This course will meet Tuesdays and Thursdays, 5:30pm-8:00pm, in SIS 205, except when we don’t meet on campus at all (see the daily schedule for details).

Course Objective and Description

That is to say, my dear philosophers: let us be on guard from now on against the dangerous old conceptual fairy-tale that posited a “pure, will-less, pain-less, timeless knowing subject.” Let us be on guard against the snare of such contradictory concepts as “pure reason,” “absolute spirituality,” “knowledge in itself”—these always demand that we think of an eye that cannot be thought, an eye that must not have a direction, an eye in which the active and interpretive powers, through which alone seeing becomes seeing-something, are supposed to be prevented and lacking. Here therefore is absurdity and nonsense demanded of the eye. There is only a perspective seeing, only a perspective “knowledge”; and the more affects that we allow to speak about a thing, the more eyes, different eyes, we know ourselves to deploy for the same thing, the more complete will our “concept” of this thing—and our “objectivity”—be.

—Friedrich Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morals 3:12

This course rests on three propositions about the practice and content of scholarly research:

1. the purpose of good research is to produce knowledge, which is composed of facts, out of mere data.

2. not all good research is, or should be, conducted through the application of large-n quantitative techniques.

3. there are systematic procedures for conducting other kinds of research; these procedures rest on diverse ontological and epistemological assumptions, but are equally rigorous in their own ways.
Accordingly, this course will provide you with an introduction to three significant styles of research in the social sciences that are neither identical with nor deficient forms of large-n quantitative research: small-n comparative case study; interpretive ethnography; and relational analysis, encompassing both network and discourse aspects. I have selected these three because it has been my experience that students of social life at all levels who are trying to do “qualitative” research (a category of which I am deeply skeptical, for reasons that I will detail in the first lecture of the course) are usually trying to use one of these three styles without really being explicit about it. The goal of this course is to make the tacit assumptions often at work in such research as explicit as possible, so that they can serve as a template or guide for more systematic and rigorous application to a variety of research questions.

As will quickly become apparent, I am also firmly committed to the proposition that a style of research is complicit in the production of the particular world of facts and knowledge that it reveals. This means that I am highly skeptical of attempts to combine research styles without proceeding very cautiously, and also that I am not convinced that different research styles can “triangulate” on a single thing in any determinate fashion. The styles of research that we will be examining in this course are, in my opinion, incommensurate with one another at some level; the solution to this problem is to pick a style of research and stick to its parameters and precepts as consistently as possible. This proposition is as debatable as any of the others that I have laid out here, and I suspect that we will have occasion to debate it as the semester goes on. But you should know my position on this philosophical (and, ultimately, moral) question before we begin our work together.

Assignments and Grading
This will be a hybrid course, consisting of lectures, workshops, individual consulting sessions, and class discussions. Each three-session “module” focusing on a particular style of research will begin with one session largely devoted to “lecture reaction,” in which we will meet having listened to a lecture that I have posted at my syndication site www.kittenboo.com, and work through that material—including the book that I have played off of in the posted lecture—through in-class exercises and discussions. The second session will focus on the discussion of one or more exemplary works in the style under consideration. The third session of each module will focus on individual students’ project proposals.

Over the course of the semester each enrolled student will produce three partial research proposals, one in each of the three styles that we will be examining; each proposal will be a maximum of 1000 words long and will contain two of the four basic parts of a good research proposal: a research question (phrased in the form of a question); and a methodological plan for how you plan to provide an answer to your research question. [An actual research proposal would also have to contain a literature summary that situates your question in the context of previous attempts to address the same or a
similar issue and a critique of those previous attempts. These two are often combined into a single “literature review” section; I separate them here to call attention to the two discrete functions that have to be fulfilled by any discussion of the extant literature in a research proposal. But in any event, you won’t be writing any literature summaries or critiques for this course.] I have structured the course sessions so that there will be ample time for in-class discussions of individual research proposals, both as a single large group and in smaller groups.

Written assignments must be submitted to me electronically. In order to do this, please save your essay in either MS Word or rtf format, and e-mail them to me at the address above. Please name your document as follows: yourlastname_essay_.#_.doc or yourlastname_essay_.#.rtf, where # should be replaced by the assignment number and yourlastname is, of course, your last name. I will send an acknowledgment by e-mail when I receive your essay, and will return the essay with comments embedded in the text when I have graded it. If you cannot see the comments, or if the file fails to open properly, please e-mail me immediately so that we can resolve the problem.

Semester grades will be calculated as follows:

- Three partial research proposals........................................60%
- Class participation ..........................................................40%

Obviously, you can’t participate if you aren’t in class, although the BlackBoard discussion forums (one will be set up for each style) and office visits can serve as close substitutes if you absolutely have to miss a scheduled class session. I do not feel that it is appropriate to take attendance for a graduate-level course, but I will notice if you are persistently absent, and your performance on the written assignments will also likely suffer.

Special Summer Session Procedures
Because I suspect that many of you will be working during the day, and hence unable to come to office-hours during normal business hours, I will be starting class each evening that we meet on campus at 6:00pm, rather than 5:30pm. I will be present in the classroom at 5:30, and available for meetings to discuss course material or assignments. This half-hour is unscheduled, so just drop in. Otherwise, if you would like to schedule a meeting-time with me, consult my calendar (ical.mac.com/onyxdr/Patrick) and then e-mail me a possible time to meet. I am never on campus on Mondays.

Readings
The following books have all been ordered at the American University bookstore; all are required.

**Daily Schedule**

12 May

Introduction, or, why there is no such thing as a “qualitative” research methodology

Recommended Readings:

14 May

NO CLASS—you have a lot of reading to do; best get to it.

**Part the First: Comparative Case Studies**

19 May

Comparative Case Studies I

Lecture #2, http://kittenboo.com/blog/2008/05/19/sis-680-lecture-two/

Readings: *Ragin, all.*

Recommended:


APSR forum on King, Keohane, and Verba’s Designing Social Inquiry, June 1995.

Mahoney, James, and Dietrich Rueschemeyer, eds. 2003. Comparative Historical Analysis in the Social Sciences (Cambridge UP).


21 May

Comparative Case Studies II

Readings: *Marx, all.
Recommended:

26 May

Comparative Case Studies III

Readings: none required, as this is a workshop/discussion day.

28 May

NO CLASS—catch your breath and work on your proposal.

29 May

Assignment 1 Due, 5:00pm

Part the Second: Interpretive Ethnography

2 June

Interpretive I

Readings: *Emerson et. al., all.
Lecture #3: http://kittenboo.com/blog/2008/06/02/sis-680-lecture-three/SIS-680-A01 • P. T. Jackson • Summer 2009 • Page 5
Recommended:
“Symposium: Interpretivism,” *Qualitative Methods* 1:2 (Fall 2003).

4 June
Interpretive II
Readings: *Orr, all.
Recommended:

9 June
Interpretation Workshop—meet downtown (details TBA)

11 June
Interpretive III
Readings: none required, as this is a discussion/workshop day.

12 June
Assignment 2 Due, 5:00pm

Part the Third: Relational Research

16 June
Relational I
Readings: *Tilly, all.
Recommended:

18 June
Relational II
Readings: *Hansen, all.
Recommended:

23 June
Relational III
Readings: none required, as this is a discussion/workshop day.

25 June
Grand Finale

26 June
Assignment 3 Due, 5:00pm