POSC 232: Interview Methods
Carleton College, Spring 2024

Professor Devashree Gupta
Office: Hasenstab 210
Email: dgupta@carleton.edu
Phone: x4681

Winter Term Office Hours are by appointment only, scheduled via this QR code or the link on Moodle. There is also a QR code on my office door that links to office hours.

“Research is formalized curiosity. It is poking and prying with a purpose.” – Zora Neale Hurston

“The best research you can do is talk to people.” – Terry Pratchett

Introduction
This class provides a hands-on introduction to how researchers devise, conduct, and analyze interviews in political science. Students will learn about different types of interview methodologies, including structured, semi-structured, and open-ended approaches that can be applied to both elite and non-elite subjects. Over the course of the class, students will consider the types of questions most appropriately answered by interviews, the fundamentals of different sampling strategies, how to devise questionnaires, and how to use the information collected for both quantitative and qualitative analysis. We will also cover interview ethics, how to employ culturally sensitive techniques, and how to approach interviews in individual, group, and crowd situations.

By the end of the course, you will be able to:

- Describe the strengths and limitations of interviews as a research methodology, including understanding the types of data that can be collected and the types of research questions that can be answered using interview techniques;
- Devise, test, and implement an interview protocol, including a questionnaire and sampling strategy;
- Understand the requirements of informed consent and how to work ethically with human subjects in varied research contexts;
- Convert raw interview data into meaningful analysis using qualitative data analysis techniques;
- Gain hands-on practice writing about qualitative data in political science research projects.

Course materials
Hooray, there are no books required for you to purchase! All materials (articles, videos, etc.) are available on Moodle. You will be required to install free software (MaxQDA) on your computer to carry out interview analysis. More details, including the student license information, is available on Moodle.
Course work
Your grade in the course will be based on the following four elements, which will be weighted as follows:

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Weight</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reading quizzes</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Practicum activities</td>
<td>50%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final project</td>
<td>20%</td>
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**Participation (15%)**
The participation grade is based on two components: (1) your *active contribution* to our shared learning as a class, and (2) your *good citizenship* in the classroom. Active contribution requires you to engage thoughtfully with the material, to attend respectfully to the ideas offered up by your peers, and to find ways to add to the substance of our conversations together – for example, by asking and answering questions, by providing examples and counter-examples, by building on ideas or offering a contrary point of view. You will have the chance to experiment with discussions in several forms, including small groups and the class as a whole. To get an A, you must contribute thoughtfully and consistently throughout the term. Good citizenship involves the role you play in establishing an open environment where we can learn together, trying out ideas without fear and pushing ourselves intellectually in a spirit of generosity. Please be prompt, be respectful, pay attention, be kind, and overall, *just be a good egg*.

**Reading quizzes (15%)**
I will administer four unannounced reading quizzes this term, each with a few short (mostly multiple-choice) questions designed to check that you are prepared for class and have engaged with the assigned reading. Because our classes are spread out one week at a time, the quizzes are a way for me to check that you are on top of the readings, which can otherwise be tempting to push aside or do at the last minute since you will have fewer class meetings to hold you accountable. Quizzes will be given at the beginning of class. I will drop the lowest grade out of the four. Quizzes cannot be made up; if you miss a class, you will forfeit that quiz and the remaining three reading quizzes will automatically count towards your grade.

**Practicum activities (50%)**
As a research methods class, much of the work this term will require hands-on practice. The only way to begin to understand how to conduct and analyze interviews is to...conduct and analyze interviews. Accordingly, the practicum activities – a series of homework assignments due throughout the term – will give you a chance to try out and build skills in doing different steps involved in qualitative interview methodology, including devising an appropriate research question, devising an interview protocol, transcribing interviews, and coding the data. *All of these practicum activities are required;* collectively, they provide the scaffolding for your final project so that by completing them in sequence, you will have done most of the work for your final project by the end of the term.

Practicum activities will be described further in class and with more detailed written instructions available on Moodle (under the “Practicum instructions” folder). Please consult those instructions for deadlines, as these will vary by activity. Activities are worth varying points depending on the complexity of the task and are indicated in the schedule below. All practicum activities collectively are worth 200 points.
**Final project (20%)**
The final project for this class builds on your practicum activities and makes use of the interviews you have conducted over the five weeks of this course in order to write up your results in a paper that will include (1) a section that lays out your research question and basic background that a brief literature review that contextualizes why this topic is interesting/important, (2) a short section that describes your methodology/interview protocol, (3) and a section that lays out your key findings – much as you would write up these results if you were working on a full research paper, and (4) an appendix with your full questionnaire and summary statistics about your interview respondents. The paper will be 8-10 double-spaced pages, not including your appendix/bibliography. The final write-up is due by **9:30pm on Monday, June 3rd**. Any extension past this point requires the involvement/approval of your class dean.

**Course Policies**
Please see Moodle for a detailed description of all relevant course policies, including attendance, grading, deadlines, accommodations, and extensions. It is your responsibility to read and familiarize yourself with these policies. We will spend some time setting class expectations around these topics on the first day of class, particularly attendance, devices in class, academic integrity and the use of artificial intelligence in your work.

**Schedule of Readings**
The readings from this course come from a variety of sources, some of which are intended for a general student audience and some for a more specialized, knowledgeable, and scholarly audience of social scientists. Depending on your background and prior experience with these disciplines, you may find some of these readings to be fairly straightforward. Others may be tougher going and will require more time and effort on your part. Regardless, it is your responsibility to read each piece with care. The numbers in the parentheses (under “Topics”) gives you an estimated page count for the readings, not including notes/appendices/bibliographies.

Please engage in active, not passive reading and viewing: summarize main points for yourself as you go along, flag points that are unclear, write down questions that come to mind, note points where you agree and disagree with the author, assess whether the author has provided sufficient credible evidence to substantiate the argument, note down aspects that strike you as interesting/important, etc. **All readings are due for the day listed unless otherwise noted.**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Readings and Assignments</th>
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| March 26   | Introduction and class overview: interviews as a research tool (22) | *To Do:*  
• Read through this syllabus and the Moodle page. Familiarize yourself with the course policies and general expectations. Bring any questions about the class, policies, assignments, and/or expectations with you to the first day of class.  

*To Read:*  

As you read through these two articles, think about the following questions:  

1. What *types of information* can interviews generate? How do interviews compare with other kinds of research methods that you might be familiar with (statistical analysis, case studies, surveys, etc.) in terms of the *data that can be generated*?  
2. How might the type of data collected differ if we talk to *experts vs. non-experts* (e.g., the von Soest vs. the Knott, et. al readings)?  
3. Given the types of information that can be collected via interviews, what *kinds of research questions* are most suitable for answering via interviews?  

*Practicum Activity #1 (due 5pm, April 1 on Moodle):* Brainstorm three possible research questions that you could investigate over the course of the term using interview data that you can collect given the constraints of time and location. For each topic/question, cite 3-4 scholarly sources that you would want to read in order to get better acquainted with the topic and main debates/understandings surrounding it (Note: you don’t have to read these items just yet, just find them/skim their abstracts to determine if they would be related to your proposed topics). 25 points
April 2
Developing an interview protocol (51)


**Practicum Activity #2 (due 5pm, April 8 on Moodle):** Decide on your core research question for the term and develop an initial interview protocol that includes proposed questions and maps those questions onto a matrix as described in the Castillo-Montoya reading. Be sure your protocol includes examples of the three different types of questions described in the Leech reading (grand tour, example, prompt). In addition, include a bibliography of 5-6 scholarly sources (you may include the ones you listed before) that you have read prior to preparing your interview protocol, along with 2-3 sentences per source of how it informed the development of your questions. 30 points

April 9
Sampling strategies, access, and recruitment (70)


**To Do (on or after April 8th):** Install MaxQDA on your computer (information/license number are on Moodle). Start watching some of the linked introductory videos over the next few weeks.

**Practicum Activity #3 (due 5pm, April 15 on Moodle):** Write up your proposed sampling strategy, including information about your desired target population, why this population makes sense given your research question, your proposed recruitment strategy, any challenges you anticipate in recruiting/gaining access to this population, and how you might proactively address these challenges. Your write-up should not exceed two double-spaced pages, and should include references to the readings from this week as appropriate. 20 points
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<tr>
<th>April 16</th>
<th>Conducting interviews, I: ethics and approaches (74)</th>
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**Practicum Activity #4 (due 5pm, April 22 on Moodle):** complete the CITI training module on human subjects for undergraduate researchers, following the instructions on Carleton’s Institutional Review Board site (https://www.carleton.edu/governance/irb/citi-modules/). Take a screenshot of your completion page and upload it to Moodle. 25 points

**In addition:** create a one-page (single-spaced) informed consent document and bring three physical copies with you to class on April 23. 15 points

<table>
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<tr>
<th>April 23</th>
<th>Conducting interviews, II: difficult populations, ethical challenges, and pitfalls (61)</th>
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**Practicum Activity #5 (due 5pm, April 26 on Moodle):** Upload your revised informed consent document, sampling strategy, interview protocol, and introductory/concluding scripts to Moodle. Once you get the green light from me on your documents, you may begin scheduling/conducting interviews. 10 points

**There is a rolling deadline for completing your interviews,** but aim to complete at least 1-2 interviews per week over the next three weeks. You should aim to have at least six interviews finished, transcribed, and analyzed by the end of the term.

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<tr>
<th>April 30</th>
<th>Bias, power, and positionality, I (57)</th>
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**There is no new practicum activity this week; continue to schedule, conduct, and transcribe your interviews.**
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<tr>
<th>May 7</th>
<th>Bias, power, and positionality, II (50)</th>
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**Practicum Activity #6 (due 5pm, May 13 on Moodle):** Write a two-page (double-spaced) reflective essay on your own positionality vis-à-vis your research topic and interview respondents, thinking about your insider/outsider status, your positionality and power, and any strategies you have employed (or will start to use) that have been referenced in the readings for Week 7-8. 15 points

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<th>May 14</th>
<th>Analyzing interviews, I (56)</th>
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**To Do:**
- If you have not yet installed MaxQDA onto your computer, do it now.
- Watch some of the instructional videos listed on Moodle to start learning how to use the software and get started with the data analysis.

**Practicum Activity #7 (due 5pm, May 20 on Moodle):** Code one entire transcript using MaxQDA. Export the coded document, along with a brief description of your document codes. In addition, upload a short reflection (<1 single-spaced page) of your reflections on coding the interview transcript: what felt clear/simple/straightforward, where did you struggle/feel unsure, and what (if anything) you would do differently when coding the next set of transcripts? 35 points
May 21

Analyzing interviews, II (49)

- Watch “The Rashomon Effect,” available at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nNMms1ud_o&list=PLWidseDF-8X9J74T5LhuuNK7vQmtalc10&index=9.

No new practicum activity due this week. Continue finishing up your interviews and coding your transcribed interviews. Do not schedule any new interviews after this point.

May 28

Writing up interview results (56)

- Skim the University of Wisconsin’s guide to incorporating interview data in your writing, available at: https://writing.wisc.edu/handbook/assignments/interviewdata/

For the following three articles, you can skim the introduction/literature review/policy recommendations/conclusion (figure out the research question and why the author(s) think it is interesting, but pay closer attention to (1) how the author(s) write up the methodology section and (2) how they report/incorporate their interview data into the discussion in different ways.

Note: the page count given at left reflects only the methodology/empirical discussion sections of the articles).


Practicum Activity #8 (due IN CLASS on May 28): complete the thematic analysis worksheet (on Moodle) and bring three copies of it with you to class. 25 points