

Advanced Research Methods II: Qualitative Methods

Master in Social Sciences

Carlos III – Juan March Institute

Spring Term 2025-2026

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Class hours: Monday, 10.00-13.00

Location: 18.1.A04

Office hours: tbd 0 (2.18.C07)

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 and methodologically 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 generally divided into three 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)
3. The third part is dedicated to discussing your progress in the methods lab project (~20 minutes).

Requirements and evaluation

Evaluation is based on:

Class participation and discussion points	35%
Assignment evaluative standards in qualitative social science	10%
Methods lab	55%
*Research proposal	15%
*Annotated interview transcript, fieldnotes, or annotated document(s)	10%
*Final paper	30%
Course grade	100%

Attendance

In the master attendance to all classes is mandatory. If you miss a session, it must be for an important reason, for instance illness (including mental health issues), care for a family member or a religious holiday. More than two non-justified absences will imply failing the course.

Class Participation and Discussion Points

In this course participation means first that you attend class. Participation 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 14.00. You do not receive individual feedback on these discussion points unless I see clear points for improvement.

Class participation and the discussion points are graded on the basis of the criteria set out in a separate document that I posted on Aula Global.

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. There is a choice of three different sets of methods: (1) interviews (2) ethnography or (3) primary documents.

All three require a paper at the end and two 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 receives a separate grade.

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! This is what I expect.

From week six onwards, I ask you to spend an average of two hours a week doing the research. Depending on your choice of method this involves tracking down contacts, conducting interviews, observing at field sites, transcribing interviews, developing fieldnotes, accessing archives and reading and analyzing documents. You will need to plan for a total of ~ 18 hours. You can find more information in a separate document that I posted on Aula Global.

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.

Deadlines

tbd	Evaluative Standards in Qualitative Social Science
tbd	Methods Lab Project Idea
tbd	Research Proposal Methods Lab Project
tbd	Annotated Interview Transcript, Fieldnotes, or Annotated Document(s) Methods Lab Project
tbd	Final Paper Methods Lab Project (1 st call)
tbd	Final Paper Methods Lab Project (2nd call)

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 <https://calendar.app.google/aGCYMKFXU5mmMPCv5>. 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. These include syllabi by [Austin Carson and Paul Staniland](#), [Jeffrey T. Checkel](#), [Michèle Lamont](#) and [Moirá O'Shea](#).

1: Introduction to Advanced Research Methods II: Qualitative Methods (26 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? (2 February)

Required readings

King, G., Keohane, R. O., & Verba, S. (2021). *Designing social inquiry: Scientific inference in qualitative research*. Princeton university press. (Read 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, P. della & Keating, M. (2008). How Many Approaches in the Social Sciences? An Epistemological Introduction. In D. della Porta & M. Keating (Eds.), *Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences: A Pluralist Perspective* (pp. 19–39) . Cambridge University Press.

Additional readings

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

3: Comparative Case Selection & Process Tracing Within Case Studies (9 February)

Required readings

Posner, D. 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), 529-545.

Additional readings

Simmons, E. S., & Smith, N. R. (Eds.). (2021). *Rethinking comparison*. Cambridge University Press.

LaPorte, J. (2024). Preparing a Causal Research Design. In Cyr, J. & Goodman, S.W. (Eds.), *Doing Good Qualitative Research* (pp. 85). Oxford University Press.

Slater, D., & Ziblatt, D. (2013). The enduring indispensability of the controlled comparison. *Comparative Political Studies*, 46(10), 1301-1327.

Seawright, J., & Gerring, J. (2008). Case selection techniques in case study research: A menu of qualitative and quantitative options. *Political research quarterly*, 61(2), 294-308.

Collier, D. (2011). Understanding process tracing. *PS: political science & politics*, 44(4), 823-830.

4: Abductive Research Design (16 February)

Required readings

Duneier, M. (2001). *Sidewalk*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. (Read: Introduction and The Book Vendor.)

Small, M. L. (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, K. (2009). *Salsa dancing into the social sciences*. Harvard University Press. (Read pp. 51-75.)

Tavory, I., & Timmermans, S. (2014). *Abductive analysis: Theorizing qualitative research*. University of Chicago Press. (pp. 1-66.)

Duneier, M. (2001). *Sidewalk*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux. (Read: Appendix: A Statement on Method.)

5: Research Ethics (23 February)

Required readings

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

Additional Readings

Heimer, C. A., & Petty, J. (2010). Bureaucratic ethics: IRBs and the legal regulation of human subjects research. *Annual Review of Law and Social Science*, 6(1), 601-626.

Fujii, L. A. (2012). Research ethics 101: Dilemmas and responsibilities. *PS: Political Science & Politics*, 45(4), 717-723.

Fisher, D. R. (2016). Doing Qualitative Research as if Counsel Is Hiding in the Closet. *Contexts*, 15(2), 12-14. <https://contexts.org/blog/how-to-do-ethnography-right/>

Knott, E., & Kostovicova, D. (2024). To Report or Not to Report on Research Ethics in Political Science and International Relations: A New Dimension of Gender-Based Inequality. *American Political Science Review*, 1-18. doi: 10.1017/S0003055424000546.

Pearlman, W. (2023). Emotional Sensibility: Exploring the Methodological and Ethical Implications of Research Participants' Emotions. *American Political Science Review*, 117(4), 1241-1254. doi:10.1017/S0003055422001253

American Sociological Association (2018). American Sociological Association Code of Ethics, June 2018. https://www.asanet.org/wp-content/uploads/asa_code_of_ethics-june2018a.pdf

Reich, J. A. (2021). Power, positionality, and the ethic of care in qualitative research. *Qualitative Sociology*, 44(4), 575–581. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11133-021-09500-4>

American Political Science Association (2020). Principles and Guidance for Human Subject Research.

[https://www.apsanet.org/Portals/54/diversity%20and%20inclusion%20prgms/Ethics/Final Principles%20with%20Guidance%20with%20intro.pdf?ver=2020-04-20-211740-153](https://www.apsanet.org/Portals/54/diversity%20and%20inclusion%20prgms/Ethics/Final_Principles%20with%20Guidance%20with%20intro.pdf?ver=2020-04-20-211740-153)

Wood, E. J. (2006). The ethical challenges of field research in conflict zones. *Qualitative sociology*, 29, 373–386. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11133-006-9027-8>

6: Interviewing I: How to do it (2 March)

Required readings

Small, M. L., & Calarco, J. M. (2022). *Qualitative literacy: A guide to evaluating ethnographic and interview research*. Univ of California Press. (Read: Chapters 1 (pp. 23– 37), 2 (pp 47–69) and 3 (pp. 80–91).)

Additional readings

Gerson, K., & Damaske, S. (2020). *The science and art of interviewing*. Oxford University Press.

Lareau, A. (2021). *Listening to people: A practical guide to interviewing, participant observation, data analysis, and writing it all up*. University of Chicago Press.

Dexter, A. L. (2006). *Elite and specialized interviewing*. ECPR Press.

7: Interviewing II: How to use interviews (9 March)

Required readings

Gonzalez-Ocantos, E., & Masullo, J. (2020). Aligning Interviewing with Process Tracing. *Sociological Methods & Research*, 00491241241258229. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00491241241258229>

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

Additional readings

Lamont, M., & Swidler, A. (2014). Methodological pluralism and the possibilities and limits of interviewing. *Qualitative sociology*, 37, 153–171.

Small, M. L., & Cook, J. M. (2023). Using interviews to understand why: Challenges and strategies in the study of motivated action. *Sociological Methods & Research*, 52(4), 1591–1631

8: Primary Documents (16 March)

This session starts with a one and a half hour seminar hosted by Chris Cleary, who will discuss his use of primary documents for his book *The Difficult Politics of Peace: Rivalry in Modern South Asia* (2022).

Required readings

Skarpelis, A. K. (2020). Life on file: Archival epistemology and theory. *Qualitative Sociology*, 43(3), 385-405. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11133-020-09460-1>.

Clary, C. (2022). *The Difficult Politics of Peace: Rivalry in Modern South Asia*. Oxford University Press. (Read: pp. 1-8.)

Vaughan, D. (2004). Theorizing disaster: Analogy, historical ethnography, and the Challenger accident. *Ethnography*, 5(3), 315-347. (Read: pp. 315-316 and pp. 320– 332.)

Additional readings

Benzecry, C. E., Deener, A., & Lara-Millán, A. (2020). Archival work as qualitative sociology. *Qualitative Sociology*, 43, 297-303. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11133-020-09466-9>

Elias, N. (2000 [1939]). *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*, 2nd Edition. Wiley-Blackwell.

Vaughan, D. (2016). *The Challenger Launch Decision Risky Technology, Culture, and Deviance at NASA, Enlarged Edition*. University of Chicago Press.

9: Ethnography: How to do it (23 March)

Required readings

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

Additional readings

Emerson, R. M., Fretz, R. I., & Shaw, L. L. (2011). *Writing ethnographic fieldnotes*. University of Chicago press. (Read: Chapter 1 Fieldnotes in Ethnographic research.)

Lareau, A. (2021). *Listening to people: A practical guide to interviewing, participant observation, data analysis, and writing it all up*. University of Chicago Press.

Wedeen, L. (2019). *Authoritarian apprehensions: Ideology, judgment, and mourning in Syria*. University of Chicago Press.

Pisano, J. (2024). Ethnography. In Cyr, J. & Goodman, S.W. (Eds.), *Doing Good Qualitative Research* (pp. 85). Oxford University Press.

Cramer, K. J. (2024). Interviewing and Listening to Ordinary People. In Cyr, J. & Goodman, S.W. (Eds.), *Doing Good Qualitative Research* (pp. 85). Oxford University Press.

Semana Santa: No Teaching (30 March and 6 April)

10 and 11: Research Project Presentations (13 April and 20 April)

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.

12: Mixed Methods & Wrap up (27 April)

The seminar introduces and discusses the merits and drawbacks of mixed-methods research. It will be hosted, in part, by Simon Chauchard.

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.

Required readings

[tbd]

Additional readings

Small, M. L. (2011). How to conduct a mixed methods study: Recent trends in a rapidly growing literature. *Annual review of sociology*, 37(1), 57-86.

Gerring, J. (2017). Qualitative methods. *Annual review of political science*, 20(1), 15-36. (Read: Multimethod Research pp. 28-31.)

Lieberman, E. S. (2005). Nested analysis as a mixed-method strategy for comparative research. *American political science review*, 99(3), 435-452.

Taylor, V., Kimport, K., Van Dyke, N., & Andersen, E. A. (2009). Culture and mobilization: Tactical repertoires, same-sex weddings, and the impact on gay activism. *American Sociological Review*, 74(6), 865-890.

13: Extra class (4 May)

Please make sure to be available on this date. If we must cancel a class, we will use this timeslot to reschedule.

14: Extra class (11 May)

Please make sure to be available on this date. If we must cancel a class, we will use this timeslot to reschedule.

Deadline 1st call: Final Paper Methods Lab Project (tbd)

Deadline 2nd call: Final Paper Methods Lab Project (tbd)