Qualitative Political Analysis

PSC 694, Fall 2011
Prof. Audie Klotz

Class: Mondays 6:45–9:30 pm in Maxwell 315
Office Hours: M & W 3:45–4:45 pm (or by appt.)

email: aklotz@maxwell.syr.edu
office: Eggers 330, 443-3866

OVERVIEW: This course introduces the research techniques most often associated with the "qualitative" label: case selection, ethnography, historiography, discourse analysis, and process tracing. We will also reassess the distinctions between qualitative, quantitative, and formal methods. Readings will draw from Political Science and, to a lesser extent, other disciplines. The overarching goal is to hone your abilities to assess published works and to select appropriate tools of analysis for your own research. Therefore, the course should be useful both to those in the early stages of graduate work and to those starting dissertations.

E-MAIL: I routinely send messages and announcements via Blackboard (blackboard.syr.edu). The Blackboard system automatically uses your <@syr.edu> address, because the University considers it the primary means of distributing official communications. If you do not regularly use your SU email account, be sure to set a "forward" to your preferred email address.

READINGS: Come to class prepared to discuss and apply the assigned readings listed for each session. Two textbooks are available for purchase at the campus bookstore: Methods of Social Movement Research [MSMR] edited by Bert Klandermans and Suzanne Staggenborg (Minnesota 2002) and Qualitative Methods in International Relations [QMIR] edited by Audie Klotz and Deepa Prakash (Palgrave 2008). Links to the other articles and book chapters can be found on Blackboard.

ATTENDANCE: Participation, 20% of your grade, is premised on regular attendance in class. If you anticipate being absent for officially-sanctioned reasons, let me know in advance, with supporting documentation when appropriate. Note that this is the first year for a new policy on religious holidays (http://supolicies.syr.edu/emp_ben/religious_observance.htm), which includes procedures for you to notify me through MySlice at the start of the semester; also see me to confirm alternative deadlines for any assignments. If you are ill, send me an email when possible, and for extended absences, provide a note from your doctor when you return to class. Otherwise, excessive absences will reduce your participation grade. Regardless of the reason for your absence, be sure to check Blackboard for any announcements or in-class exercises that you may have missed.

ASSIGNMENTS: There will be four homework exercises; these are due in class and comprise 40% of your grade (10% each). Late homework will not receive full credit, but it is always better to turn in something rather than nothing. In addition, you will write two short memos and complete in-class exercises, all of which factor into your participation grade. The final project will be a research design, which is another 40% of your grade. Talk to me before a due date if you anticipate difficulty meeting a deadline. If you might qualify for a disability-related
accommodation, contact the Office of Disability Services <http://disabiltyservices.syr.edu> as soon as possible. After they provide you with an Accommodation Authorization Letter, we can make suitable arrangements.

**PLAGIARISM:** Hopefully anyone who has reached graduate school knows not to cut-and-paste material from websites nor to practice other forms of plagiarism. If you have any doubts about proper citation, talk with me before you turn in your assignment. For SU’s policies on plagiarism, particularly tough for graduate students, see <http://academicintegrity.syr.edu/academic-integrity-policy/>. To minimize ambiguity about sufficient paraphrasing or citations, you will have the option of vetting drafts of your final paper with TurnItIn via Blackboard.

**PART 1: DEFINING QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS**

Aug 29: Introduction

*Guidelines for assignments distributed.* We will discuss the course and assignments, especially the first memo. Confirm that you have access to the Blackboard site.

Sept 5: No Class (Labor Day)

Sept 12: Epistemologies
What distinguishes "qualitative" research? Is it inherently historical and cultural, rather than scientific? Does it privilege induction over deduction? Can we make only certain types of inferences? **Memo 1 due in class.**

- Brooke Ackerly, "Feminist Curb Cutting," *QMIR*.

Sept 19: Concepts
What research questions we ask, and how we ask them, depends in part on our key concepts. The definition of these also shapes subsequent decisions about methodology. **Memo 2 due in class.**

- Anna Leader, "Thinking Tools," *QMIR*.
Sept 26: Case Studies
Some people equate qualitative methods with case study analysis, but nothing inherent in comparison determines the number of cases or how we analyze those cases. What do you seek to achieve through comparison, what it is that you will compare, and how many cases should you select? **Homework 1 due in class.**

- Donatella della Porta, "Comparative Politics and Social Movements," *MSMR.*
- Audie Klotz, "Case Selection," *QMIR.*
- David Snow and Danny Trom, "The Case Study…," *MSMR.*

### Part 2: Classic Qualitative Tools

Oct 3: Process Tracing
One of the main criticisms of quantitative approaches is their reliance on correlation, from which some analysts (too quickly) infer causal significance. Qualitative researchers often stress that their methods better capture causal connections by focusing on processes. How can we capture the sequencing of change, rather than relying upon static structures or behavioral outcomes? **Homework 2 due in class.**

- Jeff Checkel, "Process Tracing," *QMIR.*
- Kathleen Blee and Verta Taylor, "Semi-Structured Interviewing …," *MSMR.*

Oct 10: Ethnography
Political scientists, thanks to Clifford Geertz, typically think of ethnography as a tool of observation used by anthropologists to produce "thick descriptions" of "natives" in "villages." This caricature inadequately characterizes the practices of anthropologists or the scope of their research. How might we need to adapt (or correct our understandings of) ethnography in order to apply it in political settings? In what ways does it matter that participant-observation requires relationships with the people we research? **Homework 3 due in class.**

- Paul Lichterman, "Seeing Structure Happen: Theory-Driven Participant Observation," *MSMR.*
- Hugh Gusterson, "Ethnography," *QMIR.*
- Institutional Review Board (IRB) overview ([http://orip.syr.edu](http://orip.syr.edu)).
Oct 17: Historiography
Political scientists often take for granted that method for historians means the construction of narratives, based especially on primary sources found by digging around musty archives. Very often we receive no training before going off to "do" historical cases, leaving us woefully unprepared. **Homework 4 due in class.**

- Kevin Dunn, "Examining Representations," *QMIR.*
- Elisabeth Clemens and Martin Hughes, "Recovering Past Protest: Historical Research on Social Movements," *MSMR.*

Oct 24: Discourse Analysis
Reflecting various strands of theorizing, diverse approaches to textual and non-textual analysis fall under the rubric of discourse. We sample a few here to get a sense of this range. **Homework 5 due in class.**

- Hank Johnston, "Verification and Proof in Frame and Discourse Analysis," *MSMR.*
- Iver Neumann, "Discourse Analysis," *QMIR.*
- Gavan Duffy, "Dialogical Analysis," *QMIR.*

**PART 3: REASSESSING THE BOUNDARIES OF QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS**

Oct 31: Content Analysis and Surveys
Analysts can use both quantitative and qualitative methods to gather data from a wide array of verbal and written sources. Rather than defending one or the other approach, we concentrate on efforts to bridge the divide. Focus on the reading(s) most relevant to your research.

- Peg Hermann, "Content Analysis," *QMIR.*
- Ruud Koopmans and Dieter Rucht, "Protest Event Analysis," *MSMR.*
- Bert Klandermans and Jackie Smith, "Survey Research: A Case for Comparative Designs," *MSMR.*
Nov 7: Modeling and Network Analysis
Some social relations rely heavily on language, others on non-verbal communication. We explore different ways of modeling these interactions. Focus on the reading(s) most relevant to your research. **IRB certification due in class.**

- Pamela Oliver and Daniel Myers, "Formal Models in Studying Collective Action and Social Movements," *MSMR*.
- Matthew Hoffmann, "Agent Based Modeling," *QMIR*.
- Mario Diani, "Network Analysis," *MSMR*.

**PART 4: RESEARCH DESIGN**

Nov 14: Levels of Analysis
If we reject the stark individualism underpinning the assumption of utility maximization, we need alternative conceptualizations, such as reason or emotion, as the basis for action. Some researchers delve into psychology, while others rely on external views, such as habits or socialization. Focus on the reading(s) most relevant to your research.

- Jerrold Post, "Political Personality Profiling," *QMIR*.
- Debra Minkoff, "Macro-Organizational Analysis," *MSMR*.

Nov 21: No Class (Thanksgiving)

Nov 28: Mixing Methods
What makes for successful mixing? Is there a fundamental difference between qualitative and quantitative or formal methods that needs to be bridged? Or are there other rationales for combining analytical techniques?

- Bert Klandermans, Suzanne Saggenborg, and Sidney Tarrow, "Conclusion: Blending Methods and Building Theories in Social Movement Research," *MSMR*.
- Samuel Barkin, “Qualitative Methods?” *QMIR*.
- Deepa Prakash, “Practicing Pluralism,” *QMIR*.

Dec 5: Working Groups
This session is an opportunity to get feedback before submitting the final version of your research design. The exact format depends on the range of topics, but the general plan is that you will cluster into groups working on similar themes, exchange drafts prior to meeting, and offer each other suggestions.

**Papers are due on Monday, Dec 12th.**
Class Participation

Participation involves more than talking – it entails constructive and respectful contributions to discussion. Quantity isn't inherently quality, and questions can be as significant as comments or opinions. If you're naturally talkative, be diligent about listening and responding to others. You might wait to raise your hand, or not offer a second comment until you've seen that most of the others have said something. If you're a shy person, challenge yourself to contribute at least once each class session. One way is to offer a question or comment early on; this strategy enables you to influence the direction of discussion rather than having to jump into the middle of debate. Or if even that is a big step, give me some of your questions or reactions to the readings in writing before class. I can then create an opening for you to speak.

I do take into account personalities when I give participation grades but as a prerequisite, your physical presence in the classroom is essential. And regardless of personality differences, everyone should make an effort to contribute. Feel free to see me during office hours or make an appointment if you want feedback, but best not to wait until the end of the semester when there is little time to make changes.

Homework

Weekly assignments are geared towards the application of various techniques so you can assess which ones would be most appropriate for your research project. In addition to two preliminary memos, you will practice using four tools through homework assignments. We will also practice some of the "boundary-crossing" techniques though in-class exercises. Together, these activities will provide you with essential building blocks for creating your research design.

Each week's assignment is due in class. (Late papers will not receive full credit, though it is always better to turn in something.) Be prepared to share your insights and unresolved issues. Keep in mind that these are preliminary forays into what might be completely unfamiliar techniques – it is appropriate to have unanswered questions or incomplete results. These need not be lengthy papers; a few pages should suffice – or perhaps even just one page, depending on what you have to say.

Memo 1

Select a research topic which will be the focus for your subsequent assignments. It can be a general question that interests you – perhaps what you wrote about in your admissions essay, an issue that you are exploring in another course, or a tentative dissertation idea. If you are new to doing independent research, you might start with one of your favorite books or authors.

First, tell me a little about what goals – personal, practical, scholarly – underpin your research topic. What assumptions – ethical, intellectual, emotional – do you bring to it? Do you have any experiences related to this topic? Do not provide a general autobiography; rather, reflect upon
how various experiences and agendas may influence your research agenda. Then consider Ackerly’s notion of “curb cutting”: can you think of a similar experiment that would sensitize you to other perspectives on your topic? If you can implement it, tell me what you did and whether it worked. If not, tell me why you think it should be effective.

Do not worry if your topic is still broad. If you are torn between two possibilities, tell me something about both, and what draws you to each. If you’ve got more than two interests, narrow it down to two or figure out a way to combine some of them. A great resource is Lisa Baglione's *Writing a Research Paper in Political Science* (Wadsworth 2007), especially her chapter on "Getting Started."

Also take advantage of the Labor Day holiday to peruse the readings and homework assignments. You have the option to skip one of four techniques (process tracing, ethnography, historiography, and discourse analysis). Are some techniques more appropriate for your topic than others? Or is there a week when you have other big assignments due? Tentatively select the techniques you intend to apply.

**Memo 2**

Select one key concept at the heart of your research topic. (If you were undecided in Memo 1, now is the time to make a definitive choice.) Some of you may have already identified theories or specific propositions that you wish to explore; others may be doing preliminary reading in other courses to identify relevant literature. Focus here on selecting a concept, not theories or hypotheses – we will get to that soon enough.

Briefly map out the ways in which this concept is applied, either within a literature you know or by an author whose work you are using. Is the core meaning of the concept contested? For instance, perhaps there are many terms that you might say are essentially the same notion. Or are there multiple variants within a larger consensus? For instance, perhaps there are a lot of adjectives used alongside a core concept. Go through as many of the steps outlined in the readings (e.g., Leander or Adcock and Collier) as you think appropriate.

**Homework 1: Case Selection**

First, think about the purpose of comparison as it relates to your research. Does your project seem better suited to the use of temporal (historical) or spatial (cross-territorial) comparison? Why? There may be other useful dimensions of comparison; time and space are the most common, so focus on one of these unless you are convinced that some other dimension is more useful.

Second, choose an appropriate number of cases for your project: one special case, a paired comparison, small-N, or the whole universe of cases. Explain the type of comparison (most different, most similar, critical test, etc.) and what you might expect to infer. Are non-cases or
counterfactuals relevant? If you think there are multiple possibilities, focus on one but feel free to offer some comments about other possibilities.

Homework 2: Process Tracing

Quite often research questions focus on structures or outcomes, because institutions or other dimensions of social relations that are more static or seem more stable can be easier to "observe" or "measure," making them more manageable at a pragmatic level. That's not a valid reason to ignore processes, but there are difficulties in doing empirical work. How do you wrestle with something that evolves over time or that is inherently unstable?

First, identify one process somehow related in your research agenda. Keep in mind that there are an infinite number of potential processes. You might adopt a macro-historical focus, such as the effects of globalization. Or you could go micro, such as decision-making. Select one piece of scholarship that looks at that process.

Then outline the type(s) of evidence the author gathers. For instance, if interviews are crucial to decision-making, what questions were asked? Alternatively, what is appropriate historical evidence of class consciousness, in the absence of interviews with dead workers? Overall, how well did the author analyze processes?

Homework 3: Ethnography

Draft a set of open-ended or semi-structured interview questions to guide an ethnographic study related to some part of your research question. Select an appropriate setting to do a little bit of participant-observation. Most of you will not find a perfect match for your research question. Instead, probe a similar question that you can practice in an alternative setting, such as an organization's meeting, Eggers café, the TA bays, or your house. As always, you should be following the guidelines from the readings to perform this exercise. You might think of this as a "pilot study" to see whether your questions are getting at what you want to know in a way that would pass IRB scrutiny.

Tell me what you did, what you hoped to learn, whether it worked well or not, and how you might expand and/or modify your application of ethnography in your research. Alternatively, you might conclude that ethnography doesn't look like a viable technique for your research project; if so, tell me why.

Homework 4: Historiography

Focus on one aspect of your study which might merit some sort of historical perspective. Are you emphasizing continuity or change? Does sequencing, for instance, play a role in one of your hypotheses? Or maybe you're probing an argument about the importance of cultural context, so
you'd need to describe the values that appear to prevail over a long period of time.

Consider the evidence you would need. How would you find at least some it in an archive? Even if you would rely mainly on secondary sources, it helps to review some of the archives used in histories written by historians. Identify one archive and do some basic research planning. Where is the archive? What materials does it contain? How accessible do you expect it to be? Would you plan on an extended stay or a short visit?

**Homework 5: Discourse Analysis**

Select one "text" (broadly or narrowly defined). You can focus on something directly relevant to your research (e.g., a political speech or a UN resolution) or something comparable in some way to what you would need for your project (e.g., an organization's mission statement but not necessarily an organization that you plan to investigate).

Tell me how you analyzed its meaning – which variant of discourse analysis – and what substantive conclusions you drew. How would you extend this analysis to additional texts? Which other form of discourse analysis would you be inclined to try next?

**Working Groups**

Presentations of draft research designs provide an opportunity to get comments and suggestions before submitting the final paper. The format for this session varies a bit every year, but each of you will be paired with at least one partner in order to get feedback. To ensure sufficient time for commentators to read the drafts, please adhere to the following guidelines:

Provide a draft paper to your partner (but not me) no later than the Monday after Thanksgiving break. While your partner is reading your paper, reciprocate and write a response. Comments will be exchanged in class (also give me a copy). Keep in mind that the most effective feedback on any draft manuscript combines both positive reinforcement and constructive criticism. Since there will be little time remaining for revisions, highlight a few main suggestions. You can always raise additional points in margin notes.

Ideally, reading a paper about a similar topic will also prompt you to think of revisions to your own research design. If this exercise raises fundamental issues that will require more than a few days to resolve, then you may want to negotiate an extension on the due date for the final paper.
PSC 694: Research Design

Advocates of the use of multiple methods stress that the result is cumulative knowledge, not idiosyncratic results, but of course not every tool is equally useful or valid in your specific projects. To delve into these issues in concrete ways, the homework assignments asked you to apply and assess in a preliminary fashion five techniques. This final project offers you an opportunity to synthesize and ponder more deeply the advantages and weaknesses of various approaches for addressing your research question. Since the purpose of this assignment (and the course) is to work through some methodological questions, more so than substantive issues in your research, stick to the following guidelines in writing your paper.

Assume that you are writing a grant proposal: you want to persuade a potential funder to support your work in a feasible way. For shorter projects, you might be writing for Maxwell summer money; for dissertations, it might be the Social Science Research Council. I will then read your papers as a grant reviewer. (Unlike the real world, potentially all of you could merit a "fund" ranking, rather than competing for finite resources.)

1) **Clearly state your question but do not provide a literature review.** If you are advanced in your dissertation research, identify the hypotheses that you seek to test or the relationship you seek to explore. You do not need to "test hypotheses" if you want to ask "how possible" questions, for instance. If you are in the early stages of defining your research interests, you might opt to build on someone else's work that you admire (perhaps extended to other issues or parts of the world) or that you think is "wrong" or poorly done (by showing how you would research the same question in a better way). Unlike in a full-fledged research design, this section should be no more than **one paragraph**. Do **not** spend pages explaining where you hypotheses come from or why current research on the issue is lacking (but be aware that a complete research design would do that).

2) **Clarify your case selection.** Remember that determining the number of cases is part of the research design, along with concept clarification and hypothesis formulation. Do **not** tell me that case selection is one of your methodologies.

3) **Select one of the four other classic qualitative tools – other than "case study" – that you find useful for researching your question.** Explain why this technique helps you and how you would apply it in your research. Presumably this section will build on and refine the preliminary application of this tool in your homework. You may also want to consult the recommended readings.

4) **Select a second analytical tool, either from the classic ones in Part 2 or the boundary-crossing ones in Part 3.** Explain why this second technique complements or contrasts your primary approach. What do you seek to gain by adopting more than one method? How will you apply it (building on your homework or in-class exercises), and how will you assess the results of the two analyses? Keep feasibility in mind.
5) **Conclude with an assessment of what your research design cannot adequately capture.** All methodologies have their strengths and limitations, and no project can cover all issues or compile every type of relevant evidence. In one paragraph, point out some of the remaining questions and/or additional tools that you would like to explore if you had more research money or time.

6) **Limit your paper to 10 double-spaced pages.** One of the biggest challenges in writing proposals is to conform to rigid requirements, sometimes including finite character limits on web-based programs. To simulate those constraints, I will not read anything past the tenth page, including references. Do not try to fudge this by changing fonts and margins! Nothing annoys a grant reviewer more than a proposal in teeny-tiny type with no room to scribble comments. Use 12-point Times Roman or equivalent, with minimum 1” margins on all sides. Don't resort to a cover page to squeeze out two or three more lines, but you can use a header or smaller margin at the top of the first page to make room for your name and a title for your project.

Turn in your paper via Blackboard no later than 9 pm on Monday, December 12th. Please do not email it to me as an attachment. Since I have already circulated my grading guidelines, I do not normally provide comments on final papers – but I will gladly provide feedback if you actually intend to do the research you propose. If you want comments, submit a paper copy to my department mailbox in 100 Eggers. Rest assured that I will not be offended if you do not want comments.

If you have extenuating circumstances that may preclude your completion of the assignment by the deadline, consult with me before rather than after the deadline. I will ask you to agree to a new deadline, and you might see an incomplete or a missing grade on your transcript.
Grading Guidelines for the Research Design Assignment

I read these papers as if they had been submitted for a grant competition, per the assignment guidelines (e.g., you get to choose what type of grant, I don't expect a literature review, you are limited to the tools we covered in the course, etc). Grades mirror whether I would support funding your proposal and the degree of enthusiasm I might bring to a selection committee meeting.

**A: Fund!** These proposals convey the importance of the idea/question and present appropriate tools to research it. The feasibility of their application is also clear, although there still might be some room for improvement. The higher the score (from 94 on up), the more likely I would go into a meeting prepared to push to fund if other reviewers are not equally enthusiastic. However, in practice, most selection committees easily agree on a few proposals that should get funding.

**A-: Fund if there's enough money.** There may be some gap between the research question and the tools, but the general idea makes sense and the methods are appropriate and feasible. These are the "gray zone" proposals that selection committees spend most of their time debating. Scoring 92 means that I would not object to funding the proposal, but others would have to be your strong advocate. Often, selection committees are willing to fund proposals that have some problems if their overall impression is that the researcher is capable of sorting out those problems while doing the research. Keep in mind that a lot of typos or other presentation gaffes won't create a positive impression! (If so, you will score 90 rather than 92 on this assignment.)

**B range: Resubmit**

B+: Promising research, however, the question may be clear but the link to the methods may need further thought and/or the feasibility of the project may be in doubt. These concerns can be resolved with a bit of rethinking before resubmitting the revised proposal the next year (or perhaps sooner to a different funder). Many grant proposals start out like this, and after a few rounds of submission, get funded. Do not take to heart rejection letters, as they're an inevitable part of the process!

B: You still need to sort out some basic issues, e.g., key concepts or how different tools will be applied.

B-: In addition to needing to sort out some basic issues, you need to pay more attention to presentation.

**C range: No Funding**

These proposals still need to resolve big issues. Without a clear research question, it is impossible to select appropriate methods. If you have done all of your homework assignments, this should not happen!