

PhD Course: Qualitative Research Methods

PhD in Social and Political Sciences AY 2025-26

Instructors:

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12 sessions

1. Objectives and content

The course explores qualitative methodologies and their application to research in the social sciences. The course exposes students to the theoretical principles underlying qualitative approaches and discusses the questions that can be addressed with these methodologies. At the same time, it aims at familiarizing the students with the concrete application of qualitative methodologies, giving them the opportunity to experience for themselves the strengths and weaknesses of such approaches.

The course, therefore, will entail traditional lectures, the discussion of scholarly papers built upon qualitative approaches, and examples conducted with these methodologies. It will confront students with the methods for analysing text data, derived from public speeches, conversations, or interviews, field notes and visual data.

The course has been design as a working seminar. During the course students will complete 2 non – assessed assignments whereby students will collect their own data for the purpose of qualitative analysis and will carry out the analysis themselves.

2. Evaluation

The evaluation is composed of:

- 100% a “research proposal-type” paper. The paper should incorporate (i) a brief literature review and research question to be investigated with qualitative methods; (ii) the description of the qualitative research design (iii) the description of the data collection tools and analysis to be undertaken. The assignment will be submitted to the instructor after the end of the course.

The material for the classes will be slides, scholarly papers, and chapters of methodology textbooks. The syllabus details the compulsory methodological readings. During the classes specific examples will be discussed.

3. Detailed syllabus

Session	Date	Content	Readings
1	03/02/2026 10:15-11:45	<p>PART I: Introduction to qualitative research and research designs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Epistemological issues • Basics of qualitative research <p>Research design in qual research</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Building a conceptual framework and framing research questions in qualitative studies • Typologies of research design: Case-studies, longitudinal research designs 	<p><u>Useful sources (research questions)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Booth, W.C., Colomb G.G. and Williams J.M. (2003) From questions to problems, <i>The Craft of Research</i>, Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press: 40-71 (Chapter 4) • Lofland, Snow, Anderson and Lofland. (2005) “Asking questions”, <i>Analyzing Social Settings: A Guide to Qualitative Observation and Analysis</i>. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Company: 144 – 167 (Chapter 7) <p><u>Useful sources (case study research designs)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yin R (2018) “Designing case studies” in <i>Case Study Research and Applications</i> 6th Edition (chapter 2) • Bennett, A., & Elman, C. (2006). Qualitative research: Recent developments in case study methods. <i>Annual Review of Political Science</i>, 9, 455-476. • Collins, C., Neely, M. & Khan, S. (2024). “Which Cases Do I Need?” Constructing Cases and Observations in Qualitative Research. <i>Annual Review of Sociology</i>. 50. 10.1146/annurev-soc-031021-035000 <p><u>Examples of papers will be distributed and discussed in class</u></p>
2	03/02/2026 12:00-13:30 Compagni	<p>Mixed methods research designs</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Typologies of studies • Data collection combinations 	<p><u>Useful sources</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creswell, J. W. & Clark PVL (2011). <i>Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research</i>. United Kingdom: SAGE Publications (Chapter 3 and 6) • Gibson, C. B. (2016). Elaboration, Generalization, Triangulation, and Interpretation: On Enhancing the Value of Mixed Method Research: On Enhancing the Value of Mixed Method Research. <i>Organizational Research Methods</i>, 20(2), 193-223. <p><u>Examples of papers will be distributed and discussed in class</u></p>

3	10/02/2025 10:15-11:45 Compagni	<p>PART II: Data collection in qual research</p> <p>Collecting verbal data through interviews</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The practice of interviewing: semi-structured interviews, elite interviews, narrative interviews • The practice of collecting verbal exchanges • Beyond text: the role of videos and visuals <p>Launch of Assignment 1(a): <i>Generating an interview protocol and conducting an interview</i> (<u>deadline 16/02 midday</u>)</p>	<p><u>Useful sources</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flick U. (2014) “Collecting verbal data” (Chapter 15) - “Interviews” (Chapter 16) - “Focus groups” (Chapter 17) in <i>An Introduction to Qualitative Research</i>, Sage • LeBaron, C., Jarzabkowski P. and Pratt M-G. et al. (2018) An Introduction to Video Methods in Organizational Research. <i>Organ Res Meth.</i> 21(2):239-260. <p><u>Scholarly papers to be discussed (read beforehand)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anteby, M., & Holm, A. L. (2021). Translating Expertise across Work Contexts: US Puppeteers Move from Stage to Screen. <i>American Sociological Review</i>, 86(2), 310-340. • Parkinson, S. E. (2013). Organizing Rebellion: Rethinking High-risk Mobilization and Social Networks in War. <i>American Political Science Review</i>, 107(3), 418-432. • Zavyalova, A. (2024). Stigmatization by an Authoritarian Government: Russian NGOs Under the 2012 Foreign Agents Law. <i>Administrative Science Quarterly</i>, 70(1), 69-118.
4	10/02/2025 12:00-13:30 Compagni	<p>Data collection: Conducting fieldwork</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Getting in: Identifying the research site, negotiating access, ERB procedures • Collecting real-time data: participant observation, field notes and ethnographic interviews • Ethnography in the digital world <p>Launch of Assignment 1(b): <i>Conducting a (digital) ethnography/field observation</i> (<u>deadline 16/02 midday</u>)</p>	<p><u>Useful sources</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Barley, S. R. (1990). Images of Imaging: Notes on Doing longitudinal field work. <i>Organization Science</i>, 1(3), 220-247. • Loafland, Snow, Anderson, Loafland (2004). “Thinking topics” <i>In Analyzing Social Settings: A Guide to Qualitative Observation and Analysis</i> (chapter 6) • Akemu, O., & Abdelnour, S. (2020). Confronting the digital: Doing ethnography in modern organizational settings. <i>Organizational Research Methods</i>, 23(2), 296-321. <p><u>Scholarly papers to be discussed (read beforehand)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rond, M, Lok, J & Marrison, A (2021). To Catch A Predator: The Lived Experience of Extreme Practices. <i>The Academy of Management Journal</i>. 65. 10.5465/amj.2020.1492 • Kantola, J., Elomäki, A., Gaweda, B., Miller, C., Ahrens, P. & Berthet, V. (2023). "It's Like Shouting to a Brick Wall": Normative Whiteness and Racism in the European Parliament," <i>American Political Science Review</i>, 117(1), 184-199.

5	17/02/2025 10:15-11:45 Compagni	Class discussion on Assignment 1a and 1b	
6	17/02/2025 12:00-13:30 Compagni	Class discussion on Assignment 1a and 1b (continued) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussion on differences between primary, secondary data collection or their combination 	
7	24/02/2026 10:15-11:45 Cappellaro	<p>PART III: Analyzing qualitative data</p> <p>Coding techniques: focus on verbal data</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inductive, deductive and abductive coding • Grounded theory • Qualitative content and thematic analysis • Protocol analysis for coding cognitive processes <p><i>Launch of Assignment 2: Coding an interview text (<u>deadline 01/03 midday</u>)</i></p>	<p><u>Useful sources</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deterding, N. M., & Waters, M. C. (2021). Flexible coding of in-depth interviews: A twenty-first-century approach. <i>Sociological methods & research</i>, 50(2), 708-739. • Locke K. (2001) “Grounded theory’s research practices” in <i>Grounded Theory in Management Research</i>, Sage, (chapter 4) • Gioia, D. A., Corley, K. G., & Hamilton, A. L. (2012). Seeking qualitative rigor in inductive research: Notes on the Gioia methodology. <i>Organizational research methods</i>, 16(1), 15-31. • van Someren, M. W., Barnard, Y. F., & Sandberg, J. A. C. (1994). The think aloud method: a practical approach to modelling cognitive processes. (Knowledge-based systems). Academic Press. (<i>chapter 7 Analyzing the Protocols: 117-137</i>) <p><u>Scholarly papers to be discussed (read beforehand the one assigned to you)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lashley, K., & Pollock, T. G. (2020). Waiting to inhale: Reducing stigma in the medical cannabis industry. <i>Administrative science quarterly</i>, 65(2), 434-482. • Gioia, D. A., Thomas, J. B., Clark, S. M., & Chittipeddi, K. (1994). Symbolism and strategic change in academia: The dynamics of sensemaking and influence. <i>Organization Science</i>, 5(3), 363-383. • González, Y., & Mayka, L. (2023). Policing, democratic participation, and the reproduction of asymmetric citizenship. <i>American political science review</i>, 117(1), 263-279. (Read appendix from page 6: coding meeting minutes) • <u>Just skim</u> the data analysis: Li, M., Tan, C. H., Wei, K. K., & Wang, K. (2017). Sequentiality of product review information provision. <i>Mis Quarterly</i>, 41(3), 867-A7. (protocol analysis)

			<p><u>Additional papers:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mojola, S. A., Angotti, N., Schatz, E., & Houle, B. (2021). “A nowadays disease”: HIV/AIDS and social change in a rural South African community. <i>American journal of sociology</i>, 127(3), 950-1000. • Chiarello, E. (2023). Trojan horse technologies: Smuggling criminal-legal logics into healthcare practice. <i>American Sociological Review</i>, 88(6), 1131-1160. • Mueller, A. S., & Abrutyn, S. (2016). Adolescents under pressure: A new Durkheimian framework for understanding adolescent suicide in a cohesive community. <i>American sociological review</i>, 81(5), 877-899. (interviews and focus groups) • Compagni, A., Cappellaro, G., & Nigam, A. (2024). Responding to professional knowledge disruptions of unmitigable uncertainty: The role of emotions, practices, and moral duty among COVID-19 physicians. <i>Academy of Management Journal</i>, 67(3), 829-861.(coding)
8	24/02/2026 12:00-13:30	<p>Coding techniques: focus on non-verbal data</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Media and video analysis <p>Techniques to analyse textual data</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Domains of discourse and methodological techniques: framing analysis, rhetorical analysis, discourse analysis 	<p><u>Useful sources</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fazeli, S., Sabetti, J., & Ferrari, M. (2023). Performing qualitative content analysis of video data in social sciences and medicine: The visual-verbal video analysis method. <i>International Journal of Qualitative Methods</i>, 22, 16094069231185452. • Fairclough, N. (2003). <i>Analysing discourse</i> (Vol. 270). London: Routledge. Chapter Introduction only <p><u>Scholarly papers to be discussed (read beforehand the one assigned to you)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lefsrud and Meyer (2012). Science or science fiction? Professionals’ discursive construction of Climate Change. <i>Organization Studies</i> • Kahl, S. J., & Grodal, S. (2016). Discursive strategies and radical technological change: Multilevel discourse analysis of the early computer (1947–1958). <i>Strategic Management Journal</i>, 37(1), 149-166. • DeSoucey, M., & Waggoner, M. R. (2022). Another person’s peril: Peanut allergy, risk perceptions, and responsible sociality. <i>American Sociological Review</i>, 87(1), 50-79. <p><u>Additional papers (for your interest):</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bailey, C. M., Collins Jr, P. M., Rhodes, J. H., & Rice, D. (2025). The effect of judicial decisions on issue salience and legal consciousness in

			media serving the LGBTQ+ community. <i>American Political Science Review</i> , 119(1), 108-123. (read appendix on qualitative content analysis)
9	03/03/2026 10:15-11:45	Coding in practice (I) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Class discussion on Assignment 2 	
10	03/03/2026 12:00-13:30	Coding in practice (II) <p>Class discussion on Assignment 2 (continued)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The use of software in qualitative analysis Human-generated vs AI-generated coding: a discussion 	<u>Useful sources</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nguyen, D. C., & Welch, C. (2025). Generative Artificial Intelligence in Qualitative Data Analysis: Analyzing—Or Just Chatting? <i>Organizational Research Methods</i>, 29(1), 3-39. https://doi.org/10.1177/10944281251377154 (Original work published 2026)
11	10/03/2026 10.15-11.45	Design-specific analytical approaches <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Analytical approaches for comparative case studies Analytical approaches for time-based studies: processual studies and historical analysis 	<u>Useful sources</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Eisenhardt K.M. (1989) Building Theories from Case Study Research, <i>The Academy of Management Review</i>, Vol. 14, No. 4 pp. 532-550 Langley A. (1999) Strategies for Theorizing from Process Data. <i>The Academy of Management Review</i> Vol. 24, No. 4 pp. 691-710 <p><u>Scholarly papers to be discussed (read beforehand the one assigned to you)</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hallen, B. L., & Eisenhardt, K. M. (2012). Catalyzing strategies and efficient tie formation: How entrepreneurial firms obtain investment ties. <i>Academy of Management Journal</i>, 55(1), 35-70. (read methodology section) Cappellaro, G., Compagni, A., & Vaara, E. (2021). Maintaining strategic ambiguity for protection: Struggles over opacity, equivocality, and absurdity around the Sicilian Mafia. <i>Academy of Management Journal</i>, 64(1), 1-37. Steinsson, S. (2024). Rule ambiguity, institutional clashes, and population loss: how Wikipedia became the last good place on the internet. <i>American Political Science Review</i>, 118(1), 235-251.
12	10/03/2026 12.00-13.30	From the methods to the scholarly output <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The process of writing up a qualitative paper The process of going through the review process Being on the reviewer's side 	

4. Non- assessed assignments

During the course of the classes, students will be asked to produce 2 assignments. While these assignments are not formally marked, they are extremely valuable to understand the real process of collecting and analysing qualitative data. A brief overview of each assignment is detailed below. Prior to each class, the instructors will upload on the Blackboard folder the detailed instructions for each assignment. During the class (date of discussion) you will be asked to make a presentation of your work.

You will choose between assignment 1a or 1b

Assignment 1a: Generating an interview protocol and conducting an interview

Topic: Those of you who choose this assignment will elaborate a tentative research question and an interview protocol and explain the choice of interview type and interviewee. On the basis of the interview protocol you will conduct an interview with a suitable interviewee and transcribe it. In a 8-10 min presentation you will reflect on: 1) good and bad of the interview; 2) possible corrections to the protocol.

Assignment 1b: Conducting a (digital) ethnography/field observation

Topic: Those of you who choose this assignment will identify a space in which to conduct some observation. The observation will need to be guided by a RQ even if broad. For the purpose of this assignment the choice can fall also on digital spaces (e.g. an online forum, a public debate, a parliamentary/party debate, a TV talk show, the press conference of a politician) in which your possibility to interact is limited or for which your observation is asynchronous. Observation will need to last at least a couple of hours overall. Field notes and the rest of the material associated to your observation, including the your observation structure, will be then compiled. In a 8-10 min presentation you will reflect on: 1) good and bad of the observation process; 2) possible corrections to the protocol.

Assignment 2: Coding an interview text

Topic: Each of you will be assigned two interview transcripts and will be asked to analyse the text by identifying first order codes on the basis of a broad RQ provided by the instructor. On the date of the discussion each of you will present briefly the coding scheme developed. You will then work as a group to develop second-order and third-order selective codes.