IN540: Research Methods in International Studies
Prof. Hiroshi Nakazato

Syllabus, Course Content and Purpose

T/Th 12 noon-1:15 pm

Date Sept. 8, 2009
Purpose of Course

- To lay the groundwork for understanding qualitative research methods in the social sciences.

- Three separate aspects covered in class:
  - Meta-theory of IR Theory: how and why we use models and theories;
  - Rationale of academic research: the literature review and research design;
  - Theory and practice of research in the social sciences.

- IN497 Senior Thesis covers the more practical aspects of research.
Meta-Theory of IR Theory

- This is not the study of IR theories (e.g., Realism, Institutionalism, Democratic Peace, etc.), nor the study of models (e.g., Keck & Sikkink’s TANs, etc.).
- Instead, this refers to the study of how and why scholars come up with theories and models, and the way they work.
- Implicitly or explicitly, all of you will be working with models and some theory, perhaps your own.
- This course presents the rationale for why, and not the specific theories you will use.
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Rationale of Academic Research

- We consider the purpose of academic research and its presentation; why do we do things this way?
- The components of a research project:
  - introduction - what are you doing?
  - literature review - what has been done before?
  - research design - how will you argue your thesis?
  - content chapters
  - conclusion - what is your summary?
- We focus mainly on the literature review and research design.
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Theory and practice of Social Science research

- Social sciences, like the physical sciences, are built on explaining and understanding phenomena.
- There are terms and ideas we need to learn, not only so we can understand others’ work, but also so we can apply them to our own work.
- There are different ways to analyze and approach a given social phenomenon—we will learn about these as well.
- The course name, “Research Methods in International Studies,” is actually a bit misleading.
- It probably should be “Research Methodology,” but that doesn’t roll off the tongue as easily.
Theory and practice of Social Science research

- What’s the difference?
- “Methods” is about how you plan on obtaining data or assembling an argument.
- “Methodology” is about why you’ve chosen that method.
- Many starting scholars think about research in terms of a method:
  - “I’m going to interview people on topic X.”
  - “I want to do a case study on Brazil regarding Y.”
  - “I plan to compare the UK and Netherlands on issue Z.”
To change conceptual metaphors, the method used in a research project is the tip of the research iceberg.

New scholars can readily see the method employed, but the reasoning often hidden behind it is far more important.

- **Ontology**: The philosophical study of reality, being, or existence
- **Methodology**: The philosophical study of the nature and scope of knowledge
- **Epistemology**: The study of the nature and scope of knowledge
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Course Requirements

- The course is hard, but not difficult.
  - Two mid-terms: 10% each (20% total)
  - Three short papers: 10% each (30% total)
  - Short exercises: weight varies (25% total)
  - Preliminary research paper: 25%

- Students are required to submit, at the end of the course, a research paper on a topic of their own choosing, explaining what has been done and what they want to do.

- For thesis writers, this research paper can serve as the foundation of a senior thesis.
The Research Process

Booth, Colomb, Williams (hereafter BCW), *The Craft of Research*, pp. 3-25
The Uses of Research

- Why do research?
  - Presumably, not everything is known and thus things still need to be uncovered.
  - Even if many things are known, you still need to learn them.
- On a personal level, how you learn changes.
  - Being a student is passive, learning from someone else who already knows the material.
  - Being a scholar is active, learning for yourself.
- We need to learn how to learn for ourselves.
The Uses of Research

- Knowledge is incremental; in having learned something, you then should share what you have learned with others.
- BCW, in their first chapter, “Thinking in Print,” introduce several key ideas:
  - You are joining a pre-existing conversation on research, one that you need to understand.
  - In adding to the conversation, whatever you have to say, it will be in print.
  - How you say it, then, matters in the way you present your work.
The Uses of Research

BCW make a critical point, one that is easy to comprehend but difficult to practice:

- Writing is thinking.
- When you’re looking for a topic, when you’re thinking about a problem, when you’re stuck on a certain point... write!
- Even though experienced scholars know this, many still confess having difficulties in finding traction.
- You will likely encounter this, and you will discover BCW are correct—just write!
BCW make a point that what you say and how you say it has to interest your reader.

We are writing for fellow academics.

Our prose, then, has to be sufficiently informative without being either too elliptical on one side or too elementary on the other.

What is suitable for one adviser may not be suitable for another.

In the process of drafting chapters and revising them, you will find the necessary degree of clarity.
The Uses of Research

**IMPORTANT IDEAS**

- every research program has a thesis.
- a thesis is an extended argument that explains, defends, and illuminates the thesis.
- a thesis is a causal narrative.
- a thesis is shared scholarship, built on others’ work, and extending general knowledge further.
- scholarship in the social sciences have further criteria or expectations; more on this later.