

# SO102 Methods in Social Studies

Seminar Leader: Tamara Kolaric  
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Course Times: Tuesdays & Thursdays 15:45-17:15 (room TBC)  
Credits: 8 ECTS, 4 U.S. credits  
Office Hours: Thursdays, 13:00-15:00 (room TBC)

## Course Description

The aim of this course is to give students the theoretical and practical skills needed to conduct research in social sciences using qualitative data and methods. Designed as a combination of interactive lectures and hands-on practical exercises, this course is meant to provide students with the opportunity to learn from experience by inviting them to try out different methods of data collection and analysis – through both in-class work and homework assignments. The course will start with discussing the logic of qualitative data analysis, and the different questions that can (and cannot) be answered through it. Students will learn how to conduct the pre-analysis process: formulating a good research question, using theory (and writing a literature review), and selecting cases for investigation. The central part of the course will cover various methods of qualitative data collection and analysis. We will try out different methods of data collection, including participant observation, interviewing, focus groups and using/reusing archival data. We will then move on to the different ways data can be analyzed, starting with thematic analysis in order to grasp the practicalities of the researchers' interaction with data, as well as the process of coding textual data (on paper and using available software). The final part of the course will be dedicated to interpretive methods for data analysis, with a particular emphasis on discourse-analytical approaches, as well as to strategies for writing-up work based on qualitative data analysis. Students in the final two years of their studies are invited to use the course as a first step to designing their thesis project.

## Learning outcomes

By the end of the course, the students will:

- Understand the different existing research traditions and their underpinnings;
- Engage in the practicalities of the research process at a basic level: formulating a research question, writing a literature review, selecting an appropriate (qualitative) methodological design, thinking through the arising ethical and other issues;
- Gain basic practice in applying some commonly used qualitative methods;
- Learn how to write up and present their research.

## Requirements

### Attendance

Attendance at all classes and film screenings is mandatory, as is active participation in class discussions and activities. There will be an attendance sheet for every session. If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to catch up on the missed material (and please note that any assignments that are due are still mandatory). More than two absences in a semester will significantly affect the participation grade for the course. Late arrival counts as an absence. Please consult the Student Handbook for regulations governing periods of illness or leaves of absence.

### Readings

All readings are mandatory and to be completed before class, as they will be the base for the class discussions. All assigned texts are available in the shared Google Classroom folder – with the exception of those from the following book: **Hennink, Monique, Inge Hutter, and Ayay Bailey. 2011. Qualitative Research Methods. London: Sage Publications.** You may purchase the handbook, but you need not: there are a few copies of the book on the library hold shelf for the course. There is a possibility of some changes to the scheduled class readings. You will be notified of any changes made in class, and updated readings will be posted on Google Classroom.

### Use of Laptops and Other Electronic Devices in Class

Use of laptops for taking notes in class is allowed. However, mobile phones are not allowed, and the use of other electronic devices (laptop, tablet) for purposes unrelated to the coursework will result in a 0-points participation grade for that particular session.

### Submission of Assignments

All assignments are to be submitted through the shared class Google Drive folder by the stated deadline (unless agreed otherwise). Please read the syllabus in detail and make sure you are familiar with all the submission deadlines.

### Policy on Late Submission

All assignments need to be submitted by the deadline noted in the syllabus. From the Student handbook, adjusted: *assignments that are up to 24 hours late will be downgraded one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays and other assignments that are more than 24 hours late. Where an instructor agrees to accept a late essay, it must be submitted within four weeks of the deadline and cannot receive a grade of higher than C. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment.*

### Academic Integrity

Students are expected to adhere to the highest standards of academic integrity and intellectual engagements in their academic work. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section III Academic Misconduct.

## Assessment

- Class participation and attendance (10%)

You are expected to do your readings and come to class prepared, actively participate in class debates and present your ideas and opinions.

- Participant observation assignment (10%)

During **Week 4 of the course, on Thursday, February 20**, you will be expected to conduct a small project: participate in a (self-started) social situation as a (participant) observer and present the results to your colleagues in class with a very brief (5-minute, no more than 3 slides) presentation. You may do the assignment earlier as well, just make sure it is ready to present by the date.

- Interview assignment (10%)

You will develop an interview guide for a brief (5-10 minutes) interview on the topic we've agreed on in class during the February 27 course session. **Use it to interview one person on the agreed topic. Transcribe the interview – together with your interview notes - and submit it by 23:59 PM on Sunday, March 15, to the Google Drive folder.**

- Focus group assignment (10%)

In **Week 6, on Thursday, March 5**, we will do a focus group simulation. You will be assigned a role and are expected to come prepared, participate actively and share your impressions after the exercise.

- Individual research project (60%)

Every student in class will do a small research project that will allow them to apply the skills we learn in class and at the same time try out a real research exercise (something that will come in handy when you will be doing your thesis in a few years). You will be doing small segments of the project throughout the semester.

I) **Writing your introduction and a research question you want to answer (10%):** You will identify a question that you are interested in answering (which is suited to be answered through applying a qualitative methodology), write it down and explain the wider topic within which it is situated, and why it matters as a research question – either from a theory or a practical knowledge perspective.

This exercise (assignment 1a, of about 450 words) is due ***by 23:59 on Sunday, February 16, and is to be uploaded to the Google Drive folder.***

II) **Literature review (15% - 2500 words, minimum 6 peer-reviewed sources):** You will do a review of the relevant literature for your project, to provide an overview of what other authors are writing on your chosen topic/question, summarize the key arguments and debates, and identify what the literature gaps are (that you can possibly fill in with your mini-project). When doing the review, think critically and engage with the authors: how do they present their arguments, what traditions are they speaking from, what methods are they using – and how convincing do you find their approaches and arguments? Finally, where can your project be situated within the debate?

Following the literature review, you are free to refine your own project to suit what you have learned better. Please keep in mind that both the review and the introduction are part of the same project and should be written like that.

**Literature review is to be submitted by end of Week 6, by 23:59 PM on Sunday, March 15.**

III) **Methodological design (20% - 1000 words):** For your research question, you will design a methodological framework aimed at answering it – before you actually undertake the work of answering it. In the design writeup, you are expected to explain what kind of methodological approach you will be using (and why it is appropriate for your work); what cases you will be working with; how will you collect the data necessary, and how you will analyze it. If necessary, you will also develop appropriate tools (e.g. an interview guide) for the data collection.

The deadline for submitting the design is Week 10, 23:59 PM on Sunday, April 5.

The deadline for conducting your data collection is Week 11, by 23:59 on Sunday, April 19.

IV) **Analyzing your data and writing up your results (15%, 2000 words):** You will conduct your analysis and write up your results, as well as unite them with the previous assignments into one coherent research project to be presented in class.

The deadline for submission of the whole project is Sunday, May 3.

V) **Presentation of your project and results:** You will have the opportunity to present your research project and findings to your colleagues in class during Week 14. We will agree on the presentations schedule in advance.

Following course presentations, you will have until Friday, May 15 to submit the final version of the project, incorporating peer feedback.

### **Grade Breakdown**

10% - in-class participation and regular attendance;

10% - participant observation assignment;

10% - focus group assignment;

10% - interview assignment;

60% - individual research project;

## Schedule

*Please note that changes to the schedule, sessions and readings are possible.*

### PART I: DESIGNING A QUALITATIVE RESEARCH PROJECT

#### Week 1: Introduction: The logic of qualitative research

Tuesday, January 28

*Introduction to the course + paradigms in social sciences*

- Corbetta, P. (2003). *Social Research: Theory, Methods and Techniques*. London: SAGE Publications. Chapter 1

Thursday, January 30

*Nomothetic vs. idiographic approaches to understanding the world*

- Corbetta, P. (2003). *Social Research: Theory, Methods and Techniques*. London: SAGE Publications. Chapter 2
- Desmond, M., & Travis, A. (2018). Political Consequences of Survival Strategies among the Urban Poor. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122418792836>

*Assignment (non-graded): 500-1000-word essay on the topic "Being a student at Bard College Berlin" to be submitted by 23:59 on Sunday, February 2, to the course Google Drive folder.*

#### Week 2: Thinking about research design (I)

Tuesday, February 4

*Principles of qualitative research design*

- Hennink, M., Hutter, I., & Bailey, A. (2013). *Qualitative Research Methods*. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: SAGE Publications. Chapter 3
- Zirakzadeh, C. E. (2009). When Nationalists Are Not Separatists: Discarding and Recovering Academic Theories while Doing Fieldwork in the Basque Region of Spain. In *Political Ethnography: What Immersion Contributes to the Study of Power* (pp. 97–117). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Thursday, February 6

*Reviewing the literature, asking a good research question*

- Schwartz-Shea, P., & Yanow, D. (2013). *Interpretive Research Design: Concepts and Processes*. New York and London: Routledge. Chapter 2
- Neuman, W. L. (2014). *Basics of Social Research: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* (Third Edit). Edinburgh: Pearson. Chapter 4

#### Week 3: Thinking about research design (II)

Tuesday, February 11

*What do we do with theory? Should we care about concepts in qualitative research?*

- Creswell, J. (2013). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Method Approaches*. Thousand Oaks: SAGE. Chapter 3
- Adcock, R., & Collier, D. (2001). Measurement Validity: A Shared Standard for Qualitative and

Quantitative Research. *The American Political Science Review*, 95(3), 529–546.

Thursday, February 13

*Ethical (and practical) issues in qualitative research*

- Hennink, M., Hutter, I., & Bailey, A. (2013). *Qualitative Research Methods*. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: SAGE Publications. Chapter 4
- Lee, R. M., & Renzetti, C. M. (1990). The Problems of Researching Sensitive Topics: An Overview and Introduction. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 3(5), 510–528.

*Assignment I: 500-word introduction and research puzzle (and RQ) due by 23:59 on Sunday, February 16, to be uploaded to the Google Drive folder.*

Week 4: (Participant) observation

Tuesday, February 18

*(Participant) observation (I)*

- Hennink, M., Hutter, I., & Bailey, A. (2013). *Qualitative Research Methods*. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: SAGE Publications. Chapter 8
- Goffman, A. (2014). *On The Run: Fugitive Life in an American City*. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press. Selected pages (TBA)

*Assignment: A 3-slide, 5-minute participant observation report (to be presented in class on Thursday; does not need to be submitted in advance).*

Thursday, February 20

*(Participant) observation (II) – student presentations and discussion*

- Desmond, M. (2017). *Evicted: Poverty and profit in the American city*. Farmington Hills, Michigan: Thorndike Press. Selected pages (TBA)

Week 5: Qualitative interviewing

Tuesday, February 25

*The basics of interviewing*

- Hennink, M., Hutter, I., & Bailey, A. (2013). *Qualitative Research Methods*. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: SAGE Publications. Chapter 6
- Pahl, J. M., & Pahl, R. H. (1971). *Managers and their wives: A study of career and family relationships in the middle class*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books. Chapter 1 and Appendix

*Assignment: Class agrees on an interview topic (or topics, depending on the class size).*

Thursday, February 27

*In-class interviewing exercise*

Readings TBA.

*Assignment: You will develop an interview guide for a brief (5-10 minutes) interview on the topic we've agreed on in class during the February 27 course session. Use it to interview one person on the agreed topic. Write it up – together with your interview notes – and submit it by 23:59 PM on Sunday, March 15, to the Google Drive folder.*

## Week 6: Focus groups

Tuesday, March 3

- Hennink, M., Hutter, I., & Bailey, A. (2013). *Qualitative Research Methods*. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: SAGE Publications. Chapter 7
- Sokolić, I. (2016). Researching norms, narratives, and transitional justice: focus group methodology in post-conflict Croatia. *Nationalities Papers*, 44(6), 932–949. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00905992.2016.1183605>

Thursday, March 5

*Focus groups in-class exercise*

No assigned readings.

*Assignment II: Literature review due by 23:59 PM on Sunday, March 8.*

## Week 7: Thinking more broadly about textual data

Tuesday, March 10

*Essays, diaries, secondary sources etc. as data*

- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2013). *Successful Qualitative Research: A Practical Guide for Beginners*. London: Sage. Chapter 6
- Perry, B., Smith, K., & Warren, S. (2015). Revealing and re-valuing cultural intermediaries in the 'real' creative city: Insights from a diary-keeping exercise. *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 18(6), 724–740. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549415572324>

Thursday, March 12

*Archive as a place of data collection/reusing data - Guest lecture and readings TBA*

## PART III: DATA ANALYSIS

## Week 8: Qualitative data and causal inference – a complicated story?

Tuesday, March 17

*Case study*

- Gerring, J. (2004). What Is a Case Study and What Is It Good for? *The American Political Science Review*, 98(2), 341–354.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (Eds.). (2017). *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*. Journal of Chemical Information and Modeling (Fifth Edit, Vol. 53). Los Angeles, London, New Delhi, Singapore: SAGE. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107415324.004>. Chapter 14

Thursday, March 19

*Process tracing*

- Collier, D. (2011). Understanding process tracing. *PS - Political Science and Politics*, 44(4), 823–830. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1049096511001429>

## Week 9: Coding and thematic analysis

Tuesday, March 24

*An introduction to coding*

- Saldana, J. (2013). *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*. London: SAGE Publications. Chapter 1

Thursday, March 26

*Thematic analysis*

- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>

A practical coding exercise TBC.

**Week 10: From thematic to interpretive analysis**

Tuesday, March 31

*What does it mean to interpret?*

- Geertz, C. (1972). Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight. *Dedalus*, 101(1), 1–37.
- Bevir, M., & Rhodes, R. A. W. (2006). Defending Interpretation. *European Political Science*, 5(1), 69–83. <https://doi.org/10.1057/palgrave.eps.2210059>

Thursday, April 2

*Thinking through traditions and assumptions*

- Cohn, C. (1987). Sex and Death in the Rational World of Defense Intellectuals. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 12(4), 687–718. <https://doi.org/10.1086/494362>

*Assignment III, Research design, due by 23:59 PM on Sunday, April 5.*

SPRING BREAK (April 6 – April 13) – No class

**Week 11: Discourse-analytical approaches**

Tuesday, April 14

*Discourse-analytical traditions: Language, structure, meaning*

- Mills, S. (2004). *Discourse* (2nd ed.). London: Routledge. Chapters 1, 2 and 6

Thursday, April 16

*Doing discourse analysis*

- Gill, R. (2000). Discourse Analysis. In M. Bauer & G. Gaskell (Eds.), *Qualitative Researching with Text, Image and Sound*. (pp. 172–190). London: SAGE Publications.

*Data collection deadline by 23:59 PM on Sunday, April 19.*

**Week 12: New(er) qualitative approaches – and how can they be of use to us?**

Tuesday, April 21

*Autoethnography*

- Burlyuk, O. (2019). Fending off a triple inferiority complex in academia: an autoethnography. *Journal of Narrative Politics*, 6(1), 28–50. Retrieved from <https://jnp.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/default/article/view/115/112>

Thursday, April 23

*Working with non-textual data – coding the visual, interpreting the auditory + recap session (discussing how all our fieldworks went)*

- Excerpts from the instructor's (unpublished) PhD thesis; TBA

PART IV: VALIDITY CONCERNS, WRITING UP, PRESENTING

Week 13: Taking a step back: Evaluating qualitative work

Tuesday, April 28

*Validity, reflexivity, situating the researcher*

- Schwartz-Shea, P., & Yanow, D. (2013). Designing for Trustworthiness: Knowledge Claims and Evaluations of Interpretive Research. In *Interpretive Research Design: Concepts and Processes* (pp. 91–112). New York and London: Routledge.
- Rose, G. (1997). Situating knowledges: Positionality, reflexivities and other tactics. *Progress in Human Geography*, 21(3), 305–320. <https://doi.org/10.1191/030913297673302122>

Thursday, April 30

*Writing it up*

- Hennink, M., Hutter, I., & Bailey, A. (2013). *Qualitative Research Methods*. London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: SAGE Publications. Chapter 11
- Becker, H. S. (2007). *Writing for Social Scientists: How to Start and Finish Your Thesis, Book, or Article*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press. Chapter 2

*Consolidated research project (IV) due on Friday, May 1.*

Week 14

*Student presentations & final discussion*

Tuesday, May 5

*Student presentations I*

No readings assigned

Thursday, May 7

*Student presentations II*

No readings assigned

COMPLETION WEEK (May 11 – May 15) – no class

*Final research project write-up due on May 15.*