

Short Course 2: Designing and Conducting Field Research

- Co-Sponsors:** Qualitative and Multi-Method Research and International History and Politics Sections
- Contact Person:** Professor Colin Elman, CQRM, c/o Moynihan Institute of Global Affairs, Maxwell School, 346 Eggers Hall, Syracuse University, Syracuse, New York 13244-1020
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- Registration:** Faculty - \$10; Grad Students - \$5
Check should be made out to CQRM and send to Prof. Colin Elman.
- Time:** 2:00pm – 6:00pm
- Location:** On the premises of the APSA Annual Meeting
- Instructors:** Diana Kapiszewski, University of California, Berkeley
Naomi Levy, College of William and Mary
Scott Straus, University of Wisconsin, Madison

This short course addresses a variety of field methods and data collection techniques to help analysts make the most of their empirical research. Topics include preparing for and conducting research involving the direct observation of political actors, institutions, and processes; unstructured and structured interviews; archival sources; ethnographic study; as well as managing, analyzing, and evaluating data. Although field methods are usually associated with “studying politics abroad,” we discuss techniques that may be applied both inside and outside the U.S. A foundational premise of the course is that planning for the effective use of field methods and the efficient collection of data are a crucial part of overall research design.

Analysts typically initiate their projects by mapping out their analytic questions and identifying the data they will need to investigate and to support their claims. Yet even if the research is well planned and adequately funded, obstacles can arise. Key respondents may be unhelpful or unavailable. Valuable archives and other collections of primary materials may be accessible only on a limited basis or may be poorly organized. Data necessary for constructing sampling frames for formal or informal interviewing may simply not exist. Time or money may run out before essential data have been collected.

This short course will help analysts to anticipate, identify, and resolve many of the challenges involved in designing and conducting field research. We discuss strategies that will allow the analyst to: (1) convert the research design into a “to get” list; (2) identify and begin to investigate data sources before leaving the home institution; (3) make optimal use of relevant technologies (email, web, cell phones, portable photocopying equipment, scanners, digital cameras, and voice and video recorders); (4) respond to the availability of data not anticipated in the original research design, and to the inaccessibility of data that was originally to be collected; (5) organize and manage the potentially vast quantities of information gathered; (6) establish key contacts and interact constructively with politicians, administrators, and scholars in the host community; (7) cope with professionally, politically, and personally uncomfortable situations; (8) make the transition from data collection to data analysis and writing in a timely manner.

Short Course 2 (continued)

Participants will be provided with document templates that may be useful when carrying out field research, including sample correspondence. The course is valuable for students planning dissertation projects, for scholars who would like to develop or improve their data collection skills, and for those who teach classes on research methods.