Course Description:

This seminar introduces graduate students to the vast literature on qualitative methodology. Its goal is to enable students to become more aware of the importance of methodology within the discipline and in their own work. Through intensive reading of the relevant literature, several essays and fieldwork exercises, and a final proposal, students should become critical consumers and producers of the qualitative methods canon.

The development of qualitative methods as a distinct literature in political science has only crystallized in the past ten years. These years have seen the creation of the Consortium on Qualitative Research Methods and its yearly institute now held at Syracuse University. Within the American Political Science Association, the section on qualitative methods, now renamed the section on qualitative and multi-method research, has become one of the most dynamic. This course builds on these foundations and seeks to engage students within the context of this body of research.

A course on qualitative methods can be taught in myriad different ways. My approach is to emphasize the analytical aspects of the qualitative methods canon with the larger goal of interrogating what social science means, how it can be best practiced, and what different techniques and tools imply about social science ontology. This requires that we have some foundations in the philosophy of science, in debates about causation, and in the analysis and meaning of concepts. Beyond these foundations, a key aspect of qualitative methods has always been a concern with research that focuses on one or several cases or countries. Hence, qualitative methods must include the study of ethnography, case studies, and comparative analysis. We will look at these methods in depth. Finally, it is crucial that students not just be consumers of this literature but also practitioners. To that effect, this course requires that students actively practice and engage these methods through a number of writing exercises that are described below. These writing exercises provide the stepping stones to writing an academic proposal – the final requirement of this course.

Ultimately, this seminar should help students: (1) become self-conscious about methodology and the analytical implications, advantages, and disadvantages of each method; (2) write and conduct research with rigor, logic, and creativity; (3) gain a head start on developing a Ph.D. dissertation or Master’s thesis/research essay proposal; (4) become more aware of the nature of the political science profession and how methodology
is a core aspect of the profession; and (5) be able to articulate and defend their work assertively and forcefully in professional settings on the basis of methodological rigor and awareness.

Course Requirements:

1. This is a reading-intensive seminar. As befits a graduate seminar, readings in this course are heavy. Students are required to do the readings beforehand and come to class ready to discuss, compare, and critique the readings. I strongly encourage you to take notes when reading and to write your assessments and critiques of the readings before the seminar meeting. By writing as you read, you will retain information much more effectively.

2. Pro-active participation. This seminar will be successful to the extent that students participate actively, critically, and constructively. Participation hinges on consistent reading of the materials. The way to gain the most from this seminar is to participate pro-actively – through oral discussion, intensive reading, and through the writing exercises.

3. Five papers. Four analytical papers of 4 double-spaced pages in length and 12-point font. Do not exceed the 4-page limit. One paper (Paper #3 on interviews) of 2 double-spaced pages in length. These papers have very different purposes; you must follow carefully the instructions below.
   a. All papers must be posted on myCourses no later than 4:00pm on the Monday before the Tuesday seminar. Seminar members should read all the papers of their fellow classmates and be prepared to discuss them. I may also call on students to discuss their specific papers.
   b. Two papers should be response papers that provide a critical analysis of the week’s readings. These are designated as papers #1 and #5. Paper #1 should be written for Week 2, Week 3, or Week 4. Paper #5 should be written for Week 9, Week 10, or Week 11. In other words, for both of these two papers you have some choice of when to write them. These papers are standard graduate seminar essays that are meant to critique and build on the literature. For these essays, you should think of contrasts and similarities between the readings, issues you find problematic, or questions you think can be deepened further. Your paper should then develop one main thesis based on your analysis of the readings. It should in effect be a response to an issue that you find interesting, provocative, or compelling. It is not necessary to analyze all the readings in the paper. What is more important is that you focus on one overarching central argument that builds on and critiques several readings. Remember: a weak paper provides a list of scattered thoughts and lacks a central argument; a strong paper advances one thesis statement in a systematic, logical, forceful, and analytical manner.
   c. Paper #2 is a specific essay on ethnography or participant observation. For this paper you will be required to do some fieldwork observation of social or political life in Montreal, either by attending a public meeting, observing a particular activity or community for several days, or any other form of research that requires some intensive observation of social life. This paper should not just relay what happened, but should provide some analytical structure to the ethnography. For instance, what is the context of the meeting or community? What is the social composition of the community or
meeting you observed? What broader implications can you derive from your observations? How do your observations help us understand social or political life? Use the relevant literature for the week on ethnography to help frame your paper and engage at an analytical level some of the arguments from the readings. You should plan ahead for this paper, which is due in Week 5, in order to give yourself enough time to conduct the ethnography.

d. **Paper #3** is a specific essay on unstructured interviews. For this paper you will be required to conduct several interviews with particular sectors in society with the goal of answering the following question: What is the key to success in your specific profession? You should interview two individuals from one of the following sectors: (1) private industry; (2) academia; (3) the NGO sector; or (4) government. In your essay you must address most of the questions listed below in a way that makes the paper substantively engaging and methodologically insightful. You should also engage with the readings for Week 6 when writing your essay. Prepare ahead of time to schedule the interviews before Week 6. Questions to address in your essay: How easy or difficult was access? How did you manage the flow of the interview? Did you add questions as you went along or did you follow closely your questionnaire? Did the interview veer away from the main theme, and if so, how did you respond? Was the respondent forthcoming when you asked questions? If not, how did you adjust? Did the interviews you conducted differ in substance or comfort level? Why? Most importantly, did you collect the information that you wanted and what was the most successful aspect of the interview? Attach your questionnaire to the essay. *This paper should only be 2 pages in length, not including questionnaire.*

e. **Paper #4** is a specific essay on case study research. For this paper you will be required to assess Robert Putnam, *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994). This book is one of the most important case studies in comparative politics. Questions to address in your essay: Did you learn new empirical facts from the case study and/or theoretical insights? Did the case study lead to knowledge accumulation or was it more focused on the empirical materials? How would you assess this balance between theory and empirics? Above all, why does this case study matter? When writing this essay, be sure to engage the relevant literature from Weeks 7 and 8.

4. **One proposal of 10-12 double-spaced pages in length (12-point font).**

   a. This is a preliminary exercise in drafting a dissertation or Master’s thesis/research paper proposal and should be exploited as an opportunity to get a head start on one’s research agenda in graduate school. This exercise will also be helpful in terms of applying for competitive fellowships and grants.

   b. In the proposal, you should use the materials and ideas discussed throughout the seminar to frame your paper. Use only the materials that are relevant to your particular research question. You will also need to do extensive literature review on a substantive topic. This exercise requires that you develop your ideas systematically and in a concise and focused manner; therefore, you are required to stick to the 12-page limit. Papers that exceed the limit will be penalized. I will provide guidelines and reference materials
on how to structure an effective and convincing proposal. *All students are required to meet with me during office hours to discuss their proposal.*

c. The proposal is due by **5:00pm on Tuesday April 20** via email: ekuhonta@gmail.com.

5. Presentation of the proposal in the last two seminar meetings. The presentation should last 10 minutes with 15 minutes for discussion. All seminar participants should circulate via email a 2-page précis of the proposal one day before the final meeting. Students should read the précis and come to the seminar ready to critique each presentation. The point of the presentation is above all to gain feedback on one’s work. The more questions we have from the floor, the more constructive the session will be.

**Grade Distribution:**

1. Short papers 50%
2. Proposal and presentation of proposal 40%
3. Class participation 10%

Note: This is a rough approximation of the grade distribution. Grades can also be rounded up or down based on class effort (or lack thereof) and improvement throughout the semester.

**Statement on Academic Integrity:**

McGill University values academic integrity. Therefore, all students must understand the meaning and consequences of cheating, plagiarism, and other academic offences under the Code of Student Conduct and Disciplinary Procedures (see [www.mcgill.ca/integrity](http://www.mcgill.ca/integrity) for more information).
Books to Purchase:

All of the required books have been ordered at Paragraphe Books at 2220 McGill College Avenue. In addition to these books, one course pack will be available for purchase at the McGill Bookstore. The course pack will include only book chapters – not journal articles. All journal articles that are downloadable from McGill’s database will be posted on myCourses. The books and the course pack will be placed on reserve in the library for a three-hour loan.


Recommended [also available at Paragraphe Books]


For Reference and Consultation [only on reserve; two-day loan]

WEEK 1 (Tuesday, January 13): What Are Qualitative Methods?

*The first meeting will be a substantive meeting, rather than just an organizational meeting. Please do the following before the first day of class:
(1) Read the materials assigned below.
(2) Come to class prepared to answer the following questions: “What is your likely research topic for your Ph.D. dissertation or Master’s thesis/essay? Why did you choose this topic? What is the main question of your research topic? What methods do you envision using?”


Recommended:
James Mahoney and Gary Goertz, “A Tale of Two Cultures: Contrasting Quantitative and Qualitative Research,” *Political Analysis* 14:3 (Summer 2006): 227-249.

WEEK 2 (Tuesday, January 20): Metatheory, Theory, Laws, and Hypotheses

*Paper #1 due in Week 2, Week 3, or Week 4*

Arthur Stinchcombe, *Constructing Social Theories* (1968), 1-56.
Recommended:

**WEEK 3 (Tuesday, January 27): Causation, Causal Mechanisms, Explanation, and Inference**

*Paper #1 due in Week 2, Week 3, or Week 4*


Recommended:

**WEEK 4 (Tuesday, February 3): Concept Formation, Measurement, and Typology**

*Paper #1 due in Week 2, Week 3, or Week 4*


**Recommended:**


**WEEK 5 (Tuesday, February 10): Ethnography**

*Paper #2 due*


**Recommended:**


Paul Rabinow, *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco* (Berkeley: University of California


**WEEK 6 (Tuesday, February 17): Doing Interviews**

*Paper #3 due*


Recommended:


**WEEK 7 (Tuesday, February 24): Case Studies**

George and Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (2005), 3-124 (chaps. 1-6).


Charles C. Ragin, "Turning the Tables: How Case-Oriented Research Challenges Variable-

**Recommended:**

**WEEK 8 (Tuesday, March 10): Case Selection**

*Paper #4 due*


**Recommended:**


**WEEK 9 (Tuesday, March 17): The Comparative Method and Comparative-Historical Analysis**

*Paper #5 due in Week 9, Week 10, or Week 11*


George and Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (2005), 151-179.


James Mahoney, “Strategies of Causal Assessment in Comparative Historical Analysis,”
in Mahoney and Rueschemeyer, eds., *Comparative-Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences* (2003), 337-372.

**Recommended – comparative analysis:**


Dietrich Rueschemeyer, “Can one or a Few Cases Yield Theoretical Gains?” in Mahoney and Rueschemeyer, eds., *Comparative-Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences* (2003), 305-336.

Caroline B. Brettell, “Fieldwork in the Archives: Methods and Sources in Historical Anthropology,” in H. Russell Bernard, ed., *Handbook of Methods in Cultural Anthropology* (Walnut Creek, Calif.: AltaMira Press), 513-546.


**Recommended – comparative-historical or just historical analysis:**


**WEEK 10 (Tuesday, March 24): Temporality, Critical Junctures, and Path Dependence**

*Paper #5 due in Week 9, Week 10, or Week 11*


Recommended:

**WEEK 11 (Tuesday, March 31): Counterfactuals**

*Paper #5 due in Week 9, Week 10, or Week 11*


Recommended:

**WEEK 12 (Tuesday, April 6): Class Proposal Presentations**

**WEEK 13 (Tuesday, April 13 MAKE-UP CLASS): Class Proposal Presentations**
FURTHER REFERENCES

General:
H. Russell Bernard, ed., Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches (Walnut Creek, Calif.: AltaMira Press, 2002).

Social Theory/Sociology of Knowledge:

Rational Choice and Game Theory:
Robert H. Bates, Avner Greif, Margaret Levi, Jean-Laurent Rosenthal, and Barry R.


**Mixed Methods:**


**History of Specific Disciplines [incomplete]:**


**Disciplines and Area Studies:**

Erik Martinez Kuhonta, Dan Slater, and Tuong Vu, eds., *Southeast Asia in Political Science: Theory, Region, and Qualitative Analysis* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008).
Other Resources:

Qualitative and Multi-Method Research Newsletter of APSA available here:  
http://www.maxwell.syr.edu/moynihan/cqrm/Newsletters/

International Political Science Association working papers website here:  