DRAFT

ADVANCED FIELD RESEARCH FOR POLICY:
THEORY AND METHOD

GEORGE MASON UNIVERSITY
SCHAR SCHOOL OF POLICY AND GOVERNMENT

Course: 791-001
Spring 2020
Room: Arlington, Van Metre Hall 312
Time: Wednesdays, 7:20-10:00 pm
Office Hours: Tuesdays, 4:30-5:30

Dr. Janine R. Wedel
University Professor
Telephone: 703-993-3567
Fax: 703-993-8215
E-mail: jwedel@gmu.edu

Room 638 in Arlington, and by appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This interactive course provides intellectual grounding in theory and methodology and prepares you to frame research questions, assess concepts, and critically analyze policy processes—all, by definition, “qualitative” endeavors. Grounded in part in social anthropology, the course offers literacy in qualitative research and practical tools of field research for policy. These tools include exercises in data collection and mini student workshops in which you “go to the board” to work through research questions and design and to map out your fieldwork—thereby gaining feedback from the class in real time.

The objectives of the course include learning to:

- Frame research questions
- Select and employ the methods appropriate to address particular research questions
- Know the basics of a range of “qualitative” methods
- Design and conduct successful field research
- Observe and analyze social, political, economic, and cultural practices

The course covers the following techniques and methods:

- Social network analysis
- Participant-observation and ethnographic methods
- Case study research
- Historical and archival research
- Document analysis
- NVivo

Learning Outcomes include:

- Ability to craft a cogent research question and use theory wisely
- Familiarity with a range of methods and knowledge of when to apply them
- Improved observational and listening skills
- Ability to employ some of the methods covered and understanding of what is required to do so
REQUIREMENTS:

Summary of Anticipated Fieldwork This Semester: Each student will prepare a short summary (one paragraph at most) of fieldwork you plan to do this semester. Please also add one sentence about how this relates to your main research and dissertation interests and one sentence about the methods you may employ. This is due the second week of class. It is a basis for discussion and not graded.

Biweekly field questions (10%): Each student will note his/her thoughts and e-mail them to me every two weeks about the practical and theoretical questions that arise for you when you are contemplating or conducting field work in your organization or venue. These thoughts should also be compiled in sequential order, emailed to me at the end of the semester, and also included in your final paper as Appendix 2. Please always use this subject line: Methods Course 791 - Practical Methods Questions.

Exercise: Ethnographic and observational skills within a venue or organization (10%): See Part A of the Appendix in this syllabus.

Research Design and Fieldwork Paper (35%): Each student will develop a research and fieldwork paper, hopefully one that is relevant to your dissertation research or job. The fieldwork part must be substantial and based in significant part on field research conducted this semester (Part B of the Appendix in this syllabus might be helpful). You will “go to the board” in class to work through your research, with the class providing constructive questioning and feedback in real time.

Your paper, due at the end of the semester, must be well organized and not exceed 15 pages (not including bibliography or appendices). The paper should contain these elements and the bulk of the paper should be made up of part III and the appendices that accompany it, as specified below:

I. Introduction
II. Research question
   • Data needed to address question and a few sample field questions to ask of different parties that enable you to address the research question
III. Approach to fieldwork (how you went about it; methods used, in brief) and description of fieldwork undertaken (field notes go in appendices)
   • Your positionality, methodological dilemmas, and issues faced
   • Findings and limitations
IV. Conclusion
V. Bibliography
VI. Appendix 1: Methods employed (A short summary of the methods you employed in your field research and a one-paragraph abstract of each reference)
VII. Appendix 2: Bi-weekly field questions (see Biweekly field questions above)
VIII. Appendix 3: Any field notes
IX. Appendix 4: Exercise on Ethnographic and observational skills specified above and in Appendix, Part A
REQUIREMENTS – Continued:

**Effort, Approach, and Exercises (25%)**: This part of the evaluation is based on your interactions in class throughout the semester. The criteria include your emphasis on inquiry more than advocacy, on your presence and participation in class, on the importance of using differing kinds of participation, and your efforts to practice specific behaviors that may be less well developed. The amount of speaking time needs to be balanced with the need for others to have air time, the quality of listening, efforts to build on the contributions of others, thoughtfulness of comments, and other contributions made to the creation of a mutual learning space. I keep weekly notes on your participation for grading at the end of the semester.

**Thinking Points (20%)**: Two written thinking points (up to three single-spaced pages, with paragraph breaks) are expected of each student. The first essay covers Topics 1 & 2. The second essay covers a topic of your choice for which **at least five readings** have been assigned. Thinking points should critically review the readings. If possible, a hard copy of your assignment should be given to me by 6:00pm on the day before they are due. Please include the following information on the top of each assignment: (1) your full name; (2) course number; (3) phone number and e-mail address; and (4) readings covered in your essay.

**Schar School Policy on Plagiarism:**

The profession of scholarship and the intellectual life of a university as well as the field of public policy inquiry depend fundamentally on a foundation of trust. Thus any act of plagiarism strikes at the heart of the meaning of the university and the purpose of the Schar School of policy and Government. It constitutes a serious breach of professional ethics and it is unacceptable.

Plagiarism is the use of another’s words or ideas presented as one’s own. It includes, among other things, the use of specific words, ideas, or frameworks that are the product of another’s work. Honesty and thoroughness in citing sources is essential to professional accountability and personal responsibility. Appropriate citation is necessary so that arguments, evidence, and claims can be critically examined.

Plagiarism is wrong because of the injustice it does to the person whose ideas are stolen. But it is also wrong because it constitutes lying to one’s professional colleagues. From a prudential perspective, it is shortsighted and self-defeating, and it can ruin a professional career.

The faculty of the Schar School takes plagiarism seriously and has adopted a zero tolerance policy. Any plagiarized assignment will receive an automatic grade of “F.” This may lead to failure for the course, resulting in dismissal from the University. This dismissal will be noted on the student’s transcript. For foreign students who are on a university-sponsored visa (e.g. F-1, J-1 or J-2), dismissal also results in the revocation of their visa.

To help enforce the Schar School policy on plagiarism, all written work submitted in partial fulfillment of course or degree requirements must be available in electronic form so that it can be compared with electronic databases, as well as submitted to commercial services to which the School subscribes. Faculty may at any time submit student’s work without prior permission from the student. Individual instructors may require that written work be submitted in electronic as well as printed form. The Schar School policy on plagiarism is supplementary to the George Mason University Honor Code; it is not intended to replace it or substitute for it. ([http://www.gmu.edu/facstaff/handbook/aD.html](http://www.gmu.edu/facstaff/handbook/aD.html))
Statement on Special Needs of Students:

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please see me and contact the Disability Resource Center (DRC) at 993-2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through the DRC.

New Voices in Public Policy:

I will consider nominating the very best papers in this course for publication in New Voices in Public Policy. New Voices is a student-and faculty-reviewed journal that shares the Schar School’s finest student work with the rest of the world.

Style Manual: Please use the most recent version of the Chicago Manual of Style, Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, or some similar widely accepted standard.

READING LIST:

Articles and chapters of books: Available on library and e-reserve (Blackboard), as detailed in the syllabus.

Required Readings are available on Blackboard or the Internet. Selected books also are available on library hard-copy reserve in the Arlington library and in the Arlington bookstore.

To access e-Reserves, log into your Blackboard account, go to the course page, and then click on the "e-Reserves" link in the left-hand navigation bar. Further details regarding Reserves are located here: http://library.gmu.edu/reserves. Should the Blackboard technology fail, please contact Course Support: http://coursessupport.gmu.edu/Students/. If Blackboard is working and you are not seeing a reserve item that should be there, please contact ereserve@gmu.edu.

If you encounter further problems, please contact the Arlington Campus library. Megan McDonnell is the Access Services Supervisor (kmcdonn1@gmu.edu). Required Books: Available in the bookstore, on e-reserve, or from me.
TOPICS AND READINGS:

January 22 – Overview of Course

January 29 – Topic 1  Scientific Method and Ideology

Film: Kitchen Stories

Required Readings – to be discussed Feb. 7

- Scientific Method

Further Resources:


Assignment due: Summary of research and fieldwork idea (one paragraph or less)
February 5 – Topic 1 – Continued and Topic 2

Topic 1: Scientific Method and Ideology - continued; Methods and Public Policy Schools
Topic 2: Structure and Culture and Scientific Advancement

Required Readings

- Scientific Method – Continued
  - Burawoy, Michael. The Extended Case Method: Four Countries, Four Decades, Four Great Transformations, and One Theoretical Tradition, University of California Press, 2009: Introduction and Chapter 1. (Available on Bb under Course Content)

- Discussion of Required Readings from Jan. 31 & Feb. 7

- Methods and Public Policy Schools

Further Resources:


- National Academies. 2012. Using Science as Evidence in Public Policy. Kenneth Prewitt, Thomas A. Schwandt, and Miron L. Straf, Eds. Committee on the Use of Social Science Knowledge in Public Policy; Center for Education; Division of Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education; National Research Council, 2012. (Available on Bb under Course Content)

- Structure and Culture of Scientific Advancement

Assignment due: Thinking Points for Topics 1 & 2
February 12 – Topics 3 & 4

**Topic 3:** Concept Formation; Conceptualizing Policy and Policy Processes;
**Topic 4:** Introduction to Research Design

Required Readings:

- **Concept Formation**

- **Conceptualizing Policy and Policy Processes**

- **Introduction to Research Design**

Further Resources:

- **Classic Article:** Giovanni Sartori, “Concept Misformation in Comparative Politics,” *The American Political Science Review*, vol. 64, no. 4, Dec., 1970, pp. 1033-1053. *(Available on Bb under Course Content)*
- Giovanni Sartori, “Party Types, Organisation and Functions,” *West European Politics*, vol. 28, issue 1, 2005, *(Available under course content on Bb)*
February 19 – Topics 5 & 6

**Topic 5:** Introduction to Field Research; Interview and Ethnographic Methods

**Topic 6:** Paying Attention to Language; Framing of Language

**Required Readings:**

- Introduction to Field Research; Interview and Ethnographic Methods
  - Spradley, James P. “Interviewing an Informant” and “Making an Ethnographic Record,” *The Ethnographic Interview,* Fort Worth, TX, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers:1979, pp. 54-77 *(Available in e-reserve on Bb)*
  - Wedel, Janine R. “Appendix Two: Methodology” and “Appendix Three: Interviews: How to Interpret this List,” *Collision and Collusion: The Strange Case of Western Aid to Eastern Europe,* New York, NY: Palgrave, 2001, pp. 219-225. *(Available in e-reserve on Bb)*
  - Paying Attention to Language; Language Framing
    - Lakoff, George, and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980, pp. 3-34, 156-158, 159-184, 185-194 (pp. 3-34 only on e-reserve). *(pp. 3-34 ONLY available on e-reserve on Bb; entire book on hard copy reserve in library)*
February 19 – Topics 5 & 6 - Continued

Further Resources: Ethnography, Focus Groups, and Oral History

Assignment due: Human subjects training certificate

Assignment due:
- Exercise, Part A
- Outline for Field Research papers

February 26 – Topic 7 Case Study Design and Research; Covariational, Process Tracing, Congruence, And Other Approaches

Guest Speaker: Dana Dolan

Case studies, despite their timeless appeal and widespread use, occupy a fuzzy position in social science research due to the diversity of research approaches that fall under the broad label. The chapter by Collier and Elman sets the stage by exploring several cleavages that underpin debates about the nature of case studies, and how best to "do" them. Blatter and Haverland's book turns this conflict into opportunity, by differentiating three approaches to explanatory case study research which can be combined. Table 1.1 in Chapter 1 summarizes their analysis. The next three expand on Blatter & Haverland's three approaches. Gerring's article draws upon the logic of statistical reasoning to show how independent and dependent variables can be observed to co-vary as an indicator of causality. George and Bennett's chapter encourages researchers to strengthen their explanations by "opening the black box" of causality to trace the processes through which causes create effects. Blatter and Haverland label these two approaches "COV" for covariational and "CPT" for causal process tracing. Their third approach, "CON" for congruence, cites Graham Allison's *Conceptual Models and the Cuban Missile Crisis* as a study that applies multiple theoretical lenses to provide a deeper analysis of a single case study. Paul Cairney's article usefully expands on how this "multiple lenses" approach to case study research can work in practice. Not only are these three approaches far from the only possibilities, different case study approaches can be combined, as Eisenhardt’s highly cited article demonstrates. Her approach blends aspects of Robert Yin’s deductively-oriented case approach with aspects of Grounded Theory, an inductively-oriented approach. The final reading offers an overview of process tracing from the perspective of policy studies, including an extensive bibliography of further readings.
February 26 – Topic 7 – Continued  Case Study Design and Research; Covariational, Process Tracing, Congruence, And Other Approaches – Continued

Required Readings:


The prior week, students should have selected one of the following; with at least two students for each reading. Be prepared to discuss it in light of the readings above:


Thinking points: In what ways does case-based research differ from variables-based research? Under what conditions would a researcher use deductive research, and when would an inductive approach be more useful? Which approaches are better aligned with positivist methodological commitments, and which with interpretivist ones? Which approaches and variations fit your own views of the way the world works, and which are more likely to answer the research questions you are developing?

Further Reading: Alternative Case Study Approaches

February 26 – Topic 7 – Continued  Case Study Design and Research; Covariational, Process Tracing, Congruence, And Other Approaches – Continued

Further Reading: Alternative Case Study Approaches - Continued


Further Reading: Process Tracing

March 4 Topics 8 & 9 Grounded Theory; Employing Theory and Method

**Topic 8:** Grounded Theory

**Topic 9:** Employing Theory and Method and Discussion of Model Dissertations

Required Readings:

- Grounded Theory

- Employing Theory
  
  **OR**

- Employing Method

- Employing Theory and Method: Model dissertations in the realms of health and drug policy, finance, social movements, and auditing – *Choose one of the following*:
  
  
  

March 11 – SPRING BREAK
**March 18 – Topic 10** Mixed Methods: Combining Quantitative and Qualitative Research

Guest Lecture: Dr. Jill Rough - TBC

Required Readings:

**March 25 – Topic 11** Verification and Triangulation; Student Workshop

Required reading:

**April 1 – Topic 12** Introduction to Social Network Analysis AND Net-Map Demonstration

Guest Speaker: Amitaksha Nag

Required Readings:
- History and basic tools of social network analysis; networks within and across organizations, communities, groups, and nations

- Uses of social network analysis: from sexually transmitted disease to terrorism to business-government networks and global governance
April 1 – Topic 12 - Continued  Introduction to Social Network Analysis AND Net-Map Demonstration

Further Resources:
- Hanneman, Robert A. and Mark Riddle, Introduction to Social Network Methods. Riverside, CA: University of California, Riverside, 2005, Introduction, Chapter 1, and Chapter 10 (optional), http://faculty.ucr.edu/~hanneman/nettext/. (Also available under Course Content on Bb)

Thinking points:
What are the basic tools of social network analysis? Is network analysis a theory or a method? What kinds of problems is it suited to address? How can studying social networks help us understand the spread of disease or the workings of terrorism or organized crime? How can social network analysis shed light on governance?

April 8 – Topic 13  Historical and Archival Research

Guest Speaker: Dr. Helen McManus

Required Reading:

Further Resources:
April 15 – Topic 14  Introduction to NVivo

    Guest Speaker: Sahar Haghighat TBC

April 22 – Student Workshop

April 29 – Wrap Up: Field Research and Your Career

Final assignments due:

  • Field Research papers, incorporating Parts B & C, if applicable
  • Written discussion of method