an introduction to the research question, your planned procedures, and references cited.

Please submit a written document via Turnitin in Word or PDF form. The plan is due **Wednesday, January 10th at 12:00pm (noon)**. Extensions will only be given in cases of prior notification of illness or personal emergency according to MAIR policies. If you need an extension that does not fit the above criteria, you may choose to submit up to 12 hours after this deadline, but please be aware that there will be 10% deducted from the grade.

Structure of the Research Design Plan

1. In your **introduction** please provide:

    a. A statement of the problem based on a review of the empirical literature;
    b. The identification of a research gap and the purpose of the study; and
    c. Your central research questions and sub-questions.

2. The **procedures** section should contain the following information, as well as your justification for your selection:

    a. The philosophical assumptions and/or interpretive frameworks underlying your research;
    b. The qualitative research design to be used (e.g., comparative approach, single case);
    c. Methods and data collection procedures (i.e., case selection, forms of data, and their analysis); and
    d. Anticipated ethical issues.

3. The last section should contain a **list of references** actively cited in your research design plan.

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[2] You are not expected to carry out this research design plan for the course. However, it is recommended that you use this opportunity to test and develop ideas of how you may carry out the research for your MA thesis.

Interview Research Report

The aim of this report is to demonstrate your ability to conduct an interview and briefly analyze the results. If possible, please link it to your Research Design Plan. You will work individually to carry out one interview of about 20 minutes, which is ideally related to answering the research question in your research design plan, and to write up your report about your interview (about **2,500 words**). This should include an introduction, description of methods, interpretation, and conclusion. For the purposes of the analysis, please transcribe at least 5 minutes of the interview you conducted for your fieldwork (you are free to do more than 5 minutes if you like). To do this, choose a part of the interview you would consider important or informative concerning your study's main topic.

Please submit a written document via Turnitin in Word of PDF form. The report is due **Wednesday, January 31st at 12:00pm (noon).** Extensions will only be given in cases of prior notification of illness or personal emergency according to MAIR policies. If you need an extension that does not fit the above criteria, you may choose to submit up to 12 hours after this deadline, but please be aware that there will be 10% deducted from the grade.

Structure of the Interview Research Report

1. In your **introduction**, please state your topic and why it is worth researching. If the interview is related to your Research Design Plan, you may adapt the information from the plan for this purpose. Please explain why choosing interviews as a data-gathering method is beneficial for the topic. In total, this should amount to about 1-2 paragraphs maximum.

2. The **methods** section of the report will take a slightly different format than typical for a research paper. It should contain the following:

   a. Describe what kind of interview you did and why you chose that specific interview type. For this, please reference the various typologies discussed in class in terms of the level of control you wanted to have (structured vs. unstructured), your focus (meanings and frameworks vs. events and processes), and your scope (narrow vs. broad).

   b. Describe how the questions or the topics in your interview guide are connected to your overall research question. Highlight some interview topics or questions which were particularly important for your topic. For instance, you could specifically talk about crucial questions you used to operationalize some core concepts or parts of your question regarding your topic.

   c. Describe how you got in contact with a potential informant and how the process of getting in touch and making an appointment for the interview went. Please remember to maintain your interviewee's confidentiality and do not provide any names or identifying details.

   d. Finally, please describe your analysis. Explain why you have chosen this specific approach and describe the process of analysis in detail.

3. In the **interpretation** section, consider your assertions and propositions about the topic and discuss this concerning your data. You can use direct quotes from the interview transcript to

show themes and topics that support your assertions. Try to apply at least one embedded structure that is related to your analysis approach.

4. In your **conclusion**, please discuss the broader issues your research raises, and what research, if any, you would like to see pursued by yourself or others as a consequence of your research.

5. Please include an appendix of your **interview guide**.

How to Do Well in the Course:

This course covers a lot of information in a relatively short time, with the goal of allowing you to gain exposure to the broad issues related to qualitative research in IR. A variety of materials, resources, and learning formats will be offered to help you make the most of the course. It is expected that you take an active role in your learning by critically reading the required texts in advance of class, actively engaging with the materials, and fully participating in class discussions.

To support active discussion in class (which will make up the bulk of classroom time), you are expected to prepare 3-5 talking points/questions related to the required texts, to be submitted via Forms on Sunday evenings by 11:59pm prior to class. These submissions will not be graded, but it is possible to earn ½ bonus point per set of talking points/questions submitted. If all talking points/questions are submitted, you can earn a total of 5 bonus points towards your final grade.

Course Materials:

The course is organized primarily using MS Teams. You will find all materials, including the syllabus, slides, required readings, and exercises organized according to session channels. All relevant announcements and information will be shared via Teams.

Course Equipment and Software:

Please make sure you have a laptop with MS Teams installed. All assignments must be submitted via Turnitin, a software that checks for possible plagiarism. You are responsible for registering for the Turnitin classroom and ensuring that Turnitin is set-up and functioning properly. You can set up an account at turnitin.com and enroll is our classroom using the following information: Class ID: 40694937 / Enrollment Key: MAIRQUAL

Course Communication:

You are always welcome to send me an email or a chat message via Teams if you have any questions, and I will do my best to answer in a timely manner (Monday through Friday, during normal working hours). But please consider the following questions before doing so:

- Have you included your name and which course you have a question about?
- Have you been specific about the question you are asking?
- Have you double-checked to make sure that the answer to your question is not on the syllabus or Teams?

Academic Integrity

Attempting to receive credit for written work that is not one's own is a violation of *Constructor University's Code of Academic Integrity (*https://constructor.university/student-life/student-services/university-policies/academic-policies/code-of-academic-integrity). This includes, but is not limited to:

- Students who intentionally copy work from someone else knowing that this is against the rules;
- Students who copy an idea but fail to cite the source of the idea because they do not understand how to cite sources;
- Students who unintentionally copy an idea based on something they just read;
- Students who turn in the same assignment for two classes without seeking prior permission from instructors.

If there is evidence of plagiarism in your work, you will **immediately receive a 0% and it will be reported to the Office of Academic Affairs.** It is each student's responsibility to learn the rules governing the proper use of sources. If you have questions concerning the appropriate use of sources, please refer to *the resources provided in this course or ask your instructor*.

The Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI)

This policy covers any generative AI tool, such as ChatGPT, Elicit, etc. This includes text, slides, artwork, graphics, video, audio, and other products generated by artificial intelligence.

- This course aims for you to be able to critically think about qualitative research as discussed in the course. This means that you are evaluated on your own critical thinking skills and abilities, not that of an AI tool.
- However, it is possible to use an AI tool in the following ways for this course: (1) to help you find out more about different interpretive frameworks or research design; or (2) to find appropriate literature sources. If you do so, please clearly state how AI was used in your work.
- That being said, AI tools should NOT be used to: (1) do any actual analysis; (2) generate conclusions; (3) generate text for your reports; or (4) anything else that doesn't fall under the previous bullet point.

- o Note that the material generated by these programs may be inaccurate, incomplete, or otherwise problematic. Accordingly, a reduction in the grade is likely when using AI simply due to poorer quality of work.

If any part of this AI policy is confusing or uncertain, please discuss this with your instructor directly before submitting your work.