**Urban and Regional Planning 800:**

**Qualitative Research Methods for Policy and Planning**

Winter 2025

Syllabus subject to revision

Taubman College of Architecture and Urban Planning

Urban Planning Program

University of Michigan

Instructor: Martin Murray Course number: UP 800

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Office Hours: By appointment [contact via email, but remember not to wait until the last minute].

Statement on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Taubman College affirms the principles of diversity, equity, and inclusion as we organize resources and priorities that align with our values. We seek to have a diverse group of persons at all levels of the college - students, faculty, staff and administrators - including persons of different race and ethnicity, national origin, gender and gender expression, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, religious commitment, age, and disability status. We strive to create a community of mutual respect and trust, a community in which all persons and their respective backgrounds, identities, and views are allowed to be made visible and communicated without the threat of bias, harassment, intimidation, or discrimination.

*Aims of the Course*

The purpose of this course is to critically explore ways of conducting theoretically-informed and empirically grounded social research through an examination of different approaches to knowledge production. In specific, the course is designed to develop skills in research design for social inquiry with a particular emphasis on policy analysis and urban planning. The course focuses on some basic features of qualitative methods (case studies and comparison, ethnography, field research, interview strategies and techniques, surveys) in conjunction with a series of practical exercises aimed at “giving substance to theory.” The goal is acquire a solid understanding of various approaches to establishing a sound methodology as a logical tool to reach valid conclusions when we investigate the social world.

These basic elements of research design include (1) selecting a compelling topic (the subject-matter of research), (2) posing meaningful questions (identifying the objects of research), and (3) defining a problem (developing a grounded research design project to address what it is we want to know). Research design involves establishing ways of gathering appropriate evidence and synthesizing and adjudicating between compelling arguments. It also includes setting the scope conditions (i.e., the spatial spread and the temporal frame of the object of research, that is, how far can we generalize?), elaborating the qualitative and quantitative dimensions, and locating sources of evidence.

Throughout the course, students will be exposed to a wide range of qualitative social research methodologies useful for planners and social scientists alike. Students will become familiar with a variety of techniques in collecting and analyzing qualitative data and in deciding what information is useful and what is not. The course is organized around three goals: (1) *reading* about approaches to qualitative methods and critiquing existing scholarly work that employ various methods, (2) *learnin*g the basic building blocks of conducting valid and reliable research; and (3) *using* this newly-acquired knowledge to think practically about developing a research project of one’s own (that is, *learning by doing*).

The sheer complexity and diversity of these debates and controversies makes it impossible to cover all the issues in a comprehensive and definitive way. As a consequence, this course is necessarily limited to highlighting some issues while glossing over or ignoring others.

*Course Content*

The course will cover the following areas:

**(1) the logic of inquiry**

the movement from topics (interesting ideas, points of curiosity), to questions (what do we want to know), and to problems (puzzles);

the relationship of theory to evidence;

competing modes of inquiry (explanatory, interpretive, narrativological).

**(2) the opportunities, challenges, and limitations of case study research**

different types of "cases" and different purposes for case study research, or a "case of what”?

**(3) comparative strategies**

varying usages of comparisons in making arguments;

**(4) ethnographic field work**

Theory-driven or theory-building ethnographies;

the advantages (and disadvantages) of participant observation;

**(5) research design**

how to answer with rigor and precision the “research question” that one poses;

how to ensure that a “question” is researchable;

the “mixed methods” approach;

observation and measurement (techniques);

the use (and abuse) of evidence, or how to transform information (data) into evidence to support claims;

(7) persuasion, or how to make an argument significant, believable, and important;

(8) normative implications, or what can planners, policymakers, or other stakeholders do with this research to address (and redress) problems in the real social world

**Course Brief URP800\_QUALITATIVE METHODS\_F20\_Murray**

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The course is more or less divided into four parts:

1. How to bring "theory" (ideas) and evidence together.

2. Case Studies: what are "cases" good for?

3. The value of comparative analysis -- when "two or three (or even four) are better than one" in terms of making claims that can be generalized

4. Data and Evidence:

Transforming information (data) into evidence

*Course Format* (Expectations/Requirements)

This course will be organized in a tutorial format, that is, small group discussions where I will pose some questions and then ask you individually to respond. The content of the Tutorial Sessions will be the lecture from the previous Thursday and assigned readings. The Tutorial sessions will be organized via Zoom one day per week for an hour. I prefer Fridays.

Classroom time on Thursday evenings from 6:00pm will be primarily devoted to a combination of lectures (where I try to put forward my own particular views on specific topics) and some collective discussion of assigned readings. Students are expected to engage with the assigned readings and actively participate actively in discussions

There will be four or five separate writing assignments (each no more than four/five pages in length) which will focus directly on particular problem areas covered in lectures, assigned readings, and tutorial sessions. Students may choose to re-write these papers for final submission. There will be no expected full-length term paper.

In addition, each student is expected to write a short (approx. 3 pages, ungraded) “reflection paper” at the beginning of the semester, addressing the following questions:

(1) How does (or could) research contribute to planning practice or policy formulation?

(2) What kinds of research do planning (and related) scholars do? What kinds of research should we see more of?

This will help me to decide how to proceed during the term with lectures and readings.

*Required Books*

Charles Ragin, *Constructing Social Research* (Thousand Oaks: Pine Forge Press, 1994). Available on CANVAS

Charles Ragin and Howard Becker (eds.), *What Is a Case?* (New York: Cambridge

University Press, 1992). Available on CANVAS

All individual articles are available for electronic download on CANVAS.

\* Read Quickly

**Schedule of Class Sessions**

*Week One: Introduction: Thinking Methodologically*

Themes

Survey of the general issues to be considered;

Outline of course structure and procedures;

Summary of main ideas

”Before Method” (Saskia Sassen)

*Week Two: Theory and Evidence: Designing Social Research;* ***UNIT OF ANALYSIS VERSUS SITES OF INVESTIGATION***

*Themes*

What is theory? What is Evidence?

Constructing Narratively-Organized Explanatory Accounts

Conceptualizing wholes and parts

the abstract and the concrete

the explanans and the explanandum

Selection and Categorization

Observation and Measurement

Classification

Ideal-types [ideal-typifications]

concepts and indicators

synthetic versus analytic statements

Conceptualizing space and time

Category Mistakes [parts and wholes] (Gilbert Ryle, 1949)

Readings

Charles Ragin, *Constructing Social Research*, pp. 1-53. Chapter One and Chapter Two]

\*\* Sheldon Goldenberg, *Thinking Methodologically* (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), pp. 2-21.

John Creswell, Ch. 7 “Research Questions and Hypotheses,” Chapter 7 in *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods Approaches* [3rd edition] (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2009), pp. 129-143.

Recommended

Bent Flyvbjerg, *Making Social Science Matter: Why Social Inquiry Fails and How It Can Succeed Again* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

**Fields and Modes of Inquiry**

*Week Three: Modes of Inquiry, Fields of Inquiry*

Themes

Field of Inquiry

*Topics*: Puzzles, conundrums, “wicked problems”)

*Questions* (i.e., what do I want to know?),

*Problems* (How am I going to go about demonstrating that I “know” it);

Modes

Explanatory

Interpretive

Narrative

Readings

Gary King, Robert Keohane, and Sidney Verba, “The Science in Social Science,” in *Designing Social Inquiry: Scientific Inference in Qualitative Research* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 3-33 [Available as E-Book from U of M Library]

Ragin, *Constructing Social Research,* Chapter 3, 55-79; chapter 4, pp. 55-79, chapter 5, pp. 105-130, chapter 6, pp. 131-153.

Tutorial Assignment [For Discussion in tutorial session]

Select an article from JPER, JAPA, or any journal with “Planning” in the title which conducts research through one or more of the explanatory, interpretive, or narrativological modes of inquiry

Recommended

Robert Alford, *The Craft of Inquiry: Theories, Methods, Evidence* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), especially Chapter Two “The Construction of Arguments,” pp. 32-53.]

John Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative and Mixed Methods*

*Approaches* [4th Ed.] (Los Angeles: Sage Publications, 2013), Ch. 7 “Research Questions and Hypotheses,” [no pagination]

John Hall, *Cultures of Inquiry: From Epistemology to Discourse in Sociohistorical Research* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

Craig Calhoun, “Explanation in Historical Sociology: Narrative, General Theory, and Historically Specific Theory,” *American Journal of Sociology* 104 (1998), pp. 846–871.

Emilie Cameron, “New Geographies of Story and Storytelling,” *Progress in Human Geography* 36, 5 (2012), pp. 573-592.

**Cases and Comparisons**

*Week Four: Case Studies: Or a “Case” of What?*

Themes

Cases as exemplars; Cases as illustrations (Deductive); Cases as outliers; Deviant Cases; Cases as Theoretical Building Blocks (Inductive)

Four kinds of “cases”: confirming theory through exemplifying; building theory from the ground-up undermining theory by violating expectations; and enhancing theory by offering a broader reach

Readings

Charles Ragin and Howard Becker (eds.), *What Is a Case? Exploring the*

*Foundations of Social Inquiry* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992). [Selections]

Bent Flyvbjerg, "Five Misunderstandings about Case Study Research," *Qualitative Inquiry* 12, 2 (2006), pp. 219-245.

John Gerring, “What Is a Case Study Good For? Case Study versus Large-N Cross-Case Analysis,” chapter 3 in John Gerring, *Case Study Research: Principles and Practices* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 37-63.

Wilson Gee, “The Case Method,” *Social Science Research Methods* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1950), pp. 230-251.

Robert Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* [Third Edition] (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2008), Introduction pp. 1-19, [skim 20-56]

Group Assignment [For Discussion in the Following Class Session]

Select an article from JPER, JAPA, or any journal with “Planning” in the title which uses some variant of a case study approach, critically investigate what it is a “case” of, and evaluate the success or failure of this approach in this instance

Recommended

Joe Feagin, Gideon Sjoberg, *A Case for the Case Study* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1983).

*Week Five: Case Selection: Intentional Selection and Selection Bias (“selecting on the dependent variable”)*

Themes

Advantages and disadvantages of case-based (versus variable-based) research strategies

Generalizability -- inference

Readings

Paul Steinberg, “Can we Generalize from Case Studies?” *Global Environmental Politics* 15, 3 (2015), pp. 152–175.

Robert Goodspeed, “Case Study Research: A Framing Overview” [Unpublished Power-Point]

Jason Seawright and John Gerring, **“Case Selection Techniques in Case Study Research: A Menu of Qualitative and Quantitative Options,”** *Political Research Quarterly* 61 (2008), pp. 294-308.

Barbara Geddes, “How the Cases You Choose Affect the Answers You Get: Selection Bias and Related Issues,” chapter 3 in her *Paradigms and Sand Castles: Theory Building and Research Design in Comparative Politics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), pp. 89-130.

Why is selection bias a problem? Is it only a problem for comparative politics? Is it only a problem for quantitative research? Does your research design suffer from selection bias?

Gary King, Robert Keohane, and Sidney Verba, *Designing Social Inquiry* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 139-149 on “Intentional Selection of Observations.” If you cannot select observations randomly, what is the next-best way to select them?

David Collier and James Mahoney, “Insights and Pitfalls: Selection Bias in Qualitative Research,” *World Politics* 49, 1 (1996), pp. 56-91.

Group Assignment [For Discussion in the Tutorial Session]

Select an article from JPER, JAPA, or any journal with “Planning” in the title which uses intentional case selection. In addition, you must identify the research question (hypothesis, if any), causal or interpretive argument, operationalization of variables, approach to collection of data, and data analysis. Further, you must critically examine whether the research design and method used by the researcher is appropriate or not, identify problems and limitations, and provide ways about how to make the research problem methodologically more rigorous.

Recommended

Robert Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* [Third Edition] (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2008), pp. 1-19, [skim 20-56]

David Thacher, “The Normative Case Study,” *American Journal of Sociology* 111, 6 (2006), pp. 1631-1676.

Barbara Geddes, “Big Questions, Little Answers: How the Questions You Choose Affect the Answers You Get” chapter 2 in her *Paradigms and Sand Castles: Theory Building and Research Design in Comparative Politics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), pp. 27-88.

*Week Six: Controlled Comparisons: Truncated versus Formal*

Themes

Galton’s Problem (“independent” instances)

Small-N Studies

Readings:

Jennifer Robinson, “Cities in a World of Cities: The Comparative Gesture,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 35, 1 (2011), pp. 1-23.

Philip McMichael, “Incorporating Comparison within a World-Historical Perspective: An Alternative Comparative Method,” *American Sociological Review* 55, 3 (1990), pp. 385–397.

\*\* Dan Slater and Daniel Ziblatt, “The Enduring Indispensability of the Controlled Comparison,” *Comparative Political Studies* 46, 10 (2013), pp. 1301-1327.

\*\* Theda Skocpol and Margaret Somers, "The Uses of Comparative History in Macrosocial Inquiry," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 22, 2 (1980), pp. 174-197.

Group Assignment [For Discussion in the Following Tutorial Session]

Select an article from JPER, JAPA, or any journal with “Planning” in the title which conducts research through a “comparative study” approach

Recommended

Comparative Historical Approaches

Charles Ragin, “Case-Oriented Comparative Methods,” *The Comparative Method* (Berkeley: University of California Press. 1987), pp. 34-52.

Charles Tilly, *Big Structures, Large Processes, Huge Comparisons* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1984), pp. 60-86.

Neil Brenner, “World City Theory, Globalization and the Comparative Historical Method,” *Urban Affairs Review* 37,1 (2001), pp. 124-147.

*Week Seven: Comparative Approaches: Doing Comparisons*

Themes

Rules for comparing entities/objects

Readings

L. Owen Kirkpatrick, "The Two "Logics" of Community Development: Neighborhoods, Markets, and Community Development Corporations," *Politics and Society* 35, 2 (2007), pp. 329-359.

\* Edward Bruner, “The Masai and the Lion King: Authenticity, Nationalism, and Globalization in African Tourism,” *American Ethnologist* 28, 4 (2001), pp. 881-908.

**Group Assignment**

Read the two items below and sort out the grounds for comparison via contrast.

Kris Olds, *Globalization and Urban Change: Capital, Culture, and the Pacific Rim Mega-Projects* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

Tom Hutton, “A Commentary on Kris Olds’s Critique of the Urban Mega-Project Phenomenon: A Review Essay,” *BC Studies* 138/139 (2003), pp. 173-180.

**Fieldwork Matters**

*Week Eight: (innovative and rigorous) ethnographic, participatory, and collaborative research methods*

Themes

Ethnographic Approaches (Participant Observation); Traveling Ethnography; Observation and Measurement: Field Notes, Classifying, Coding

How much participation is too much [Alice Goffman, *On the Run*; Sudhir Venkatesh, *Gang Leader for a Day*]

Readings

Michael Burawoy, “The Extended Case Method,” *Sociological Theory* 16,(1998), pp. 4–33.

Gary Alan Fine, “Ten Lies of Ethnography: Moral Dilemmas of Field Research,” *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 22, 3 (1993), pp. 267-294**.**

Staci Newmahr and Stacey Hannem, “Surrogate Ethnography: Fieldwork, the Academy, and Resisting the IRB,” *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 47, 1 (2018), pp. 3-27.

Recommended

Michael Burawoy, *Global Ethnography Forces: Connections and Imaginations in a Postmodern World (*Berkeley: University of California Press) (With nine coauthors)

Michael Burawoy, *Ethnography Unbound: Power and Resistance in the Modern Metropolis* (Berkeley: University of California Press

Group Assignment [For Discussion in the Following Class Session]

Select an article from JPER, JAPA, or any journal with “Planning” in the title which conducts research through an ethnographic approach

Week Nine: Social Construction of Ethnographic Knowledge

Themes

Ethnography as Theory-Building: Participant Observation

Ethnography as Theory-testing

Moving along the Participant-Observation Spectrum

Social Construction of the Ethnographic Subject [For example, Howard Becker, *Becoming a Marijuana User*]

Readings

Martyn Hammersley, “Standards for Assessing Ethnographic Research,” Chapter Three in *Reading Ethnographic Research: A Critical Guide* [2nd Edition] (London: Longman, 1998), pp. 58-77.

Roger Sanjek, “On Ethnographic Validity,” in Roger Sanjek (ed.), *Fieldnotes: The Making of Anthropology* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), pp. 385-418.

\*\* Robert Emerson, Rachel Fretz, and Linda Shaw, “Writing an Ethnography,” in *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes* [2nd Edition] (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), pp. 201-242.

Margarethe Kusenbach, “Street Phenomenology: The Go-Along as Ethnographic Research Tool,” *Ethnography* 4, 3 (2003), pp. 455–485.

\*\*\* Lee Ann Fujii, “Five Stories of Accidental Ethnography: Turning Unplanned Moments in the Field into Data,” *Qualitative* Research 15, 4 (2015), pp. 525-539.

Recommended

Mitchell Duneier, “What Kind of Combat Sport Is Sociology?” *American Journal*

*of Sociology* 107(2002), pp. 1551–1576.

Mitchell Duneier, “Ethnography, the Ecological Fallacy, and the 1995 Chicago Heat Wave,” *American Sociological Review* 71, 4 (2006), pp. 679-688.

Eric Klinenberg, “Blaming the Victims: Hearsay, Labeling, and the Hazards of a Quick-Hit Disaster Ethnography,” *American Sociological Review* 71, 4 (2006), pp. 689-698.

*Week Ten: Interviewing*

Themes

Formal (structured) versus Informal (unstructured) Interviews

Sampling: Random, Snowball, etc.

Who is a “key informant”? How do we know this?

Expert knowledge versus local knowledge

Objectivity versus subjectivity

How to Grasp: differences in interview types, how to set up interview, when to share questions prior and when not, whether to record them or not, how to document them, cite them, how to take notes, when these interview notes should transcribed and when not, how to write about and cite interviews

Readings

Colin Jerolmack and Shamus Kahn, “Talk is Cheap: Ethnography & the Attitudinal Fallacy,” *Sociological Methods & Research* 43, 2 (2004), pp. 178-209.

Guro Korsnes Kristensen and Malin Noem Ravn, “The Voices Heard and the Voices Silenced: Recruitment Processes in Qualitative Interview Studies,” *Qualitative Research* 15,6 (2015), pp. 722–737.

Beth Leech, “Asking Questions: Techniques for Semistructured Interviews,” *Political Science & Politics* 35,4 (2002), pp. 665-668.

Recommended

Robert Weiss, *Learning from Strangers: The Art and Method of Qualitative Interview* *Studies* (New York: Free Press, 1995).

Group Assignment [For Discussion in the Following Tutorial Session]

Select an article from JPER, JAPA, or any journal with “Planning” in the title which conducts research through the use of interviews

*Week Eleven: Survey Research and Questionnaire Design (Questionnaires, Focus Groups)*

Themes

The nature of small-scale survey research

Readings

Royce Singleton and Bruce Straits, chapters 6, 9, and 10 in *Approaches to Social Research* [Fifth Edition] (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

Nora Cate Schaeffer and Stanley Presser, “The Science of Asking Questions,” *Annual Review of Sociology* 29 (2003), pp. 65-88.

Group Assignment [For Discussion in the Following Class Session]

Select an article from JPER, JAPA, or any journal with “Planning” in the title which conducts research through the use of surveys, questionnaires, and/or focus groups

Recommended

Floyd Fowler, “Design and Evaluation of Survey Questions,” in Leonard Bickman and Debra Rog (eds.), *Handbook of Applied Social Science Research Methods* (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 1998), pp. 343-374.

**Research Design**

*Week Twelve: Finding the “Question” in the “Answer” (or Problem-Puzzle)*

What do I want to know, and how will I know that I “know” it

Themes

Procedures [Combining Methods with Research]

“Mixed methods” As Research Strategy

*Typologies of Research Design*

Descriptive (e.g., case-study, naturalistic observation, survey)

Correlational (e.g., case-control study, observational study)

Semi-experimental (e.g., field experiment, quasi-experiment)

Experimental (experiment with random assignment)

The aim of this section is to provide an examination of particular studies that actually carry out research using particular research designs. Issues here include (1) theory construction and research design (broadly conceived); (2) an investigation of different approaches to social research ("testing" theories in relation to a case [illustrative]; theoretical interpretation of events and processes on the ground history [discovery of general laws and operationalizing them]; reconsideration or reinterpretation of classic “cases” [syntheses of literatures]; contrast and analysis in two-case comparisons; analyzing causal configurations for three cases; comparatively-informed case analyses [individualizing comparisons]; analyzing parts as elements of single whole; (3) a critical examination of key examples illustrating how to do social research relevant for urban planning and policy analysis

Readings

Charles Ragin (with Mary Driscoll), “The Promise of Social Research,” in *Constructing Social Research,* pp. 155-166.

Martin Murray, “Research Design-Exercise 3”

Recommended

Lawrence Locke, Waneen Wyrick Spirduso, and Stephen Silverman, *Proposals that*

*Work: A Guide for Planning Dissertations and Grant Proposals*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications, 2007).

John Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2009) [Chapter One: “A Framework for Design,” pp. 1-26).

*Week Thirteen:* Problems with Data Collection and Interpretation

Themes

The Use (and Abuse) of Documentary Evidence

The aim of this section is to examine the actual conduct of historically-oriented research. Issues include (1) identifying and differentiating data sources; (2) gathering and storing empirical data; (3) interpreting and deploying data within an argument; (4) using qualitative and quantitative data to bring evidence to bear to support an argument.

Linking conceptual frameworks and sources of information;

Transforming raw materials (i.e., information and “data”) into historical evidence

Textual analysis of documents (newspapers, official reports, site plans, graphic representations, etc.)

Use and Interpretation of Visual Evidence

Readings

\*\* Howard Becker, “Visual Evidence,” *Visual Studies* 17,1 (2002), pp. 3-11.

Jennifer Platt, "Evidence and Proof in Documentary Research 1: Some Specific Problems of Documentary Research," and “Evidence and Proof in Documentary Research 2: Some Shared Problems of Documentary Research,” *The Sociological Review* 29, 1 (1981), pp. 31-66.

Group Assignment [For Discussion in the Following Class Session]

Select an article from JPER, JAPA, or any journal with “Planning” in the title which conducts research through the use of a visual/photographic approach to data collection

*Week Fourteen: Summary and Conclusions*