AUDIENCE: Prerequisites: none. Open to all graduate students.

COURSE DESCRIPTION: This course has been designed to help students refine their qualitative research design skills and to think about how combining more than one form of inference can lead to greater confidence in one’s research findings. Class time will be devoted to discussing causal and probabilistic forms of inference, concept formation and measurement, small-n comparison, the use of in-depth case studies, nested analysis using large and small-n components, and a range of alternative methods which lend themselves to combined strategies of investigation (ethnography, game theory, QCA, and experiments).

WHY SHOULD YOU TAKE THIS COURSE? Within the discipline qualitative and mixed methods are important tools of research. Within the APSA the launching of a Qualitative and Mixed Methods section has been seen as an important step in integrating these two different modes of investigation. Many political scientists are committed to this ecumenical view of methods and for this reason the section is one of the largest in the association. With the increased prominence of normal science models and the regression model to provide inference in the social sciences, qualitative methods have experienced a revival as well. The nature of this is two-fold. First, there are recognized limitations to what quantitative social science using the regression model can study. Many interesting and worthwhile questions demand the use of alternative strategies of research or the combination of more than one method. Second, the expansion of large-n studies using the regression model in the last twenty years has made the issue of how to generate legitimate inference and the explicit study of method a central concern of the discipline. This trend has led to a renaissance of explicit methodological thinking on the part of qualitative social scientists. Many qualitative social scientists have begun to consider how their styles of work generate valid inferences about the social world, and how their logic of inference departs from that of other modes of inquiry. The centrality of these questions across many schools of social science has been fruitful in thinking about how multiple forms of inquiry complement each other and allow us to make stronger logical inferences about the social world.

REQUIREMENTS: There is substantial reading each week (several articles or a book, or some combination thereof). Careful reading and preparation for active and cogent participation in
class discussions is essential. Students will prepare summary papers for individual readings in several weeks, and will also prepare a research paper.

Summary Paper Assignments: Each week several students will be responsible for the summarization of one specific chapter or article in the weeks reading. This assignment entails writing a short summary of the relevant reading assignment (1-2 pages). The paper should summarize the major research questions raised by the reading and the major theses of the author(s). It should also, if relevant, discuss the hypotheses framed, structures of inference, and evidence used in each piece of research. Papers that raise topics for further discussion, critically evaluate the literature, and, if relevant, relate that week’s readings to those of earlier weeks will be seen in a more favorable light. Discussion papers are due the Wednesday before the week's seminar meeting at 9:00am and should be distributed via email. All participants should read the summaries carefully before the seminar. All students are still responsible for doing all the reading each week. Someone else's notes are not a substitute for your own preparation. These notes will be helpful when you study for your comparative comprehensive exam.

Research paper: I am looking for three types of research papers in this course. You should consider these as strictures unless you discuss an alternative way of meeting the paper requirement with me. The first kind of paper that I would like to see would be explicitly methodological. That is, it would address one of the methodological controversies that are raised in the literature. The second kind of paper I would like to see would consciously use one of the research methods discussed in the course and apply it to a research question (e.g. case study, QCA, analytic narrative, ethnographic, small-n comparison, nested regression, etc.). Such a paper would need to be methodologically explicit in the framing of its design and execute the test/validation of a hypotheses/proposition using the method selected. The third kind of paper that is appropriate to this course is the execution of a research design for a larger project. Here I would expect the framing of a very defined research question, and falsifiable hypotheses/propositions about it that grow out of a survey of the relevant theoretical literature. I would also expect a detailed discussion of the kind of inferential strategy or strategies that would be used to provide verification of your hypothesis/proposition, and a discussion of the data or sources that would be used. Students should take this as an invitation to do a trial run of dissertation or funding proposals they will be floating in the near future.

PROCEDURES FOR EVALUATION: Course requirements will be weighted in the following manner. Paper -- 60%, research meetings -- 5% (10% total), research presentation -- 5% (failure to make the first draft submission deadline – minus 2%), participation -- 15%, discussant assignments 10%.

Books Available for Purchase

Required (you will read most of these):
POS 6933 Qualitative and Mixed Methods


Recommended (you will read less of these but they are good books that are worth having in your personal library):


Course Outline

A. Fundamentals

Week 1 (January 10): Course Overview

Week 2 (January 17): Causal and Probabilistic Logics of Inference

Readings:


Week 3 (January 24): Causation
Readings:


Week 4 (January 31): The Comparative Method

Readings:


Week 5 (February 7):  Concepts and Measurement

Readings:
(read mainly 1033-1046).


B. Small-n Analysis, Case Study, and Causal Assessment

Week 6 (February 14): Introduction to Case Study

Readings:


Week 7 (February 21): Case Studies: Design, Selection, Theory Testing vs. Development, Structured-Focused vs. Controlled Comparison, Theory Testing

Readings:


Week 8: (February 28): *No Class Meeting*

Schedule a meeting with me this week for a preliminary discussion of your research interest.

Spring Break

*Week 9 (March 14): Longitudinal Analysis: Process Tracing, Congruence Testing, Critical Junctures, Pacing*

*Class to be rescheduled to earlier in the week.*

Readings:


Michael Bernhard. “Institutional Syncretism and the Limitations of Path Dependence: A Theory
of Instability.” (manuscript).

C. Multiple, Mixed, and Diverse Methods

Week 10 (March 21): Nested Analysis, Mixing Casework and Statistical Analyses

Readings:


Readings:


POS 6933 Qualitative and Mixed Methods


Week 12 (April 4): Research Time

Rough drafts of papers due by class period.

Week 13 (April 11): Research Reports

Week 14: (April 18): Research Reports

Papers Due: April 30.