

Advanced Research Methods II: Qualitative Methods

Master in Social Sciences
Carlos III – Juan March Institute
Spring Term 2024-2025

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Class hours: Monday, 14.00-17.00

Location: tbc

Office hours: Thursday 15.00-17.00 or upon request (2.18.F09.)

Course description

This course is about how to evaluate and conduct qualitative research. We have two key goals. The first is to develop your qualitative literacy. How can we distinguish sound from unsound qualitative research? The second goal is to get hands-on experience with qualitative research.

Our approach to qualitative research is epistemologically plural: we consider different types of qualitative research grounded in different standards.

The course is open to anyone with an interest in qualitative methods. Previous experience is not required. Having finished the course, you should:

1. Be equipped with the tools to engage critically with qualitative social science research – even if you do not choose to draw on qualitative methods yourself!
2. Understand how qualitative and quantitative approaches relate to one another.
3. Be equipped with a foundation to pursue qualitative social science research yourself.

As you may be aware, many of the topics we are discussing are worth an entire course of their own. Therefore, we will sometimes have to gloss over important issues. Instead of trying to cover everything, we will concentrate on the most common qualitative approaches and methods.

The course consists of twelve weekly classes and an individual research project you will work on in parallel to, and in dialogue with, the classes. You get to work on a project of your choosing and will gain hands-on experience doing qualitative research.

The readings of the course comprise papers and chapters that discuss methods and works that serve as examples of how these methods may be used in practice. To cater to your different interests and to help students who already have a solid foundation in qualitative methods deepen their knowledge, I provide ample suggestions for extra readings.

Structure of classes

Each class is divided into two parts.

1. During the first part I will present the topic of the class.

2. The second part is reserved for exercises, practical activities and discussion. The goal is to apply new knowledge and to critically discuss it. We will also practice a number of methods (e.g. process tracing, interviewing, fieldnote taking)

Requirements and evaluation

Evaluation is based on:

Class participation and discussion points	35%
Methods lab	65%
Course grade	100%

Class participation and discussion points

In this course participation means first that you attend class. It also means that you read all the required readings before class, that you prepare for class, and that you actively participate in it. You must take responsibility for your learning process: you may not understand the required readings completely but try to formulate for yourself what you would need from the class to be able to fully understand the reading before coming to class.

To help ensure active participation, you will submit discussion points before each class. Discussion points should cover some of the main issues you think we should discuss in class. You can raise questions of clarification, topics of discussion and points of critique. The document should be ~ 200-300 words. Please submit the discussion points via email abouland@clio.uc3m.es on Fridays before 11.00.

Methods Lab

The methods lab requires you to carry out hands-on qualitative research. You will identify a research topic which you will pursue over the course of the semester. Note that you may be able to use the qualitative research as part of your master thesis, if you are planning on doing this you need to discuss this with me at the start of the course. There is a choice of two different sets of methods. Both require a paper at the end and three intermediate assignments leading up to it. You will discuss these intermediate assignments with your peers, and you will receive formative feedback from me, each assignment is graded separately. Of course, time is limited, and I do not expect a fully developed research thesis at the end of the course. You will likely end up with an inconclusive paper and that is perfectly fine.

NB: You will receive more detailed and more in-depth information about this assignment at the start of the course.

- 1) This option requires you to carry out fieldwork in Madrid or at another site(s) on a social science topic. You identify the state of the debate on a topic and then use interviews and/or ethnography to add new insights. From week 6 onwards, I expect you to spend an average of two hours a week on tracking down contacts, conducting interviews, observing at field sites, transcribing interviews, developing fieldnotes, and the like.

Intermediate assignments: 1) evaluation of a successful example of the type of research you would like to do, 2) short literature review and research plan, and 3) annotated interview transcription or fieldnotes*

- 2) This option requires you to carry out research using primary sources on a social science topic. These primary sources are accessed online or via an archive. You identify the state of the debate on a topic and then use primary documents to provide new insights. The final paper should present a thorough overview of existing relevant research and identify key questions. The primary documents are then used to try and shed new light on previous claims or to fill gaps in the research. Because it will be easier to access data, I expect more of this final paper than a paper based on fieldwork. From week 6 onwards, I expect you to spend an average of two hours a week on accessing archives and reading and analyzing documents.

Intermediate assignments: 1) evaluation of a successful example of the type of research you would like to do, 2) short literature review and research plan, and 3) annotation and analysis of two primary documents*

*the exact assignment will depend on the student's method and research design

Expectations

Students come from a range of disciplinary and methods backgrounds. The different perspectives that students bring to the class will be considered a resource and a strength. You are expected to be respectful of other viewpoints (Avoid a confrontational tone) and to be open to being challenged by your peers. Misconduct and discrimination based on gender, sexual orientation, race and religion are not tolerated.

Please do not use your cellphone during class. If you choose to use a laptop, use it for taking notes, not for texting, browsing or – God forbid - shopping. Off-topic use of laptops impedes your performance and distracts fellow students.

I will engage respectfully with your ideas and work and will give timely and formative feedback on the assignments. I am open to feedback throughout the block. I am also open to your requests for clarification of course content. If anything comes up that impedes your performance in this course, please contact me.

Contact and questions

For questions or anything else that may come up, you can contact me before class or during the break. I also encourage you to come see me during office hours. You can book a slot [[insert link](#)]. You can reach me by email on abouland@clio.uc3m.es.

Acknowledgements

I have taken inspiration for this syllabus (structure, course readings and assignments) from a range of existing syllabi of qualitative methods courses from educators in sociology and political science programs. These include syllabi by [Austin Carson and Paul Staniland](#), [Jeffrey T. Checkel](#), [Michèle Lamont](#) and [Moira O'Shea](#).

NB: the required and additional reading may be subject to change, a definitive syllabus will be distributed at the start of the course

1: Introduction to Advanced Research Methods II: Qualitative Methods (27 January)

No readings. I will set out the structure of the course and discuss practicalities. We will get to know each other and try to answer the following questions:

- what knowledge and experience do you bring to this course?
- what do you want to learn and/or practice?
- what topic would you like to work on for the methods lab? Note that this does not have to be a fully developed idea and that do not need to stick to it – all I am asking is to think about a potential topic and to be prepared to discuss it in class.

2: One Approach in the Social Sciences? (3 February)

Required readings

Gary King, Robert O. Keohane, and Sidney Verba. 1994. *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research*. Princeton: Princeton University Press. (pp 1-12)

Becker, H. S. (2009). How to find out how to do qualitative research. *International Journal of Communication*, 3, 9. <https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/550/329>

Porta, Donatella della, and Michael Keating. 2008. "How Many Approaches in the Social Sciences? An Epistemological Introduction." In *Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences: A Pluralist Perspective*, eds. Donatella Della Porta and Michael Keating. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. chapter, 19–39.

Additional readings

Mahoney, J. (2010). After KKV: The new methodology of qualitative research. *World Politics*, 62(1), 120-147.

[tbd]

3: Comparative Case Selection & Process Tracing Within Case Studies (10 February)

Required readings

Posner, Daniel N. 2004. "The Political Salience of Cultural Difference: Why Chewas and Tumbukas Are Allies in Zambia and Adversaries in Malawi." *American Political Science Review* 98(4): 529–45.

Gonzalez-Ocantos, E., & LaPorte, J. (2021). Process Tracing and the Problem of Missing Data. *Sociological Methods & Research*, 50(3), 1407-1435. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0049124119826153>

Additional readings

[tbd]

****DEADLINE: evaluation of a successful example of the type of research you are interested in**

4: Abductive Research Design (17 February)

Required readings

Duneier, Mitchell. (2001). Sidewalk. New York :Farrar, Straus and Giroux. (introduction and “the book vendor”)

Small, Mario Luis. 2009. “How Many Cases Do I Need: On Science and the Logic of Case Selection in Field-Based Research.” *Ethnography* 10 (1): 5 – 38.

Additional readings

Luker, Kristin. 2008. *Salsa Dancing into the Social Sciences*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 51-75.

Timmermans, Stefan and Iddo Tavory. 2014. *Abductive Analysis: Theorizing Qualitative Research*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. Pp. 1-66.

Duneier, Mitchell. (2001). Sidewalk. New York :Farrar, Straus and Giroux. (Appendix: A Statement on Method)

[tbd]

****DEADLINE: literature review and research plan methods lab research project**

5: Research Ethics (24 February)

Required readings

Wood, E.J. The Ethical Challenges of Field Research in Conflict Zones. *Qual Sociol* 29, 373–386 (2006).
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11133-006-9027-8>

Watkins-Hayes, C. (2019). *Remaking a life: How women living with HIV/AIDS confront inequality*. Univ of California Press. (Introduction and Appendix A)

Additional Readings

Heimer, Carol A. and JuLeigh Petty. “Bureaucratic Ethics: IRBs and the Legal Regulation of Human Subjects Research,” *Annual Review of Law and Social Science* 6: 601-26.

Fujii, L. (2012). Research Ethics 101: Dilemmas and Responsibilities. *PS: Political Science t& Politics*, 45(4), 717-723.

Fisher, Dana R. “Doing Qualitative Research as if Counsel is Hiding in the Closet.” Guests post from Ali, Syed and Philip Cohen, eds. 2016. “How to do Ethnography Right,” *Contexts*
<https://contexts.org/blog/how-to-do-ethnography-right/>

[tbd]

6: Interviewing I: How to do it (3 March)

Required readings

Small, M. and J. Calarco. 2022. *Qualitative Literacy: A Guide to Evaluating Ethnographic and Interview Research*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press. Chapters 1 (pp. 23- 37), 2 (pp 47-69) and 3 (pp. 80-91).

Additional readings

Tbd.

7: Interviewing II: How to use interviews (10 March)

Required readings

Gonzalez-Ocantos, E., & Masullo, J. (2024). Aligning Interviewing with Process Tracing. *Sociological Methods & Research*, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/00491241241258229>

Lamont, M. (1992). *Money, morals, and manners: The culture of the French and the American upper-middle class*. University of Chicago Press. (Introduction, Appendix I-IV)

Additional readings

Lamont, Michèle, and Ann Swidler. 2014. "Methodological Pluralism and the Possibilities and Limits of Interviewing". *Qualitative Sociology* 37 (2):153-171.

[Tbd]

8: Ethnography: How to do it (17 March)

Required readings

Small, M. and J. Calarco. 2022. *Qualitative Literacy: A Guide to Evaluating Ethnographic and Interview Research*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press. Chapters 1 (pp. 37-46), 2 (pp 69-79) and 3 (pp. 91-98).

Emerson, R., Fretz, R., & Shaw, L. (2011). "Chapter 1. Fieldnotes in Ethnographic research". In *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes*. 2nd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Additional readings

Tbd.

****DEADLINE: annotated interview/field notes/primary documents methods lab research project**

9 and 10: Research Project Presentations (24 March and 31 March)

In these two sessions everyone will present their on-going research projects. It is an opportunity to receive feedback from your peers and from me. At this point you will have submitted the literature review and the research plan and you will be in the process of actually doing the research.

11: Primary Documents (7 April)

Required readings

TerBeek, Calvin. "'Clocks Must Always Be Turned Back': Brown v. Board of Education and the Racial Origins of Constitutional Originalism." *American Political Science Review* (2021): 1-14.

Skarpelis, A. K. M. 2020. "Life on File: Archival Epistemology and Theory." *Qualitative Sociology* 43 (3): 385–405. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11133-020-09460-1>.

Additional readings

Gould, Roger V. *Insurgent Identities: Class, Community, and Protest in Paris from 1848 to the Commune*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995. Chapter 1 and 2 and appendix B

[Tbd]

****Semana Santa, no teaching on 14 and 21 April**

12: Mixed Methods & Wrap up (28 April)

Required readings

[tbd]

The session introduces and discusses the merits and drawbacks of mixed-methods research.

In the second half we wrap-up the semester. We reflect on the course; on what we have learned on how we may build on this knowledge in the future.

****Deadline research paper methods lab, exact dates of first and second call tbd at the start of the course**