Advanced Topics in Qualitative Methods: Historical Research

PSC 804-M001  
Fall 2018  
M, 3:45-6:30  
Maxwell Hall 309A  
Instructor: Steven White  
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Office Hours: Wednesdays 1-2 (and by appointment)  
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Course Description

This class covers a range of theoretical and practical issues related to conducting qualitative historical research in political science. Topics will include differences between historical research in political science and political history; historiography and selection bias when working with secondary sources; and planning and conducting archival research. We will also examine major theoretical concepts in historical research, including path dependence, critical junctures, and other forms of institutional change, as well as best practices for case selection and process tracing. Other topics will include using historical research as part of a mixed methods approach; points of tension and overlap with quantitative historical work; and debates about what transparency should look like for qualitative researchers.

Course Readings

These four books are available for purchase in the university bookstore:


Most of the other readings (including academic journal articles, chapters from edited collections, and books) are available online via the library website. There are a few exceptions, which I have scanned and placed on Blackboard (denoted as such in the reading list).
Assessment Criteria

Participation: 35%

Archive memorandum: 10%

Article critique: 10%

Book review essay: 10%

Final paper: 35%

This is a discussion-oriented seminar, so regular attendance and engaged participation are required. Participation also includes occasional “mini-presentations” (for example, a brief discussion of similarities and differences between a political science article and a history article on a subject of your choice on September 17), as well as an informal presentation on the mixed methods book that you choose to read and review on November 26.

Students are also responsible for a final written assignment, with some flexibility on the form that this takes. Examples might include a draft dissertation proposal or funding application, an article-length paper or chapter draft, etc. We will discuss this further in class. Along with a written document, the final class session will be set aside for each of you to workshop your research projects (whatever form they might take at this stage).

Final papers are due December 14.

There are also three smaller pieces of writing due:

- **On October 8:** a memorandum describing your trip to the archives of the Onondaga County Public Library

- **On October 29:** a peer review-style critique of an assigned article

- **On November 26:** a review of a mixed methods book of your choice
Academic Integrity

Syracuse University’s Academic Integrity Policy holds students accountable for the integrity of the work they submit. Students should be familiar with the policy and know that it is their responsibility to learn about course-specific expectations, as well as about University policy. The University policy governs appropriate citation and use of sources, the integrity of work submitted in exams and assignments, and the veracity of signatures on attendance sheets and other verification of participation in class activities. The policy also prohibits students from submitting the same written work in more than one class without receiving written authorization in advance from both instructors. The presumptive penalty for a first offense by an undergraduate student is course failure, accompanied by a transcript notation indicating that the failure resulted from a violation of Academic Integrity Policy. The standard sanction for a first offense by a graduate student is suspension or expulsion. For more information and the complete policy, see http://academicintegrity.syr.edu.

Accommodations

If you believe that you need accommodations for a disability, please contact the Office of Disability Services (ODS), located in Room 309 of 804 University Avenue, or call (315) 443-4498 for an appointment to discuss your needs and the process for requesting accommodations. ODS is responsible for coordinating disability-related accommodations and will issue students with documented disabilities Accommodation Authorization Letters, as appropriate. Since accommodations may require early planning and generally are not provided retroactively, please contact ODS as soon as possible. More information can be found online at http://disabilityservices.syr.edu/.

Religious Observances

SU’s religious observances policy is available at http://supolicies.syr.edu/emp_ben/religious_observance.htm.

Syracuse University recognizes the diversity of faiths represented among the campus community and protects the right of students, faculty, and staff to observe the holy days according to their tradition. Under the policy, students are provided an opportunity to make up any examination, study, or work requirements that may be missed due to a religious observance—provided they notify their instructors before the end of the second week of classes. Students have access to an online notification form through MySlice that they can use to notify their instructors.

Schedule

August 27: Introduction

September 3: No class (Labor Day)
September 10: Approaches to historical work in political science

**Required**


James Mahoney, Erin Kimball, and Kendra L. Koivu, “The Logic of Historical Explanation in the Social Sciences,” *Comparative Political Studies* 42(1), 2009, 114-146


Selections from Colin Elman and Miriam Fendius Elman, eds., *Bridges and Boundaries: Historians, Political Scientists, and the Study of International Relations* [Blackboard]


**Recommended (i.e., we won’t talk about these, but they might be of interest if you want to learn more)**

The rest of James Mahoney and Kathleen Thelen, eds., *Advances in Comparative-Historical Analysis*

For an influential earlier collection along similar lines: James Mahoney and Dietrich Rueschemeyer, eds., *Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

The rest of Orfeo Fioretos, Tulia G. Falleti, and Adam Sheingate, *The Oxford Handbook of Historical Institutionalism*

If you’re interested in American political development specifically, take a look at the rest of *The Oxford Handbook of American Political Development*


September 17: More on the differences between historical political science and political history

Required

Selections from Margaret Susan Thompson, The Spider Web: Congress and Lobbying in the Age of Grant

- Professor Thompson will be a guest speaker for the first part of class

Also read:

- One article by a political scientist on a topic of your choice
- One article by a historian on the same topic

For class:

- Prepare a 5-minute overview about similarities/differences between the articles you chose

Recommended


- See also the rest of the forum on Evgeny Finkel's book in this issue of Shofar


Fritz Stern, ed., The Varieties of History
September 24: Secondary sources, newspaper coverage, and archival research

Required


October 1: Archival research, continued

Required


- Skim Appendix II: “Working with Primary Sources” for what might be of interest


Guest speaker (end of class): Rachel McMaster, Ph.D. candidate

Recommended

@RAKarl Twitter thread on archival research, as well as YouTube videos:

- Research Methods for Historians. Part 2: Digitizing + Organizing Archival Sources


October 8: Theoretical concepts in historical research

Required

Paul Pierson, Politics in Time: History, Institutions, and Social Analysis, pp. 17-102; 133-166.


Recommended


October 15: Case studies

Required

Alexander L. George and Andrew Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Science*.


Recommended

If you're planning to do case study research, you should be generally familiar with the relevant arguments from King, Keohane, and Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry*, as well as disagreements with their framework found in sources like Brady and Collier, eds., *Rethinking Social Inquiry*. See also W. Phillips Shively, “Case Selection: Insights from “Rethinking Social Inquiry,” *Political Analysis* 14(3), 2006, 344-347.

The most common alternative to George and Bennett is John Gerring, *Case Study Research: Principles and Practices*, which might be of interest as well.

For shorter treatments by Gerring, see:


October 22: Process tracing methodology

Required

Derek Beach and Rasmus Brun Pedersen, *Process-Tracing Methods: Foundations and Guidelines*


Recommended


- See also the rest of this special issue of *New Political Economy* on the topic of process tracing


October 29: Examples of qualitative historical research

Required

Readings for this week TBD
November 5: Tensions/overlap between quantitative and qualitative approaches to historical research

**Required**

*APSR* debate on the origins of proportional representation:


Selections from *Studies in APD* special issue on DW-NOMINATE and historical context:


**Recommended**

November 12: Mixed methods/multi-method research

**Required**

Jason Seawright, *Multi-Method Social Science: Combining Qualitative and Quantitative Tools*


**Recommended**


November 19: No class (Thanksgiving break)

November 26: Examples of mixed methods research (and a little on the recent transparency debate)

Mixed methods research in practice:

- Multi-method research is especially conducive to book-length manuscripts, so to explore what mixed methods work looks like in practice, each member of the class will select one book in advance, write a review, and prepare an informal presentation on how the author(s) used a mixed methods strategy to answer their research questions: Was it effective? What were the strengths of the approach? Any weaknesses? How might the results have been different had the author(s) only relied on a single method?

We will spend most of our class session discussing the mixed methods books that people read, but we'll also discuss what transparency looks like in qualitative historical research.

Here are a few short readings on transparency:

**Required**

- Andrew Moravcsik, “Active Citation: A Precondition for Replicable Qualitative Research,” *PS: Political Science & Politics* 43(1), 2010, 29-35.
• Jack Snyder, “Active Citation: In Search of Smoking Guns or Meaningful Context?,” *Security Studies* 23(4), 2014, 708-714.


• Nikhar Gaikwad, Veronica Herrera, and Robert Mickey, “Research with Text-Based Sources: Draft Report of QTD Working Group II.1”

**Recommended**


December 3: Presentations