This course introduces the research techniques most often associated with the "qualitative" label: case studies, 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.

Come to class prepared to discuss and apply the assigned readings listed for each session. Many weeks, you will also complete homework that asks you to apply lessons from the readings. One textbook is available for purchase at the campus bookstore: 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 (blackboard.syr.edu). Recommended resources are also listed on Blackboard, to provide examples from a variety of topics and for further specialized guidance. Additional recommendations welcome.

Participation, 20% of your grade, is premised on regular attendance in class. In addition, you will write two short memos and complete in-class exercises, which factor into your participation grade. If you anticipate being absent for officially-sanctioned reasons, let me know in advance, with supporting documentation when appropriate. Notify me of any absences due to religious holidays via MySlice during the first two weeks of the semester, then confirm alternative deadlines for any assignments (http://supolicies.syr.edu/emp_ben/religious_observance.htm). 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. Regardless of the reason for your absence, be sure to check Blackboard for any announcements or in-class exercises that you may have missed.

You will complete four homework exercises (out of five options); 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. 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://disabilityservices.syr.edu> as soon as possible. After they provide you with an Accommodation Authorization Letter, we can make suitable arrangements.

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.

Jan 14: Introduction
Guidelines for assignments distributed. We will discuss the course and assignments, especially the first memo. Confirm that you can access the Blackboard site.

PART 1: THE FOUNDATIONS OF RESEARCH DESIGN

Jan 21: Cultures of Inquiry
What distinguishes "qualitative" research? Is it inherently historical and interpretive, 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.

Jan 28: Core 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.

Feb 4: 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.**


o Audie Klotz, "Case Selection," QMIR.

o Dan Slater and David Ziblatt, "The Enduring Indispensability of the Controlled Comparison," Comparative Political Studies 46 (10), October 2013: 1301-27.

PART 2: FOUR CLASSIC QUALITATIVE TOOLS

Feb 11: 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 2 due in class.


o Hugh Gusterson, "Ethnography," QMIR.

o Symposium, “Fieldwork, Identities, and Intersectionality,” PS: Political Science and Politics 42 (2), April 2009: 287-328 – read the Editors’ Introduction and the contribution(s) most relevant to your own research.

Feb 18: 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 3 due in class.

o John Berger, Ways of Seeing (Viking 1973), pp. 45-64.

o Iver Neumann, "Discourse Analysis," QMIR.

o Gavan Duffy, "Dialogical Analysis," QMIR.


Feb 25: 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.

o Ian Lustick, "History, Historiography, and Political Science: Multiple Historical Records and

- Kevin Dunn, "Examining Representations," *QMIR*.
- Watch “The Umbrella Man” (5 min. video linked on BB).

**Mar 4: 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 5 due in class.*

- Jeffrey Checkel, "Process Tracing," *QMIR*.

**March 11: Spring Break**

*No class*

### PART 3: MIXING METHODS

**March 18: Reassessing the Boundaries of Qualitative Analysis**

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?

- Samuel Barkin, “Qualitative Methods?” *QMIR*.
- Sharlane Nagy Hesse-Biber, *Mixed Methods Research: Merging Theory with Practice* (Guilford 2010), ch. 3.
- Deepa Prakash, “Practicing Pluralism,” *QMIR*.

Peruse tools for April 1-15 & identify one most likely to be relevant for your research.
March 25: Institutional Review Board
No class (International Studies Association meeting)
**Complete basic IRB certification & submit copy of CITI confirmation.**
See IRB folder in Assignments tab for detailed instructions and related resources.

April 1: 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 two efforts to bridge the divide.

- Peg Hermann, "Content Analysis," *QMIR*.

April 8: Modeling and Network Analysis
Some social relations rely heavily on language, others on non-verbal communication. We explore two different ways to get at these interactions.

- Matthew Hoffmann, "Agent Based Modeling," *QMIR*.
- Roger Gould, "Uses of Network Tools in Comparative Historical Research," in Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences, ed. James Mahoney and Dietrich Rusechemeyer (Cambridge 2003), ch. 7

April 15: Rationality Revisited
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.

- Jerrold Post, "Political Personality Profiling," *QMIR*.

Apr 22: 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.

April 29: Final Papers due (via Blackboard)
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. 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 tools through four homework assignments. 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.

Finally, peruse the readings and homework assignments. You have the option to skip one of the four classic techniques (ethnography, discourse analysis, historiography, and process tracing). 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.

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, *Writing a Research Paper in Political Science* (any edition), especially her chapter on "Getting Started."

**Memo 2**

Select one core 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, there may be many terms that you might say are essentially the same notion. Or are there multiple variants within a larger consensus? 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: 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 real-world setting to do a little bit of participant-observation this week. 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.

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 3: Discourse Analysis

Select one "text" (broadly or narrowly defined). Focus either 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 – with 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?

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.

Then consider the evidence you would need. How would you find at least some of 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: 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?

Working Groups

Presentations of draft research designs provide an opportunity to get comments and suggestions before submitting the final paper. Ideally, reading a paper about a similar topic will also prompt you to think of revisions to your own research design. 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) by the deadline announced in class. While your partner is reading your paper, reciprocate and write a response. These written comments will be exchanged in class and provided to me too. 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.

If this exercise raises fundamental issues that will require more than a few days to resolve, then you may want to negotiate a modest extension on the due date for the final paper. I would rather see your best work.
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 techniques in a preliminary fashion. 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 the final 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. 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 classic qualitative tools 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 on the last day of class. Please do **not** email it to me as an attachment. Since I circulate my grading guidelines at the start of the semester, I do not normally provide detailed comments on final papers – but I will gladly provide more feedback if you actually intend to do the research you propose. If you want comments, **also** 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). 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. 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!