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

Time: Thursdays, 4:30-7:10PM  
Innovation Hall 205  

Instructor contact information:  
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Office hours: Wednesdays 2-3pm, or by appointment  

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, participant observation, case studies and content analysis. The rest of the semester is devoted to data analysis – coding, analyzing, and validating collected information. Class sessions are generally 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): (20%)  
• 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: (60%)  
• 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 and annotated bibliography (10%): By 5PM on October 11, students will submit a 3-page single-spaced paper that provides a clear problem statement; (1) identifying the research question, (2) justifying its importance in the chosen field, (3) addressing the ethical issues that your topic might raise, and (4) providing an annotated bibliography including at least 10 academic papers. During class on October 12, students will be divided into small groups and each student will prepare written comments on three research draft descriptions.
  - Draft Proposal #2: (20%) On November 1 (by 5PM), students will submit a draft research proposal (3-page single-spaced paper) containing (1) a detailed 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) if appropriate provides a sample questionnaire for interviews, survey or focus group (questionnaires do not count towards word count.) 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: (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 (not to exceed 7 single-spaced pages) 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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Assignment/Due Date and Details</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>September 10</td>
<td>Human subject training certificate due by 5pm (by email)</td>
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<tr>
<td>September 14</td>
<td>Research topic finalized (send me your topics by email)</td>
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<tr>
<td>September 21</td>
<td>Bring Class-1 assignment to class for discussion</td>
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<tr>
<td>September 28</td>
<td>Interview report due</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 11</td>
<td>Draft research description due (upload on blackboard); discussed on October 12</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 1</td>
<td>Draft proposal #2 due (upload on blackboard); discussed on November 2</td>
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<tr>
<td>November 30 &amp; December 7</td>
<td>Final proposal presentations</td>
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<tr>
<td>December 11</td>
<td>Final proposals due by midnight (upload on blackboard)</td>
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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
**Required Book:**

**Recommended Books:**

**LIBRARIAN**
Should you need help to find course material or sources for your research assignments, Helen Mcmanus is the Schar School librarian. Feel free to contact Helen (hmcmanus@gmu.edu) when needed. She can help you:

1. subscribe to an “ask a librarian” discussion forum to provide detailed research assistance;
2. provide or create tutorials to support research skills needed to complete your assignments;
3. provide synchronous instruction via Blackboard Collaborate;
4. and/or consult with you at key points in the semester/when needed.

**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. Examples of plagiarism include: quoting a source word for word without using quotation marks and proper citations; or copy-pasting extracts from various sources without quotation marks and proper citations. See honorcode.gmu.edu for more detailed information. [See http://oai.gmu.edu/the-mason-honor-code-2/].

**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
8/31/17
Course Overview — Introduction to Qualitative Methods: Formulating a Research Topic

Reading list:
• Lisa A. Baglione, chapters 1 & 2

Class 2
9/7/17
Ethical Issues in Qualitative Research

Reading list

Class 3
9/14/17
The Literature Review — Conceptual Framework

Guest Speaker: Mary Oberlies, GMU Librarian, “Library Resources: Literature search and databases” (4:30 pm-5:30 pm)

Reading list
• Lisa Baglione, chapters 3 and 4

Recommended Reading:
• Read the introduction and literature review sections of the following articles (Uploaded on Blackboard):
  o Lawrence R., Jacobs and Benjamin I. Page, “Who Influences U.S. Foreign Policy?” American Political Science Review vol. 99, no 1 (February 2005):107-123, (Read pages 1 to 7-Data and methods not included)
Class 4  
9/21/17  
Research Design

Reading list
• Lisa Baglione, chapters 5, 6 & 7

Part II. DATA COLLECTION METHODS, VALIDITY, AND RELIABILITY

Class 5  
9/28/17  
Overview of Data Collection Methods —  
Interview reports due

Reading list

Class 6  
10/5/17  
The Interview, Focus Group & Survey

Reading List
• David L. Morgan, “Focus Group as a Qualitative Research Method,” in Focus Group as a Research Method, (Sage, 2011) [Compares focus group to Interview and participant observation—available on Blackboard]

Class 7  
10/12/17  
Proposal Writing Workshop #1 — Online

By October 11, submit a 3-page single-spaced paper that provides a clear problem statement: (1) identifying the research question, (2) justifying its importance in the chosen field, (3) addressing the ethical issues that your topic might raise, and (4) providing an annotated bibliography including at least 10 academic papers.

Papers need to be uploaded on Blackboard in “Workshop 1” folder

Class 8  
10/19/17  
Delphi Survey and Quasi/Natural Experiment

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
• “Natural and Quasi Experiments,” Sage publications, (disregard parts that deal with statistics)
Class 9  
10/26/17  
**Participant Observation and Case Studies**

**Reading list**
- Greg Guest *et al.*, “Participant Observation,” in *Collecting Qualitative Data: A Field Manual for Applied Research,* (Sage, 2017) [A copy is available on Blackboard]
- Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2005), Chapters 3 and 4 [also available on Blackboard]

Class 10  
11/2/17  
**Proposal Writing Workshop 2: Data Gathering**

**Assignment**
*By November 1,* submit a 3-page single-spaced paper that (1) provides a detailed 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)

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**Part III. ANALYZING DATA**

Class 11  
11/9/17  
**Coding and Analyzing Qualitative Data**

**Reading list**

Class 12  
11/16/17  
**Content Analysis**

**Guest Speaker:** Trevor Thrall, Associate Professor, Biodefense Program/Schar School, GMU

**Reading list**

*Thanksgiving Recess: November 22-26, 2017*

Class 13  
11/30/17  
**Proposal Writing Workshop 3**

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