

POLI 3P92

Qualitative Political Analysis

Winter 2018

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course introduces students to non-numerical (qualitative) methods of political research involving written texts or interactions with human subjects. After a brief review of the fundamental principles and components of positivist political research, the bulk of the course focuses on qualitative research designs, qualitative data collection techniques, and qualitative data analysis techniques. Students will be familiarized with various case study and comparative research designs, archival, interview, and observational data collection, and qualitative data analysis techniques such as content analysis and process tracing. Finally, students will be made aware of important ethical considerations in qualitative political research and how qualitative research can be designed to avoid ethical problems. Throughout the course, there is an emphasis is on self-directed learning and the application of research skills.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- Lab Tests (6 X 10% each) 60%
- Final Exam (TBA) 40%

Please note: the last date for withdrawal without academic penalty from this course is March 9, 2018. Students will have received notification of at least 15% of their final grade by March 2, 2018.

REQUIRED TEXT

- Lisa Harrison & Theresa Callan, *Key Research Concepts in Politics and International Relations*. London: Sage, 2013. (Available in the bookstore. This text will not be available on the library reserve).

COURSE FORMAT

This course is designed in a hybrid format involving a mixture of online learning and on-campus labs. The course involves six modules, each module designed to be completed in two weeks. The modules each address a different topic in qualitative political research and the schedule of modules is outlined below.

Within each two-week module, there are five learning components: 1) a required reading; 2) an online e-lecture; 3) online practice lab tests; 4) an on-campus tutorial; and, 5) an on-campus lab test. Each of these learning components is described further below.

1) Required Readings

The required readings are designed to provide an introduction to the topic of each module. They provide important background and baseline information for understanding the e-lecture and for completing the practice labs and lab test.

2) E-Lectures

The e-lectures provide in-depth instruction on the topic of each module. Each e-lecture is a narrated PowerPoint presentation designed to teach a different set of qualitative research skills. Accordingly, the e-lectures are an essential learning component of each module. The e-lectures and pages for taking notes (with the lecture slides already on them) can be accessed on the course Sakai page. It is strongly recommended that students print these pages prior to viewing each e-lecture and that they take notes as they view them. The e-lectures can be viewed multiple times, according to each student's learning needs.

3) Practice Labs

The practice labs are designed to provide students with practice in applying the research skills they've learned in the e-lectures. They are also designed to allow students to practice/study for the lab test at the end of each module. The instructions in the practice labs are nearly identical to the instructions in the actual lab tests. The only difference between the practice labs and the lab test are the cases/examples used in applying the research skills. The practice labs also include answer sheets to allow students to compare their answers with model answers. Students may complete as many (or as few) of the practice labs as they feel is necessary to master a research skill. The practice labs can be accessed on the course Sakai page in the Resources section.

4) Tutorials

Every student has been assigned to a lab section that meets once per week at an on-campus computer lab, at a regularly scheduled time. In each two-week module, each lab section will meet twice: the first week of each module will be an optional tutorial; and, the second week of each module will be a mandatory lab test (see below). The tutorials are designed to act as help sessions for students who have questions about course content and would like some in-person instruction. Every student must have completed the text reading, viewed the e-lecture, and attempted at least one practice lab prior to attending the tutorial for their module. Student attendance at tutorials is optional; participation grades are not awarded for attendance.

5) Lab Tests

As mentioned above, during the second week of each module, at your regularly scheduled lab time, there will be a lab test. The lab test is the culminating assignment of each module and evaluates student mastery of the research skills taught in each module. The lab tests are very close in design to the practice labs and completion of the practice labs should provide good preparation for the lab tests.

The lab tests are to be treated as a mini-exam: they must be completed on-campus at their scheduled times, and no outside aids will be permitted (i.e., no note sheets, texts, etc.). Failure to attend a lab test will result in a grade of zero. Rescheduling of lab tests, on compassionate or medical grounds, must be arranged with your lab leader in advance of the scheduled test, and must be accompanied by appropriate documentation (e.g., a doctor's note). At each lab test, the test sheet will be distributed by the lab leader. Following the instructions on the test sheet, students will then access the course Sakai page and complete the test online. Lab tests will then be graded and returned by the lab leaders.

Please note: As described above, each module in the course has a typical two-week cycle: in week one, students complete the required readings, view the e-lecture, complete at least one of the practice labs, and attend their tutorial (if desired); in week two, students complete the remaining practice labs, study, and write the lab test. Students will be best served to complete the learning components of each module in the order described above, starting with the text reading, moving to the e-lecture, then the first practice lab, the tutorial, the remaining practice labs, and, finally, the lab test.

COURSE MODULES

1. The Fundamentals of Empirical Political Research (tutorials: Jan. 8; lab tests: Jan. 15)

- Learning Objective: By the end of this module, students should be able to identify the basic components of empirical political research, including: research questions, hypotheses, variables, indicators, and levels of measurement.
- Required Reading: Harrison & Callan text, chapters on “Epistemology,” “Positivism,” “Empirical Analysis,” “Hypothesis Testing and Inference,” “Causality and Correlations,” “Concepts,” “Variables,” and “Levels of Measurement.” (Students are best served to read the chapters in the order listed here).
- E-Lecture: ‘The Fundamentals of Empirical Political Research’ (available on the course Sakai page)
- Practice Labs: available on the course Sakai page
- Lab Test: conducted in-class during regularly scheduled lab times

2. Qualitative Research Designs (tutorials: Jan. 22; lab tests: Jan. 29)

- Learning Objective: By the end of this module, students should be able to identify and critically evaluate a range of case study and comparative research designs.
- Required Reading: Harrison & Callan text, chapters on “Quantitative Methods,” “Qualitative Methods,” “Case Studies,” and “Comparative Method.” (Students are best served to read the chapters in the order listed here).
- E-lecture: ‘Qualitative Research Designs’ (available on the course Sakai page)
- Practice Labs: available on the course Sakai page
- Lab Test: conducted in-class during regularly scheduled lab times

3. Qualitative Data Collection: Archival, Interview, and Observational Research (tutorials: Feb. 5; lab tests: Feb. 12)

- Learning Objective: By the end of this module, students should know when and how to use the archival, interview, and observational techniques to collect sound qualitative data.
- Required Reading: Harrison & Callan text, chapters on “Validity,” “Reliability,” “Documentary Analysis,” “Primary Sources,” “Interviewing,” “Observation,” and “Sampling.” (Students are best served to read the chapters in the order listed here).

- E-Lecture: 'Qualitative Data Collection: Archival, Interview, and Observational Research' (available on the course Sakai page)
- Practice Labs: available on the course Sakai page
- Lab Test: conducted in-class during regularly scheduled lab times
- Please note: the fall term reading week takes place during this module

4. Qualitative Data Analysis: Content Analysis (tutorials: Feb. 26; lab tests: Mar. 5)

- Learning Objective: By the end of this module, students should be able to identify latent content in written materials through systematic coding.
- Required Reading: Harrison & Callan text, chapter on "Content Analysis," and "Deduction/Induction"
- E-lectures: 'Content Analysis' & 'Special Topic: The Left-Right Ideological Spectrum' (available on the course Sakai page)
- Practice Labs: available on the course Sakai page
- Lab Test: conducted in-class during regularly scheduled lab times

5. Qualitative Data Analysis: Process Tracing (tutorials: Mar. 12; lab tests: Mar. 19)

- Learning Objective: By the end of this module students should be able to undertake sound process tracing analyses.
- Required Reading: Harrison & Callan text, chapter on "Triangulation"
- E-Lecture: 'Process Tracing' (available on the course Sakai page)
- Practice Labs: available on the course Sakai page
- Lab Test: conducted in-class during regularly scheduled lab times

6. Ethical Issues in Political Research (tutorials: Mar. 26; lab tests: Apr. 2)

- Learning Objective: By the end of this module students should be able to identify ethical concerns in political research with human participants, and to develop research designs that avoid ethical violations.
- Required Reading: Harrison & Callan text, chapter on "Ethics"
- E-lecture: 'Ethical Issues in Political Research' (available on the course Sakai page)

- Practice Labs: available on the course Sakai page
- Lab Test: conducted in-class during regularly scheduled lab times

COURSE COMMUNICATIONS

As a hybrid course, students have a number of in-person and electronic options to contact the course instructors (i.e., the professor or TAs) should they have any questions:

- During regularly scheduled office hours;
- During the bi-weekly tutorials;
- Through email; and/or
- Through the 'Forums' on the course Sakai page

Students wishing for private consultation should not communicate with instructors through the 'Forums' as these are accessible to all members of the class. Questions posted to the 'Forums' may be answered by another student or by one of the instructors. The 'Forums' will be regularly monitored by the instructors and students are expected to conduct themselves with decorum in their 'Forum' exchanges. The instructors will do their best to respond to 'Forum' questions within 36 hours of posting and students shouldn't expect immediate responses (particularly on weekends and evenings). Instructors reserve the right not to address questions on the 'Forums' involving long or complex answers that are better addressed in-person. Students are encouraged to bring these questions to the tutorials or office hours.

The course Sakai page also has an 'Announcements' section and students should monitor this regularly for important messages concerning syllabus changes, lab rescheduling, course content, exam time and location, etc.

STATEMENT ON ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT

Academic misconduct is a serious offence. The principle of academic integrity, particularly of doing one's own work, documenting properly (including use of quotation marks, appropriate paraphrasing and referencing/citation), collaborating appropriately, and avoiding misrepresentation, is a core principle in university study. Students should consult Section XVII, "Academic Misconduct", in the "Academic Regulations and University Policies" entry in the Graduate Calendar, available at <http://www.brocku.ca/webcal> to view a fuller description of prohibited actions, and the procedures and penalties.

Because academic integrity is vital to the well-being of the university community, Brock University takes academic misconduct very seriously. Academic misconduct includes plagiarism, which involves presenting the words and ideas of another person as if they were your own, and other forms of cheating, such as using crib notes during a test or fabricating data for a lab assignment. The penalties for academic misconduct can be very severe. A grade of zero may be given for the assignment or even for the course, and a second offense may result in suspension from the University.

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

As part of Brock University's commitment to a respectful work and learning environment, the University will make every reasonable effort to accommodate all members of the university community with disabilities. If you require academic accommodations related to a documented disability to participate in this course, you are encouraged to contact Student Accessibility Services in the Student Development Centre (4th floor Schmon Tower, ex. 3240). You are also encouraged to discuss any accommodations with the instructor well in advance of due dates and scheduled assessments.

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION DUE TO RELIGIOUS OBLIGATIONS

Brock University acknowledges the pluralistic nature of the undergraduate and graduate communities such that accommodations will be made for students who, by reason of religious obligation, must miss an examination, test, assignment deadline, laboratory or other compulsory academic event. Students requesting academic accommodation on the basis of religious obligation should make a formal, written request to their instructor(s) for alternative dates and/or means of satisfying requirements.

MEDICAL EXEMPTION POLICY

The University will accommodate students whose studies become interrupted, or who may be unable to complete academic work, due to an incapacitating medical condition. In these situations, the student must complete the Brock University Student Medical Certificate or [Brock University Student Health Services Medical Certificate](#) (or in case of a concussion, the Brock University Student Health Services Medical Concussion Certificate) and include any relevant medical documentation to support his/her request for academic accommodation based on medical grounds. The University may, at its discretion, request more detailed documentation in certain cases.

INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY NOTICE

All slides, presentations, handouts, tests, exams, and other course materials created by the instructor in this course are the intellectual property of the instructor. A student who publicly posts or sells an instructor's work, without the instructor's express consent, may be charged with misconduct under Brock's Academic Integrity Policy and/or Code of Conduct, and may also face adverse legal consequences for infringement of intellectual property rights.