RESEARCH METHODS
GOVT 500-002
Schar School of Policy and Government
George Mason University

Time: Wednesdays, 4:30-7:10PM
Innovation Hall 203

Instructor contact information:
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COURSE DESCRIPTION
The course offers practical training in qualitative research methods as they apply to political science and security studies. Instead of addressing research methods in the abstract, the course will engage students in practical research via in-class exercises, field-research assignments, and writing a research proposal. Although the course will concentrate on qualitative research, the value of using mixed methods will be addressed throughout the semester. The course is composed of three parts. The first is devoted to research design – how to formulate a topic, conduct a literature review, consider ethical issues, and identify research activities and methods. Then we turn to data-collection methods, reviewing in detail such methods as the interview, focus groups, surveys, natural experiments, case studies and big data analysis. The rest of the semester is devoted to data analysis – coding, analyzing, and validating collected information. Class sessions are divided into two parts: the first reviews specific research methods or concepts; the second applies these concepts and methods using the instructor’s and other actual research projects as illustrations. Students will have the opportunity to showcase their understanding of qualitative methods, or highlight lingering problems during three research proposal-writing workshops, where they will present their progress in writing various parts of their proposals and discuss their experience in conducting research.

COURSE OBJECTIVES
- Give students hands-on experience with research methods
- Develop the analytical and critical skills needed to conduct research in the social sciences
- Strengthen students’ ability to formulate research topics and design research projects
- Apply these skills to the preparation of a dissertation/thesis proposal in the students’ fields of specialization

COURSE REQUIREMENTS
1/ Participation and class assignments: (20%)
Students are required to complete class assignments and participate in class discussions while demonstrating that they have completed required readings in advance of each session.

2/ Field Research Assignment (interview): (30%)
- Complete an interview related to your dissertation/thesis or on a topic agreed upon with the instructor. Write a 1,000-word paper indicating (1) how you prepared for the interview (preparatory research, selection of human subject, sample questionnaire, recording technique), and (2) describe what worked, what did not, what would you change/add for your next interview.
- Interview reports are due on October 19.

3/ Research Proposal Project: (50%)
- During the semester, students will be required to design a research project with a substantial qualitative research component and present their progress during three proposal-writing workshops. Students may choose their existing or planned Ph.D. dissertation/Master’s thesis topic or any other topic of interest as the
basis for this exercise. **Topics have to be finalized by September 14 (send me your proposed topics by Email on or by September 14).**

- **Workshop schedule:** *(Detailed instructions will be posted on blackboard at the beginning of the semester)*
  
  - **Draft Research Description:** By 5PM on **October 3**, students will submit a 1,000-word paper (1) identifying the research question, (2) justifying its importance in the chosen field, (3) providing a detailed literature review, and (4) addressing the ethical issues that your topic might raise. During class on **October 5**, students will be divided into small groups and each student will prepare written comments on three research draft descriptions. The class will then discuss several draft proposals and comments.
  
  - **Draft Proposal #2:** (20%) On **October 31** *(by 5PM)*, students will submit a draft research proposal (1,500 words) containing a detailed plan for carrying out a qualitative research project. During class on **November 2**, students will be divided into small groups and each student will prepare written comments on two or three drafts. The class will then discuss several draft proposals/comments.
  
  - **Final Proposal:** (3,000-word paper: 30%) Students will present their final proposal to the class and use the feedback from the class to revise them before the due date. Presentations should not exceed 15 minutes each, and will take place on **November 30 and December 7** according to a schedule that will be posted on blackboard two weeks prior. Final proposals are due on **December 11** *(by 5PM)*.

  **All draft proposals must be uploaded on blackboard. Instructions on how to do so will be provided by the instructor.**

**Deadline Summary:**

**September 11:** Human subject certificate due by 5pm (by email)

**September 14:** Research topic finalized (send me your topics by email)

**September 21:** Bring class-1 assignment to class

**October 3:** Draft research description due (upload on blackboard); discussed on **October 5**

**October 19:** Interview reports due (by email)

**October 31:** Draft proposal #2 due (upload on blackboard); discussed on **November 2**

**November 30 and December 7:** Final proposal presentations

**December 11:** Final proposals due by midnight (upload on blackboard)

**PLEASE SUBMIT ALL PAPERS IN WORD FORMAT, 12 POINT, SINGLE-SPACED**

**Writing Guides**

You might find it useful to consult the following guides to improve your writing:

- Chicago Style Citation Quick Guide, at [http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html](http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html)

**Required Books:**


**Recommended Books:**

UNIVERSITY POLICIES & INFORMATION

Academic Integrity
Students must be responsible for their own work, and students and faculty must take on the responsibility of dealing explicitly with violations. This tenet must be a foundation of our university culture. [See http://academicintegrity.gmu.edu/distance].

Academic Inclusivity
This course embodies the perspective that we all have differing perspectives and ideas and we each deserve the opportunity to share our thoughts. Therefore, we will conduct our discussions with respect for those differences. That means, we each have the freedom to express our ideas, but we should also do so keeping in mind that our colleagues deserve to hear differing thoughts in a respectful manner, i.e. we may disagree without being disagreeable. See http://integrity.gmu.edu/.

Honor Code
George Mason University has an Honor Code, which requires all members of this community to maintain the highest standards of academic honesty and integrity. Cheating, plagiarism, lying, and stealing are all prohibited. All violations of the Honor Code will be reported to the Honor Committee. See honorcode.gmu.edu for more detailed information. [See http://oai.gmu.edu/the-mason-honor-code-2/].

MasonLive/E-mail
Students are responsible for the content of university communications sent to their George Mason University email account and are required to activate their account and check it regularly. All communication from the university, college, school, and program will be sent to students solely through their Mason email account. [See https://masonlive.login.gmu.edu].

Students with Disabilities
Students with disabilities who seek accommodations in a course must be registered with the George Mason University Office of Disability Services (ODS) and inform their instructor, in writing, at the beginning of the semester [See http://ods.gmu.edu]. All academic accommodations must be arranged through ODS.

Writing Center
The George Mason University Writing Center staff provides a variety of resources and services (e.g., tutoring, workshops, writing guides, handbooks) intended to support students as they work to construct and share knowledge through writing. [See http://writingcenter.gmu.edu]. You can now sign up for an Online Writing Lab (OWL) session just like you sign up for a face-to-face session in the Writing Center, which means YOU set the date and time of the appointment! Learn more about the Online Writing Lab (OWL).

Counseling and Psychological Services
The George Mason University Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) staff consists of professional counseling and clinical psychologists, social workers, and counselors who offer a wide range of services (e.g., individual and group counseling, workshops, and outreach programs) to enhance students’ personal experience and academic performance. [See http://caps.gmu.edu].

Diversity, Religious Holiday
Please refer to George Mason University’s calendar of religious holidays and observations. (See http://ulife.gmu.edu/calendar/religious-holiday-calendar/). It is the student’s responsibility to speak to the instructor in advance should their religious observances impact their participation in class activities and assignments.
CLASS SCHEDULE AND READINGS

Part I. RESEARCH DESIGN

Class 1  Course Overview — Introduction to Qualitative Methods: Formulating a Research Topic

8/31/16  Reading list:
* Lisa A. Baglione, chapters 1 & 2
* Joseph A. Maxwell, chapter 1

Class 2  Ethical Issues in Qualitative Research

9/7/16  Reading list

Class 3  The Literature Review — Conceptual Framework

9/14/16  Guest Speaker: GMU Librarian, “Library Resources: Literature search and databases” (TBD)

Reading list
* Lisa Baglione, chapters 4 and 5
* Joseph A. Maxwell, chapter 3 (pages 39-72)

Class 4  Research Design

9/21/16  Reading list
* Lisa Baglione, chapter 7
* Joseph A. Maxwell, chapters 4, 5 & 7
Part II. DATA COLLECTION METHODS, VALIDITY, AND RELIABILITY

Class 5
9/28/16

The Interview & Survey

Reading list
- Joseph A. Maxwell, chapter 5 (pp: 90-102), and chapter 6

Class 6
10/5/16

Proposal Writing Workshop 1: Research Design

Assignment
*By October 3, submit a 1,000-word paper that (a) identifies your research proposal question; (b) identifies the expected theoretical and/or practical contributions to the field; (c) provides a detailed literature review; and (d) briefly identifies ethical issues and the measure you might take to address these concerns. Papers need to be uploaded on Blackboard in “Workshop 1” folder.*

Class 7
10/12/16

Focus Group & Quasi/Natural Experiment

Reading List

Class 8
10/19/16

Case Studies

Reading list
Class 9  
10/26/14

**Big Data Analysis**

**Guest Speaker:** Kathleen Vogel, Director of Science, Technology, and Society Program, Department of Political Science, North Caroline State University

“Big Data Analytics and National Security: Social, Ethical, and Policy Implications”

**Reading list**
- Kathleen Vogel, “Big Data and the Invisible: Social Dimensions of Science” First Workshop on Human-Centered Big Data Research, North Carolina State University, April 1-3, 2014. (A copy of the article is available on blackboard)

Class 10  
11/2/16

**Proposal Writing Workshop 2: Data Gathering**

**Assignment**

*By October 31, submit a 1,500-word paper that (1) provides a revised literature review; (2) describes your data gathering strategy; (3) identifies the questions to address; (4) identifies the groups/individuals/place/time to be investigated, and (5) provides a sample questionnaire for interviews, survey or focus group (questionnaires do not count towards word count)*

Class 11  
11/9/16

**Delphi Survey & Content Analysis**

**Guest Speaker:** Jesse Kirkpatrick, Assistant Director, GMU Institute for Philosophy and Public Policy

“Use of The Delphi Method to Analyze Security Challenges posed by Technological Developments”

**Reading list**
Class 12  Coding and Analyzing Qualitative Data
11/16/16

Reading list
• Joseph A. Maxwell, chapters 5 (pp:104-116)

Thanksgiving Recess: November 23-27, 2016

Class 13  Proposal Writing Workshop 3
11/30/16  Final proposal presentations

Class 14  Proposal Writing Workshop 3 (cont’d):
12/7/16  Final proposal presentations

Final proposals due on December 11 by 5pm (upload on blackboard)