Analytic Approaches in International Studies (IS 830)
Course Syllabus
School for International Studies, Simon Fraser University
Fall 2017

Instructor: Christopher Gibson (clgibson@sfu.ca)
Class Meetings: Fridays, 1:30 PM – 5:20 PM in HC 1525 thru Oct. 20; HC 1350 thereafter
Office Hours: Fridays, 9:00 AM to 11:00am in HC 7333

Course Description

This is an introductory course in social scientific methods of research and analysis for graduate students in international studies. As an introductory course, the goal is not for you to become an expert in any of the analytic approaches to international studies research that we will examine. Rather, you will become a more knowledgeable and critical consumer of social science scholarship and will build a foundation of methodological skill and literacy necessary for pursuing your own research. The course introduces key analytic approaches to doing research – including both qualitative and quantitative methods – and examines how scholars in international studies apply them when formulating and defending scholarly and policy-relevant arguments. It particularly explores qualitative approaches such as ethnography, single case-study, comparative case-study, and comparative-historical analysis, as well as quantitative approaches such as descriptive statistical analysis, bivariate, and multivariate regression analysis.

In Part I of the course, our discussion-based meetings explore epistemological foundations of social science research, and review multiple qualitative approaches to conducting research in international studies. Initial sessions aim to develop a stronger understanding of the contributions and limitations that various epistemological orientations of particular analytic approaches impose upon researchers and scholars. We consider, for example, how ethnography, case studies, and statistics-based survey research – all widely-used but radically divergent methods in international studies – draw upon contrasting epistemologies that attune them to certain types of research questions, while limiting their ability to shed light on other types of questions. Our meetings then aim to deepen our understanding of assigned readings about a given qualitative approach by examining their application in exemplary pieces of research by international development, governance, and conflict scholars. We especially focus on how and why the type of qualitative approach adopted, the data-gathering/production tools used, and the analytic methods applied by various authors ultimately contributed to and/or undermined the arguments made by such studies. Our meetings during this part of the course typically involve a mixture of mini-lectures, class discussions, and interactive exercises to be conducted as a class or in small groups. During the lecture- and lab-based sessions in Part II, our meetings focus on learning how statistics such as means, variance, correlations, and linear regression slopes are calculated and mobilized to make knowledge claims. In this part of the course, we will also practice calculating statistics with SPSS software and interpreting them. Thus, classes in both parts of the course prepare students to critically assess the strengths and weaknesses of widely-ranging analytic approaches to international studies research.
Learning Goals/Outcomes

Students will finish the course with the following knowledge and skills:

- A basic understanding of the relationship between diverse methods of social scientific analysis and their epistemological foundations.
- A basic understanding of key concepts and research tools that scholars apply to answering questions of interest in the field of international studies.
- The ability to critically evaluate strengths and weaknesses of the methodologies used and arguments made by scholars and practitioners of international studies.

Required Readings

Although many readings will be posted to our Canvas website, we will read large portions of the following books:

- Linneman, Thomas J. 2011. *Social Statistics: The Basics and Beyond*. New York: Routledge. [NOTE: do not buy later or earlier versions of this text; we will use the 2011 version, which differs from other versions]

Assignments and Grading

Your grade for the course will be based on the following components:

1. Class Participation 10%
2. Discussion Papers (4) 16% (4% each x 4)
3. Responses to Discussion Papers (2) 4% (2% each x 2)
4. Mid-term Essay (1) 25%
5. Quantitative Homework Exercises (2) 20% (10% x 2)
6. Final Exam (1) 25%

1. Class Participation (10%):

Since our learning will be especially dependent upon collective discussion of course readings, it is essential that you participate fully in class discussions and complete all assigned readings prior to the seminar. As a graduate seminar, you are expected to contribute thoughtful comments and questions, especially since much of our learning will depend on our discussions. It is also essential that all students enter discussions with an open mind and actively respect one another’s viewpoints. Our seminar will be an open, collaborative one in which we rely upon one another’s active listening and thoughtful responses to our readings and one another’s understandings of them. Your class participation grade will be determined by your attendance and *active* participation in our meetings.
2. Discussion Papers (16% total, 4% x 4 papers):

During Weeks 2, 3, 4, and 5 (4 classes), you will write a short but analytic discussion papers of between 600 and 700 words each. You also have the option of writing a 5th paper for Class #6 that can take the place of your lowest discussion paper grade. These papers should not only synthesize and critically engage at least one of our readings for that week, but also pose at least two discussion questions that will help us delve into readings more deeply. These single-spaced, 12-point font, typed papers must be posted to the relevant week’s Discussion folder on our Canvas website no later than 8:30am on Thursdays (i.e. 29 hours before our class) of appropriate weeks. Please cut and paste the text of your paper into the discussion window. Write your name and the week for which you are writing on the top line.

Please observe the following guidelines. Discussion papers should be written primarily on the basis of required readings for that week and EXCLUSIVELY on the basis of reading listed on our course syllabus. Please be sure to provide properly cited references, where appropriate. In addition, each paper should contain four explicit sections: 1) an introduction, 2) a synthesis, 3) an assessment, and 4) two questions to help stimulate class discussion. Below is more detailed description of what each of these sections should contain:

1) First, your introduction should consist of a brief paragraph that raises a central question or paradox about the readings. It should also provide a very brief agenda or outline of what you will write about in the rest of your discussion paper.

2) Second, you should provide a brief synthesis of a reading or piece of a reading in which you identify the central questions, main points, concepts, and/or core arguments. Please do not confuse a synthesis with an exhaustive inventory of all the ideas, question, points, concepts, or core arguments made in a given reading. Unlike this sort of inventory, a synthesis focuses in depth on the most significant aspects of a reading, noting and defining the key concepts used by the author. When noting such concepts, please include a reference to a specific page number, or provide the author’s most synthetic rendering of the concept(s) by using a textual quotation (with a page number). Crafting a synthesis can be difficult because doing so assumes that you have understood the text deeply enough to identify and focus upon its most central parts. Including citations and/or quotations is essential, in part because it constitutes the “evidence,” which you will write about in the remainder of the paper.

3) Third, please provide a brief and original assessment of the contributions and limitations of the author’s central argument, ideas, or concepts. There are many ways to organize an assessment. For example, one may comment on whether or not and why an author’s evidence or analysis supports their arguments and/or conclusions. Rather than simply stating your opinion, provide tangible reasons for why you were convinced or not convinced by their arguments/conclusions and be sure to describe what parts of these argument/conclusions were especially compelling/insightful or less than persuasive and why. This is a good place to help launch a healthy debate in class by developing your own reason-based claim about how compelling (or not compelling) you found a reading to be.

4) Finally, please provide two discussion questions or puzzles about our readings, whose resolution would do the following: 1) help illuminate the finer points and complexities of a reading; 2) further clarify the author’s argument; and 3) foster a vibrant class discussion.
3. Response Papers (4% total, 2% x 2 responses):

For two of our classes from Week 2 to Week 5 (see the schedule, below), you must also write a 250- to 300-word response to your peers’ discussion papers. You also have the option of writing a 3rd response paper for Class #6 that can take the place of your lowest discussion paper grade. Each of these response papers should address the ideas of at least one other student’s discussion papers for that week. These single-spaced, 12-point font, typed papers must be posted to the relevant week’s discussion folder on our Canvas website no later than 8:30am on Fridays (i.e. 5 hours before our class). Please do not start a new discussion thread; instead click “Reply” within the relevant week’s discussion thread and then cut and paste your contribution in the appropriate window. The most constructive responses do not simply render an opinion but engage in a dialogue with the authors (your classroom peers) in a way that helps disentangle and promote a deeper understanding of our readings. Your responses should be based on your peers’ rendering of the text and must use citations and quotations as needed. In order to facilitate an even distribution of papers on any given week, I will divide the class into Group X and Group Y. Each student in Group X will post a response paper for our Sept. 15 and Oct. 29 meetings. Each student in Group Y will post a response paper for our Sept. 22 and Oct. 6 meetings.

4. Midterm Essay (25%):

In this academic essay, you will develop and support a clear and original argument that critically engages our course materials in an extended format. More specifically, students will write an in-depth analysis of two or more of the methodological approaches to qualitative research that were covered in Part I of the course. The essay will be between 3,750 and 4,000 words long and will assess the strengths and weaknesses of two or more qualitative approaches to doing research by evaluating how effectively or ineffectively they were pursued in specific pieces of scholarship listed on our syllabus. More precise instructions and an assignment description will be circulated in advance of the due date, which is tentatively scheduled for October 19th (please note that this date is two days before class meets that week). The essay should be submitted in two ways: 1) submit an electronic copy through Canvas; AND 2) submit an identical hard copy to me at the beginning of class on October 20th.

5. Two Statistical Homework Exercises (20% total; 10% x 2):

Students will be assigned two take-home problem sets (10% each) that involve calculating and interpreting quantitative data and statistics. The problem sets may also require students to use SPSS to analyze data. Through these exercises, students will practice the calculation of basic statistics that are fundamental in some international studies research and then assess the contributions and limitations of such statistics to substantive understandings regarding questions of interest to scholars and policy-relevant research. More precise instructions will be provided during the second part of the course. The first exercise will be due in hard copy at the beginning of class on November 3rd and the second will be due in hard copy at the beginning of class on November 24th.

6. Final Exam (25%):

The final exam will be closed-book, closed notes, in-class exam on December 1st that tests your understanding of quantitative methods and analysis. Therefore, the exam is not cumulative.
Class Policies

**Academic Integrity:**
All students are expected to read and understand the university’s policies with regard to academic dishonesty: [http://www.sfu.ca/policies/gazette/teaching.html](http://www.sfu.ca/policies/gazette/teaching.html). Forms of academic dishonesty include but are not limited to the following:

- Submitting all or a portion of the same work for credit in more than one course.
- Representing another person’s work as your own for course assignments.
- Failure to acknowledge sources of facts, information, analyses, interpretations, and arguments that you incorporate in your work, whether from a source that is written, spoken communication, or the internet and whether it is published and unpublished. Appropriate documentation of your sources is necessary when you quote, paraphrase or incorporate information and ideas generated by others.

All students in SIS classes are expected to read the SFU Library lesson on “What is Plagiarism?” ([http://www.lib.sfu.ca/help/writing/plagiarism](http://www.lib.sfu.ca/help/writing/plagiarism)) and take the interactive tutorial, “Understanding and Avoiding Plagiarism” ([http://www.lib.sfu.ca/help/tutorials/plagiarism-tutorial](http://www.lib.sfu.ca/help/tutorials/plagiarism-tutorial)). All students taking courses in International Studies are expected to read and understand the university’s policies regarding academic dishonesty. The School for International Studies takes academic dishonesty seriously and expects that you understand these policies: [http://www.sfu.ca/policies/gazette/student/s10-01.html](http://www.sfu.ca/policies/gazette/student/s10-01.html).

**No Prerequisites:**
Undergraduate course work in social science research methods is not required.

**Respectful Technology Usage:**
Silence cell phones before classes begin. You may use laptops and tablets but only for class purposes, such as consulting electronic copies of our readings. Do not use facebook, twitter, apps, or any websites unless requested to do so by the instructor.

**Attend Class and Participate Actively:**
It is mandatory that you attend and actively participate in ALL class sessions. If you have to miss a class for any reason, consult me beforehand, either by email, during class, or in office hours.

**Complete All of Your Reading and Assignments on Time:**
You must complete all readings for a given week prior to that week’s class. Except in extraordinary circumstances and cases of illness, I will not accept any later papers for any of the assignments in the course.

**No Late Papers / No Makeup Exams** (except in extraordinary circumstances and due to illness)

**The Instructor Reserves the Right to Revise the Syllabus as Needed**
Overview of Course Schedule

Course Introduction
Class #1 on Sept. 8

Part I: Qualitative Approaches
Class #2 on Sept. 15
Class #3 on Sept. 22
Class #4 on Sept. 29
Class #5 on Oct. 6
Class #6 on Oct. 13
Class #7 on Oct. 20

Part II: Quantitative Approaches
Class #8 on Oct. 27
Class #9 on Nov. 3
Class #10 on Nov. 10
Class #11 on Nov. 17
Class #12 on Nov. 24
Class #13 on Dec. 1 (final in-class exam)

Class #1: (Sep. 8): Course Introduction
(no assigned readings for first day)

Class #2 (Sep. 15): Epistemological Foundations; Research Design

Guiding Questions:
- How do divergent epistemologies inform the research questions, theories, and methodological approaches that scholars of international studies use to design research and formulate arguments?
- What are the unique challenges, contributions, and limitations of both positivist and interpretivist/reflexive approaches to social scientific research?
- Can there be more than one model of social science? Is a “reflexive” model of social science compatible or incompatible with a model of positivist social science?
- What are some generally agreed-upon guidelines and approaches to designing qualitative research?

Readings:
Class #3 (Sep. 22): Ethnographic Approaches

Guiding Questions:
- What do ethnographic research practices involve and what are their most central, guiding principles?
- For Geertz, what kinds of research goals can ethnographic fieldwork advance? Are these goals the same as those articulated by Burawoy?
- How do scholars create, collect, and analyze diverse types of qualitative data through participant observation, interviewing, fieldnote-writing, and fieldwork?

Readings:

Class #4 (Sep. 29): Single Case Study Approaches & Process-tracing

Guiding Questions:
- What is a case study and what considerations should analysts prioritize when constructing single case studies?
- What is process-tracing in case study research and how does it differ from thick description in ethnographic research?
- What kinds of process-tracing tests can be applied when analysts seek to substantiate causal arguments?

Readings:
Class #5 (Oct. 6): Comparative Case Studies

Guiding Questions:
- How can researchers gain analytic leverage through comparison of multiple cases to one another?
- What is the method of structured, focused comparison using multiple case studies? What are the limitations and contributions of this approach?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of applying structured, focused comparison to subnational cases?

Readings:

Class #6 (Oct. 13): Comparative-Historical Case Studies

Guiding Questions:
- How do researchers conceptualize, measure, and assess causal relationships in comparative-historical studies?
- What are the contributions and limitations of these methodological approaches to knowledge in the field of international studies?

Readings:

**Class #7 (Oct. 20): Ethical Considerations; Qualitative Data Production; Proposals**

**Guiding Questions:**
- What generally-accepted ethical standards that social scientists must observe when producing and collecting data for their research?
- How do researchers go about producing and analyzing qualitative data?
- What are some suggested approaches to writing research and funding proposals?
- What is a literature review and what should it contain?

**Readings:**
- Anonymous. “Research Funding Proposal for Graduate Student Fieldwork”
Part II: Quantitative Approaches

Class #8 (Oct. 27): Visualizing Data; Cross-tabulation

Guiding Questions:
- What are statistical data?
- How do we perform descriptive analyses of quantitative data using statistical software?
- How do scholars read and interpret cross-tabulations?
- How can we assess the extent to which graphs and other, visual representations of data misrepresent actual data?

Readings:
- Linneman. Chapters 1 and 2.

Lab Exercise (TBA)

Class #9 (Nov. 3): Central Tendency; Variability; Chi-squared Tests, Sampling

Guiding Questions:
- How do survey researchers measure and interpret central tendency and variability?
- What is Type I error and how do we statistically assess it?
- How do we assess statistical significance of cross-tab findings using chi-squared tests?
- What general approaches do social scientists use when designing survey samples that they intend to be representative of a larger population?

Readings:
- Linneman Chapters 3 and 4

Lab Exercise (TBA)

Class #10 (Nov. 10): Sampling Distributions; Standard Error; Confidence Intervals; T-tests

Guiding Questions:
- What are sampling distributions?
- What is standard error and how do we calculate and interpret it?
- How do we construct confidence intervals?
- How do we compare means across groups using t-tests?

Readings:
- Linneman Chapters 5 and 6.

Lab Exercise (TBA)
Class #11 (Nov. 17): Bivariate Correlation and Bivariate OLS Regression

Guiding Questions:
- What is a correlation coefficient, how do we calculate it, and why is it insufficient for assessing causal relationships?
- What is a bivariate, Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression and how do we interpret the statistical and substantive significance of regression slopes?

Readings:
- Linneman Chapter 7 and 8

Lab Exercise (TBA)

Class #12 (Nov. 24): Multivariate OLS Regression; Dichotomous Independent Variables; Controlling

Guiding Questions:
- What are multivariate linear regressions and how do we interpret them?
- How do we include dichotomous independent variables in regression analyses and assess their slopes?
- How do we use control variables?

Readings:
- Linneman. Chapter 9 and 10.

Lab Exercise/Review

Class #13 (Dec. 1): In-class Exam (only covers material from Part II of the course)