

**Department of Political Science  
Dalhousie University  
Winter 2012**

**POLI 3493**

**POLITICAL INQUIRY II: QUALITATIVE METHODS**

**Time and location:**

Friday, 13:35-16:25

Henry Hicks Building - Room C217

**Instructor:**

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Office hours:

Tuesday 1:30-2:30; or by appointment

**Teaching Assistant**

TBA

E-mail: TBA

Office hours: TBA

**Course Overview**

This course introduces the theory and practice of qualitative research methods to study political phenomena. Themes addressed in the course include the theoretical and conceptual implications of choosing a particular methodology; the differences between qualitative and quantitative research methods; qualitative data collection methods available to political scientists, including interviewing, focus groups, participant observation, unobtrusive methods; the analysis and presentation of qualitative data; the ethical issues involved in conducting qualitative research; and the content and structure of research proposals based on qualitative data and methods. Students will put into practice the theoretical and methodological insights learnt during this course by conducting individual and team projects on key aspects of the qualitative research

process (operationalization, data collection, data analysis, data display and presentation) and by drafting a research proposal on a subject related to politics.

The course is divided into 5 sections: 1) qualitative political inquiry and its foundations, 2) designing qualitative research, 3) conducting qualitative research, 4) analyzing qualitative data, 5) drafting a qualitative research proposal.

### **Course Format**

The course will be based on a combination of lectures and group discussions and activities. Lectures will follow the readings, but they will not overlap completely. Since the course will have *no tutorials*, lectures will presuppose familiarity with the readings. It is *essential* for students to complete the reading assignments before the lecture, in order to fully benefit from class discussions. Although the course does not include a class participation component, attendance to lectures is strongly encouraged. Most of the group work will be in fact conducted in class.

### **Course Textbook**

Lawrence Neuman and Karen Robson, *Basics of Social Research – Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*, Second Canadian Edition, Pearson 2009. The book is available at the bookstore or can be accessed (at a reduced cost) online as an e-book. For more information on how to access the book online, see <http://tinyurl.com/coursesmartfreedom>

### **Other readings**

Other readings mentioned in the course outline will be either available for photocopying at the Killam Library Short Loan or posted online on the course website. Most readings are excerpts from the following books:

- Alan Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, Third Edition, Oxford University Press 2010
- Janet Buttolph, H. T. Reynolds, Jason D. Mycof, *Political Science Research Methods*, Sixth Edition, CQ Press 2010
- Craig Leonard Brians; Lars Willnat; Jarol B. Manheim; Richard C. Rich, *Empirical Political Analysis: Quantitative and Qualitative Research Methods*, Eighth Edition, Longman 2010
- Diane E. Schmidt, *Writing in Political Science: A Practical Guide*, Fourth Edition, Longman 2010

### **Course on Blackboard**

Lecture slides, syllabus, assignment instructions, bibliographic references and other relevant material for this course will be available on Blackboard. Blackboard will also function as main means of communication between the instructor and students. Students will also be able to view their grades, read announcements and contribute to the discussion board. The course on Blackboard can be accessed at <https://dalhousie.blackboard.com/>.

### **Email Policy**

Please feel free to contact me or the TA by email if you have any questions related to the course. We will reply to legitimate email inquiries within 2 days. If you do not receive a reply within this period, please resubmit your question(s).

### **Course Evaluation**

The course evaluation is based on three individual assignments (research proposal, operationalization, data collection) and three team assignments (data collection, data analysis, project presentation). The final grade will be calculated out of 100 points (60 for the individual and 40 for the team assignments) and based on the content, quality and originality of the work submitted or presented.

### **PART I - INDIVIDUAL ASSIGNMENTS**

#### *1) Research Proposal (35 points)*

The assignment consists in the drafting of a research proposal based on qualitative research methods. Research proposals should be maximum 12 pages long (12 font, double spaced, 1 inch margins). The topic and research question(s) for the research proposal should be related to the theme of politics, broadly understood. If you have doubts about the appropriateness of the topic and research questions selected, please contact the instructor or the TA. More details on the research proposal, including some concrete examples, are available on Blackboard. The assignment is due in class on Session 13 (November 30).

#### *2) Operationalization assignment (10 points)*

This assignment will be an in-class test. Students will be provided with a series of research questions and will have to identify the key concepts and then select observable phenomena that can represent these concepts in a qualitative form. The test will take place on Session 4 (September 28)

3) *Data collection assignment – interviews/participant observation (15 points)*

Each student is asked to conduct a small research exercise entailing the use of either interviews or participant observation as main method of qualitative data collection and then submit a transcript of the material collected accompanied by a brief memo that introduces the project's topic, method, location, timing and participants. The assessment of the project is based on the content, quality and originality of the work submitted. The assignment is due within 7 days of the lecture in which the relevant component of the research process (i.e. data collection) is addressed.

Part II - TEAM ASSIGNMENTS

NB: At the beginning of the term, students will be divided into research teams composed of 4-5 individuals. Each team will be responsible to carry out a series of small research projects on key components of the qualitative research process. The results of these projects should be submitted to Blackboard in the dedicated assignment section.

1) *Data collection assignment - focus groups/unobtrusive methods (15 points)*

This team assignment entails the use of either focus groups or unobtrusive methods (i.e. archival analysis or collection of human traces) as main methods to collect qualitative data and the submission of a transcript of the material collected accompanied by a brief memo that introduces the project's topic, method, location, timing and participants. The assignment is due within 7 days of the lecture in which the relevant component of the research process (i.e. data collection method) is addressed.

2) *Data analysis assignment (15 points)*

This team assignment entails the coding, display and interpretation of a given set of qualitative data. The assignment is due within 7 days of the lecture in which the relevant component of the research process (i.e. data analysis) is addressed.

3) *Data analysis presentations (10 points)*

In this assignment each team will present to the rest of the class the results of the data analysis exercise conducted during the term. The team oral presentations will take place on Session 13 (November 30).

**Late penalty policy**

Late submissions for the research proposal will be penalized *two points per day* (including weekends but excluding religious holidays). Late submissions for all the other assignments will be penalized 1 point per day (including weekends but excluding religious holidays). Extensions will be granted only for documented reasons of illness, or bereavement. The length of the

extension will be based on the information in the documentation. In case of illness, students must ask the physician to indicate *explicitly* the length of time during which they were unable to attend to their coursework obligations.

### **Academic Dishonesty**

Academic dishonesty consists of misrepresentation by deception or by other fraudulent means and can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: “grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty”), and/or suspension or expulsion from the University. It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various kinds of academic dishonesty please refer to: <http://plagiarism.dal.ca/student/index.html>.

### **Accommodation policy**

Students may request accommodation as a result of barriers related to disability, religious obligation, or any characteristic under the Nova Scotia Human Rights Act. Students who require academic accommodation for either classroom participation or the writing of tests, quizzes and exams should make their request to the Office of Student Accessibility & Accommodation (OSAA) prior to or at the outset of each academic term (with the exception of X/Y courses). Please see [www.studentaccessibility.dal.ca](http://www.studentaccessibility.dal.ca) for more information and to obtain Form A. Request for Accommodation. A note taker may be required to assist a classmate. There is an honourarium of \$75/course/term. If you are interested, please contact OSAA at 494-2836 for more information. Please note that your classroom may contain specialized accessible furniture and equipment. It is important that these items remain in the classroom so that students who require their usage will be able to participate in the class.

## COURSE OUTLINE AND READINGS

### PART 1: QUALITATIVE POLITICAL INQUIRY AND ITS FOUNDATIONS

#### Session 1: September 7

*Class introduction: Qualitative research and political inquiry*

Readings: Neuman and Robson Chapter 1 and 2; Buttolph et al. Chapter 2

Themes addressed in these sessions include:

- What is qualitative political inquiry and why does it matter?
- Qualitative vs quantitative methods
- Key paradigms and debates in qualitative research methods
- Preview of the course
- Creation of research teams

### PART 2: DESIGNING QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

#### Session 2: September 14

*Qualitative Research design*

Readings: Readings: Neuman and Robson Chapter 4 and 5; Bryman Chapter 8

Themes addressed in this session include:

- Topic selection
- Research questions
- Qualitative vs quantitative research design
- Types of explanations involving qualitative methods
- Writing a literature review

#### Session 3: September 21

*Qualitative measurement and operationalization*

Readings: Neuman and Robson Chapter 6

Themes addressed in this session include:

- Measurement and qualitative research
- Measurement criteria
- Data operationalization

**Session 4: September 28**

*Qualitative Sampling*

Readings: Neuman and Robson Chapter 7

Themes addressed in this session include:

- Defining a sample
- Probability vs non probability sampling
- Types of non probability samples

*NB: in the second part of the class there will be a test on data operationalization*

**PART 3: CONDUCTING QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

**Session 5: October 5**

*Ethical issues in conducting research*

Readings: Neuman and Robson Chapter 3

Themes addressed in this session include:

- Main issues in research ethics
- Examples of ethically questionable research

**Session 6: October 12**

*Qualitative Data Collection Methods 1: Interviewing*

Readings: Neuman and Robson Chapter 12

**Session 7: October 19**

*Qualitative Data Collection Methods 2: Focus Groups*

Readings: Neuman and Robson Chapter 12

**Session 8: October 26**

*Qualitative Data Collection Methods 3: Field Research (participant observation)*

Readings: Neuman and Robson Chapter 13

**Sessions 9: November 2**

*Qualitative Data Collection Methods 4: Unobtrusive Methods (archival research, human traces)*

Readings: Berg Chapters 8, 9

## **PART 4: ANALYZING QUALITATIVE DATA**

### **Session 10: November 9**

#### *Qualitative data analysis*

Readings: Neuman and Robson Chapter 15; Bryman et al. Chapter 13, Schmidt Chapter 5

Themes addressed in these sessions include:

- Types of data to analyze
- Steps in qualitative data analysis
- Data reduction and coding
- Interpreting qualitative data
- Content analysis and other data reduction methods

### **Session 11: November 16**

#### *Qualitative data display and interpretation*

Readings: samples of data display distributed in class

Themes addressed in this session include:

- The role of data display in qualitative research
- Textual types of qualitative data display
- Non-textual types of qualitative display
- How to interpret data

## **PART 5 – WRITING AND PRESENTING QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

### **Session 12: November 23**

#### *Writing a research proposal and research report*

Readings: Schmidt Chapter 9, 10, 11

Themes addressed in this session include:

- The purpose, content and format of a research proposal
- The purpose, content and format of a research report

### **Session 13: November 30**

#### *Conclusions + Team projects presentations*

Readings: Neuman and Robson Chapter 16

Themes addressed in this session include:

- The pros and cons of qualitative research
- Combining qualitative and quantitative methods

NB: Research proposal due

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