In-depth interviewing

Elective course
Winter semester, 2015-16 academic year
2 credits – 4 ECTS

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Office hours: Mondays 11.00-12.30
Tuesdays 11.00-12.30
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Class: Mondays, 13.30-15.10
Classroom: FT809

Course webpage: http://ceulearning.ceu.edu/course/view.php?id=4858

Course description and structure

This course introduces students of political science to one method in interpretive qualitative research, namely in-depth interviewing. The course is structured such that it closely reflects the steps taken by researchers in developing and completing an empirical research project drawing on in-depth interviews. Thus, the course starts with the links between research questions and research design, the steps taken to successfully prepare and complete fieldwork, the preparation and completion of data analysis and concluding with discussions about the quality of qualitative research. Several of the issues covered are coupled with practical assignments geared towards developing hands-on experience with carrying out and analysing in-depth interviews with actual individuals. At the same time, the course incorporates a number of research articles which exemplify the use of in-depth interviews in the study of politics from a number of different epistemological traditions, honing in on the use of elite interviews especially.

Due to its step-by-step structure expanding on the practicalities of carrying out a qualitative research project drawing on in-depth interviews, its strong focus on conceptual frameworks in viewing, collecting, analysing and writing up interview data and, not least, its hands-on practical assignments, this course provides students with solid grounding for being able to actually carry out research projects drawing primarily on in-depth interview data and its rigorous analysis. In short, this is a practical methods course for political science scholars in the making interested in empirical research.

Learning outcomes

The learning objectives of this course are the following:
- To have a good grasp of research puzzles and research questions that are best tackled through an empirical research design that builds on in-depth interviews;
- To have a clear understanding of the different ways in which textual data generated through in-depth interviewing can be conceived of and, thus, analysed and interpreted;
- To have a clear understanding of how to prepare, manage and successfully complete in-depth interview data collection in the real world;
- To understand the ethical implications of carrying out research through eliciting narratives from private (or, indeed, public) individuals and to act in accordance with ethical guidelines in all stages of research projects drawing on in-depth interview data;
- To understand the sources of quality in interpretive qualitative data analysis and be able to produce quality qualitative research outputs using in-depth interview data;
- To be able to carry out computer-assisted qualitative data analysis using in-depth interview data.

The skills this course aims to cultivate and further develop are, among others:

- **empirical social science research skills**, especially preparing and carrying out fieldwork; managing and rigorously analysing in-depth interview data using appropriate software; and writing up research findings in a compelling and scholarly fashion.
- **transferable skills**: meaningful oral participation in group settings, reflecting deep engagement with the subject matter; concise and precise oral formulation of opinions, arguments and puzzles; critical listening; presenting and critically discussing scholarly work by others; developing effective PowerPoint presentations; making conference-type presentations;
- **study skills**: structured note taking, summarising (orally and in written form); critical reading and reading comprehension, meta-comprehension; constructive feedback and team work; defining one’s own learning needs, planning progress and incorporating constructive feedback received; manage a semester-long project in a successful way;
- **critical thinking skills**: reflexivity; deductive reasoning; hypothesising; structured argumentation; making inferences and articulating assumptions; the application of newly acquired knowledge to new situations and meta-cognition.

### Class structure

Meetings consist of an introductory discussion, in several sessions focusing on out-of-class assignments and students’ reactions and thoughts about these assignments. The main part of the class – approx. 60 minutes – focuses on key issues of the session, drawing on the key reading(s). Using the I.N.S.E.R.T technique (see below), students are asked to contribute issues for discussion. Classes end with in-class activities geared towards buttressing the development of meta-cognition and reflexivity, i.e. students’ ability to reflect on and understand their own learning process.

*Because it is a course aimed at innovating research methods teaching at the Department, the course was awarded a teaching development grant. As part of the teaching development project students’ class participation and end-of-class reflexive activities will be recorded and collected, respectively, for later analysis, respecting standard ethical procedure and protocols applicable in research with human subjects (informed consent, confidentiality in the treatment of data and the anonymization of data especially).*

2
Structured discussions follow the results of reading key readings using the I.N.S.E.R.T. technique (Estes and Vaughn, 1986). As such, discussions will focus on what students already knew when reading the text; what they knew differently; what they did not know; and the issues they want to find out more about.

Students are expected to use the below annotations while reading the key reading(s) in order to aid (1) the easier structuring of different types of information in the learning processes as well as (2) the easier identification of + new information and of ? issues students want to know more about in preparation for class discussion.

✔ indicates a passage that confirms what students thought was true;
– indicates a passage that disconfirms something students thought was true;
+ indicates a passage that contains important information students had not anticipated;
? marks a passage containing something students want to know more about.


Class requirements

Students are expected to attend meetings regularly, to participate in class discussions and submit independent and group work according to assignment descriptions.

Students’ final grade will consist of the following assignments:

1. class participation in structured discussions and in-class group activities during minimum 75% (i.e. 18) of sessions – 30% of the final grade
2. topic guide development (in groups of three) – 10% of the final grade
3. topic guide piloting – 10% of the final grade
4. in-depth interviewing – 10% of the final grade
5. code development & writing up parts of the codebook (in pairs) – 10% of the final grade
6. coding – 15% of the final grade
7. primary data analysis (categorization) – 15% of the final grade

In-class activities geared towards buttressing the development of reflexivity will not be graded.

Grading and assessment

This course encourages the use of so-called rubrics or descriptions of standards of performance. They are meant to help students reflect on their performance and identify aspects of their academic performance where they can improve. Specific rubrics are also used to grade all assignments. Rubrics are available online on the course website: http://ceulearning.ceu.edu/course/view.php?id=4858.

Note on Citing and Referencing

You will be expected to use Harvard style referencing. Please find an extensive citation and referencing guide on this course’s e-learning page: http://ceulearning.ceu.edu/course/view.php?id=4858.
At the same time, you are strongly encouraged to use a citation manager software for all your written assignments, in which case you can use Chicago style referencing.

**Key volumes for the course**


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**Penalties:** in case of late submissions of independent work and plagiarism. Departmental rules on plagiarism apply.

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I. WHAT ARE IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS FOR?

1. In-depth interviewing in political research and its alternatives

This session introduces what in-depth interviews as a particular qualitative primary data collection method are, the types of research questions that warrant the making of in-depth interviews and methodological alternatives to this method.

   Recommended reading:


   Additional readings:


2. What in-depth interviews are for: themes and narratives

Brainstorming research questions for the course activities.

Continuing the introductory discussion from the first session, the focus of this discussion is the different ways to think about the ‘data’ generated through in-depth interviewing: as detailed accounts of certain issues (or themes), lending themselves to a thematic analysis, or as narratives about certain issues, lending themselves to discourse analysis or narrative analysis.

   Key readings:


   Additional readings:


II. PREPARING DATA COLLECTION

3. Making and testing the topic guide

Agree on research question.

This section moves on to discuss the first step in in-depth interviewing, namely the preparation of the topic guide. This section expands on the goals and structure of a topic guide as well as on the types of questions to be included in the data collection instrument, e.g. probing and prompting questions and cues. The discussion concludes with the role of piloting prior to data collection.

Key readings:


Additional reading:

TAKE-HOME ACTIVITY 1: TOPIC GUIDE DEVELOPMENT IN GROUPS

4. Projective techniques

Discussion of sample topic guides.

The focus of this section is to explore alternative ways of engaging interview participants in discussion, namely projective techniques used for carrying out research on sensitive topics.

Key readings:


TAKE-HOME ACTIVITY 2: FINALISATION OF TOPIC GUIDE
5. Sampling and Recruitment

Building on previous discussions about research design and research questions, this section continues with another set of practical considerations to do with in-depth interview data collection, namely considerations regarding sampling and recruitment. The discussion expands on different approaches to sampling, notably purposive sampling and snowballing, deciding on sample size, choice between an opt-in versus an opt-out recruitment strategy and the negotiation of access.

Key readings:


Additional readings:


TAKE-HOME ACTIVITY 3: RECRUITMENT OF THREE POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS

III. GATHERING IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW DATA

6. The interviewing process: ethics and being in the field

This discussion focuses on the ethical considerations that govern the preparation and making of quality in-depth interviews alongside more practical considerations regarding the interactional aspects of interviewing: rapport, power and positionality and reflection.

Key readings:

Research ethics

On fieldwork
Additional reading:

TAKE-HOME ACTIVITY 4: PILOTING THE TOPIC GUIDE

7. Interviewing the powerful: Elite interviews
Discussion of piloting experience: rapport; overlaps & gaps in topic guide; depth of responses; ‘unruly’ participants; duration.

The final substantive discussion in this course is aimed at a particular type of interview briefly discussed at the beginning of the course, notably elite interviews, a common qualitative method in political science.

Key readings:

Additional readings:

TAKE-HOME ACTIVITY 5: DOING THE INTERVIEW(S)

IV. MANAGING AND ANALYSING YOUR DATA

8. Handling interview data
Discussion of interview experience(s).

This section together with the following discuss issues to do with preparing the audio material from fieldwork analysis, i.e. transcription and anonymisation, and the choices one makes about the subsequent analysis process, notably the use of software for analysis.

Key readings:
Transcription and anonymisation


**Computer assisted data analysis (CAQDAS)**


**Additional readings:**


**9. Code development and coding: deductive and inductive approaches**

Meeting in lab.

Continuing the discussion on data preparation for analysis, this discussion focuses on the first step in textual qualitative data analysis, namely code development and coding. It provides an incursion into deductive / positivist approaches to code development and coding as well as an insight into ‘open coding’ in inductive analysis. As previously, reflection and the annotation of the coding process are emphasised.

**Key readings:**


**ACTIVITY 6: CODE DEVELOPMENT & CODING THE RECEIVED INTERVIEWS; CODEBOOK CONTRIBUTIONS**

**10. Analysing and writing up facts and narratives in interview data**

This section engages with the different interpretive traditions of systematically analysing textual qualitative data, especially positivist and constructivist alternatives. The discussion also expands on the analytic process, i.e. on the iterative process of moving from the detailed and contextual to the conceptual and abstract in order to generate a theoretically driven analysis of findings or inductively generate concepts and theory (e.g. as in grounded theory).
V. WHAT ARE QUALITY QUALITATIVE RESEARCH OUTPUTS?

11. Rigour and quality in qualitative data analysis

This discussion expands on how to ascertain that the qualitative research enterprise and its outcomes are scientific, i.e. systematic, valid, reliable and potentially replicable.

Key readings:


Additional readings:


TAKE-HOME ACTIVITY 7: NOTES ON THE THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEW DATA / CATEGORIZATION

12. Final discussion