Ph.D. Seminar on Advanced Research Design

Course Information:
Professor: Adam Auerbach
E-mail: aauerba@american.edu
SIS-809-02
Office: SIS 344
Tuesdays, 2:30-5:20PM, SIS 348

Course Description:
This course enables doctoral students to create methodologically sound research designs in the social sciences. It examines a range of methodologies and research design strategies, with particular attention to their strengths and limitations, in isolation and combination.

The course is designed for doctoral students in the School of International Service entering their third year of coursework. It starts with themes that are central to research design, including concept formation, case selection, and comparison. It then examines techniques for data collection—ethnography, archival research, interviews, focus groups, survey research, and experimental design—as well as practical considerations in writing a dissertation prospectus. The seminar ends with student presentations of their research designs.

Overall, the sequence of readings and writing assignments are designed to guide students through the development of their dissertation prospectus. The coursework should be related to a concrete research project. Students should enter the course with an idea of the research topic they would like to pursue and then use the course to refine that topic into a dissertation prospectus.

Course Objectives
This course will:
• Explore the strengths and weaknesses of various research designs and methodologies.
• Encourage you to become a reflective and systematic researcher.
• Provide opportunities to apply a range of research methods to your research interests.

Learning Outcomes
• Students who successfully complete the course will be able to:
• Create methodologically sound social science research designs.
• Complete a written draft of a dissertation proposal.
• Evaluate the tradeoffs involved in various research designs.

Elements of the Course

Attendance and Participation: 20%
• Regular attendance and active participation are required, and you should come to each class prepared to discuss the assigned readings. Mastery of the assigned material will be demonstrated through active participation in seminar discussions.
• As part of the course attendance and participation requirement, each student will provide a brief (~2 minute) update on the progress made in researching and developing his/her dissertation topic and proposal at the beginning of each class session. These brief updates are designed to elicit continuing assistance and feedback from all members of the seminar.

Research Question Paper: 10%
• The research question paper should outline the puzzle or question that you are interested in pursuing for your dissertation prospectus. You should state it in the form of an explicit question and provide a brief background statement on the topic with selected literature references to justify both the empirical and the theoretical aspects of the puzzle. Your paper should be a maximum of 3 double-spaced pages. This memo is due on October 3.

Mid-Term Research Proposal: 10%
• Halfway through the term each student will provide a detailed research proposal stating the puzzle or question, justifying the substantive and theoretical significance of the problem through a succinct review of relevant scholarship, and advancing tentative thoughts on questions of case selection and the proposed methods of investigation. The mid-term proposal should be a maximum of 6 double-spaced pages, not counting the bibliography or footnotes/endnotes. The mid-term proposal is due on October 30.

Data Sources Paper: 10%
• The data sources paper should provide an outline of the specific data sources for the dissertation research, along with a justification for why each data source is being considered and a discussion of the methods that will be used to interrogate this evidence. It should be approximately 4 double-spaced pages in length. The data sources paper is due on October 31.

Research Design Presentation: 14%
• The research design presentation will be approximately 30 minutes (15 minute presentation, 3-5 minutes for discussant comments, and 10 minutes Q&A). The presentation should summarize the research design and pose questions concerning unresolved issues in the project. The discussant will deliver a set of comments and suggest additional discussion questions for the Q&A portion. Presentations will take place during the last regular course meeting and during the scheduled final exam period.
Research Design Paper: 20%

- Each student will submit a research design paper that articulates a planned approach for the dissertation research. This assignment is based on the dissertation prospectus guidelines in the SIS Ph.D. Program Handbook. The paper should address the following questions: What question will the dissertation address? What do we know about this issue now? What is the proposed research methodology and what are the proposed forms of evidence? What will the proposed research contribute to the field? The paper should include: a bibliography of works cited, an appendix with a timeline detailing a schedule for completion of the dissertation, and a brief summary of the main topic of the dissertation (150 words or less). Final research design papers are due on December 17.

Thought Exercise Memos: 16%

- For four of the field research methods examined in this course (ethnography, interviews and focus groups, archival research, and survey research), students will reflect on the readings and class discussion and then write a 2-page memo (double-spaced) that briefly outlines how that method might contribute to their dissertation research (memo prompts below). These memos are due before the class that immediately follows the one that discussed the method.

  - How might ethnography contribute to your dissertation research? Where would you conduct the ethnography? What actors, organizations, or institutions would you observe?
  - How might interviews be incorporated into your dissertation research? What set(s) of actors would you interview? What are the broad themes you would examine with each set of actors?
  - How might historical research enhance your dissertation project? What archival sources could you consult as the basis of this historical work? Where might such materials be located?
  - How might a survey contribute to your dissertation? Given your study setting(s), research question(s), and a reasonable budget ($15,000), how would you go about conducting a sample survey that would be useful for data analysis? Discuss all of the major elements of sampling—describe the population of inference, define the sampling frame, state a desired sample size, and specify the method of selecting respondents and other units if clustering or stratification are used.

Grading

Grades are as follows:
- A: 93-100
- A-: 90-93
- B+: 87-90
- B: 83-87
- B-: 80-83
- C+: 77-80
- C: 73-77
➢ C: 70-73
➢ Grades below C will be a D or an F

**Five Percentage points will be deducted each day an assignment is late.**

**Office Hours**
My office hours during the Fall 2017 semester will be held on Tuesdays from 1:00 to 2:00PM and Thursdays from 3:30 to 5:00PM. I am also available by appointment.

**Academic Integrity**
Standards of academic conduct are set forth in the Academic Integrity Code. By registering, you have acknowledged your awareness of the Academic Integrity Code, and you are obliged to become familiar with your rights and responsibilities as defined by the Code. Violations of the Academic Integrity Code will not be treated lightly, and disciplinary actions will be taken should such violations occur. Please see me if you have any questions about the academic violations described in the Code in general or as they relate to particular requirements for this course.

**Emergency Preparedness for Disruption of Class**
In the event of an emergency, American University will implement a plan for meeting the needs of all members of the university community. Should the university be required to close for a period of time, we are committed to ensuring that all aspects of our educational programs will be delivered to our students. These may include altering and extending the duration of the traditional term schedule to complete essential instruction in the traditional format and/or use of distance instructional methods. Specific strategies will vary from class to class, depending on the format of the course and the timing of the emergency. Faculty will communicate class-specific information to students via AU e-mail and Blackboard, which students must inform their faculty immediately of any absence. Students are responsible for checking their AU e-mail regularly and keeping themselves informed of emergencies. In the event of an emergency, students should refer to the AU Student Portal, the AU Website (www.prepared.american.edu) and the AU information line at (202) 885-1100 for general university-wide information, as well as contact their faculty and/or respective dean’s office for course and school/college-specific information.

**Early Warning Notifications**
Students may receive Early Warning Notices within the first month of classes. These notices are designed for you to contact your faculty, receive assistance, and develop strategies to improve your performance. Please note that you should seek help throughout the semester when you have questions, fail to submit an assignment, fail to attend class, or receive an unsatisfactory grade.

**Students with Disabilities**
If you wish to receive accommodations for a disability, please notify me with a letter from the Academic Support and Access Center. As accommodations are not retroactive, timely
notification at the beginning of the semester, if possible, is strongly recommended. To register with a disability or for questions about disability accommodations, contact the Academic Support and Access Center at 202-885-3360 or asac@american.edu.

Required Books (available at the AU bookstore)


Course Schedule:

Week One: Research Questions, Research Ethics, and Literature Reviews


—Other Recommended Readings—

➢ Ethics in the Middle East Symposium: <http://pomeps.org/2014/06/11/the-ethics-of-research-in-the-middle-east-memos/>

Week Two: Description, Interpretation, and Explanation


—Other Recommended Readings—


Week Three: Concepts and Measurement


—Other Recommended Readings—


Week Four: Comparison and Case Selection

Read Chapter 5: “Techniques for Choosing Cases” (with Jason Seawright).

—Other Recommended Readings—

Week Five: Ethnography
Kapiszewski, Diana, Lauren MacLean, and Benjamin Read. 2015. Field Research in Political Science. Cambridge UP. Read Chapter 7


—Other Recommended Readings—


Week Six: Archival Research, Historical Narratives, and Process Tracing

Kapiszewski, Diana, Lauren MacLean, and Benjamin Read. 2015. Field Research in Political Science. Cambridge University Press. Read Chapter 5

Bennett, Andrew and Jeffrey Checkel. 2015. Process Tracing. New York: Cambridge University Press. Read Chapters TBD in class


—Other Recommended Readings—


Week Seven: Interviews and Focus Groups
➢ Kapiszewski, Diana, Lauren MacLean, and Benjamin Read. 2015. Field Research in Political Science. Cambridge UP. Read Chapter 6

—Other Recommended Readings—

Week Eight: Surveys and Survey Sampling
➢ Kapiszewski, Diana, Lauren MacLean, and Benjamin Read. 2015. Field Research in Political Science. Cambridge University Press. Read Chapter 8.
—Other Recommended Readings—


Week Nine: Questionnaires


—Other Recommended Readings—


Week Ten: Experimental Research Design

➢ Kapiszewski, Diana, Lauren MacLean, and Benjamin Read. 2015. Field Research in Political Science. Cambridge University Press. Read Chapter 9


—Other Recommended Readings—


Week Eleven: Multi-Method Research
➢ Seawright, Jason. 2016. Multi-Method Social Science: Combining Qualitative and Quantitative Tools. New York: Cambridge University Press. Read Chapter 1
➢ Fearon, James D., and David D. Laitin. 2008. “Integrating Qualitative and Quantitative Methods.” In Janet M. Box-Steffensmeier, Henry E. Brady, and David Collier, eds., The Oxford Handbook of Political Methodology, 756-76.

— Other Recommended Readings —

Week Twelve: Writing and Fieldwork Practicalities
➢ Kapiszewski, Diana, Lauren MacLean, and Benjamin Read. 2014. Field Research in Political Science. Cambridge UP. Read Chapters 4 and 10

—Other Recommended Readings—

Week Thirteen: Class Presentations
Week Fourteen: Class Presentations