NUTR 0310: Qualitative Research Methods  
Spring 2019

Class Meetings: Wednesdays, 9-12 (See Schedule below for room assignments for each session)  
Instructor: Ellen Messer, PhD  
Contact: Ellen.Messer@Tufts.edu Office Hours: TBA  
Tufts Graduate Credit: 3 SHU

Prerequisites: NUTR 207 or 206 and either NUTR 204 or 210, or instructor consent.

Course Description:  
NUTR 310 teaches principles and practical skills of qualitative inquiry in an interactive seminar format. Participants will learn how to design and carry out qualitative research through weekly background readings and written assignments, critical case-study discussions, and practical class exercises. They will also take part in the design, implementation, analysis, and evaluation of a local qualitative research project that involves practical, hands-on experience. The first part of the course will focus on the foundations of qualitative inquiry, qualitative methods, their strengths and challenges, standards for quality, and tools for critical assessment of insights derived from these methods. The second part of the course will be dedicated to learning how to design qualitative studies, including data collection, data management strategies, and approaches to data analysis. Participants will gain practical experience by developing and implementing a small research study, which will include the elements of research design, field-note documentation, participant observation, in-depth interviews, focus groups, visual methods, analysis, and writing/dissemination.

Course Objectives:  
(1) Appreciate the principles of qualitative research design, and evaluate the appropriateness of qualitative vs. quantitative methods for different contexts. (What are qualitative research methods; why use them, in what situations?)  
(2) Know and master tools of qualitative research, and how to apply them in design of qualitative research (appropriate research questions & methods to answer them)  
(3) Create protocols and procedures for collecting, managing, and analyzing qualitative evidence (use qualitative methods and techniques)  
(4) Be aware of the main logistical, ethical, and theoretical issues raised by qualitative research methods, as compared with quantitative methods (be able to link qualitative inquiry to theory, policy, and practice, and evaluate quality)

Assignments:  
Students will be evaluated on weekly written assignments and class participation, and five components connected to their qualitative research projects:  
• In weekly assignments, students will keep a reading log, with critical summaries of at least 4 required and additional readings, and take responsibility for leading class discussions of readings or related exercises on a rotating basis (25 percent of grade)
In the research project, students will identify a qualitative research question that will enable them to apply qualitative methods and techniques over the course of the semester. This project will provide the basis for written assignments demonstrating mastery of particular methods: (1) observations and field notes, (2) research design and methods, (3) in depth interview format, (4) interview recording and transcription, (5) thematic qualitative analysis incorporating results of 3 / 4. The final report (10 pages), due end of term 5/8, will summarize research questions, methods, and findings, and connect qualitative research results to policy. There will also be an optional short written assignment summarizing research and implications in the form of blog or op ed. Preliminary ideas submitted for discussion Apr.10. Final version of the blog is due April 24. This is an extra credit assignment, which can raise your grade.

Assignments and Grading:
This course requires active participation of all class members through engagement in small and large group activities, debate, and discussion. Students are expected to come to class prepared by reading and completing all discussion assignments on time. Students will be asked to lead discussions on a rotating basis.

In addition to consistent class attendance and participation, each student will develop and implement a small qualitative study. The focus of the study will be “healthy eating”. You will be expected to:
(a) Develop guiding research questions for this study and sketch a framework for answering the questions
(b) Develop and implement an observational component, with written field notes and analysis
(c) Create an interview protocol to support investigation of research questions
(d) Create a sampling frame and recruitment strategy; provide justification to support these strategies
(e) Conduct 5-7 informational interviews (or comparable focus group interviews) with individuals who meet your study criteria. Record at least two interviews and transcribe them verbatim. You will share the transcript from one interview with a peer and instructor to obtain feedback. You may record information from the other interviews in the manner you choose.
(f) Develop a codebook to facilitate the analysis of data
(g) Apply your codebook to the interviews conducted. Make modifications as appropriate
(h) Analyze the data collected from interviewees
(i) Prepare a summary report of key findings and lessons learned from your project, including policy implications.

Assignment(s)                        Grading Weight
1. Weekly class attendance, participation, and leadership; critical responses to readings and exercises 25%

2. Qualitative Research Project 75% (10% each for first 5
• Development of Qualitative Research Question(s) and framework. The assignment should include a one-paragraph overview of the purpose of the study, and the primary research question(s) that will be investigated. A second paragraph should include the qualitative method you expect to use for investigation (e.g., one-on-one interviews, observations, focus groups, etc.) Also indicate a description of your proposed sample and sample justification. Due: Feb. 6.

• Field note exercise. Due Feb 20.

• Interview Guide. First Draft due Feb. 27. Final draft due Mar. 6. Develop a draft interview guide that will be used to help address your key study questions. On Feb 27, send an electronic copy to professor before class; bring a hard copy to class for discussion. You will share your assignment with one or two other classmates, who will review your research and interview guide and provide feedback during class. You have one week to incorporate their feedback. Final interview questions are due Mar. 6. To obtain full credit you must develop questions and an interview guide and also provide feedback to one of your classmates.

• Prepare a verbatim transcript of one interview. Due Mar. 27. For this assignment, conduct and audio-record at least one interview. Submit your transcription before class. During class we will reflect on what was learned during the interview, where difficulties occurred, and how the process could be improved.

• Develop a draft codebook that can be applied to all your interviews. Due Apr. 3. Review the information you gathered in your interviews to create a craft codebook, which should be organized by major categories along with definitions for each category. Bring a copy of your codebook to share with one or two peers. Final codebook due Apr. 10.

• Oral presentation of findings (Due Apr. 17)

• Translating findings into policy (Optional Blog or op ed due Apr. 24)

• Final paper (Due May 8) (final three bullets 25%). The final paper provides an opportunity to practice written dissemination. It will include: (a) introduction, including aims of the study; (b) methods, including qualitative methods, sampling, recruitment strategies, overview of questions asked, analysis strategies, (c) results, (d) discussion (lessons learned from observations, interviews, and research process), (e) study limitations, (f) conclusions, including implications for mixed methods.

Penalties for late or incomplete assignments:
Grade reductions (half grade) will be imposed for assignments that are more than three days late. More than two absences, or unexcused (other than illness or family emergency) failure to appear for a class presentation will also reduce the grade (half grade).

Course Texts and Materials:
The syllabus below lists required background readings, case-studies for critical discussion, and exercises that enable participants to apply the steps in qualitative research construction. Readings, along with course syllabus, exercises, and outlines, will be accessible on the course website. Participants will also be able to use this website for discussions and project communications.


AFN 1 Food Research: Nutritional Anthropology and Archaeological Methods (2017)
AFN 2 Food Culture: Anthropology, Linguistics, and Food Studies (2017)
Assigned chapters can be accessed on-line through Tufts libraries.


Academic Conduct:
Academic integrity, including avoiding plagiarism, is critically important. Each student is responsible for being familiar with the standards and policies outlined in the Friedman School’s Policies and Procedures manual (http://nutrition.tufts.edu/student/documents). It is the responsibility of the student to be aware of, and comply with, these policies and standards. In accordance with Tufts University’s policy on academic misconduct, violations of standards of academic conduct will be sanctioned by penalties ranging from grade reduction or failure on an assignment; grade reduction or failure of a course; up to dismissal from the school, depending on the nature and context of any infraction (http://uss.tufts.edu/studentaffairs/judicialaffairs/Academic%20Integrity.pdf).
Diversity Statement: We believe that the diversity of student experiences and perspectives is essential to the deepening of knowledge in this course. We consider it part of our responsibility as instructors to address the learning needs of all of the students in this course. We will present materials that are respectful of diversity: race, color, ethnicity, gender, age, disability, religious beliefs, political preference, sexual orientation, gender identity, socioeconomic status, citizenship, language, or national origin among other personal characteristics.

Accommodation of Disabilities:
Tufts University is committed to providing equal access and support to all students through the provision of reasonable accommodations so that each student may access their curricula and achieve their personal and academic potential. If you have a disability that requires reasonable accommodations please contact the Friedman School Assistant Dean of Student Affairs at 617-636-6719 to make arrangements for determination of appropriate accommodations. Please be aware that accommodations cannot be enacted retroactively, making timeliness a critical aspect for their provision.
Course & Assignment Schedule:
(See next section for details; schedule is subject to modification at the instructor’s discretion.)

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>Week</th>
<th>TOPIC</th>
<th>ASSIGNMENTS &amp; ACTIVITIES</th>
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<tr>
<td>Jan. 16</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Introduction: Overview</td>
<td>Interviewing one-on-one; preliminary research questions; ethics</td>
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<td>J 155</td>
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<td>Jan. 30</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Research design: ethics and quality</td>
<td>Peer discussion of research questions Comparative summaries of readings on research design, including ethics and quality; the IRB</td>
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<td>Feb. 6</td>
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<td>Mixed methods: Frameworks and process</td>
<td>Peer discussion of research questions Comparative summaries of readings on mixed methods, including ethics and quality.</td>
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<td>Feb. 13</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Science and Advocacy: Reflection, recruitment and participation strategies</td>
<td>Reflections on access and limits; reflexivity and self in research; Comparative summaries of readings Peer discussion of research and advocacy: justice, ethics and quality issues; critical response to Scheper-Hughes due.</td>
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<td>Feb. 20</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Observations and Recordings: Time, space, and social units</td>
<td>Field note exercise due. Peer discussion of observation frames and field notes Time framework exercise. Comparative summaries of readings</td>
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<td>Feb 27</td>
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<td>Interviewing I</td>
<td>First draft, Interview Guide due. Peer review of questions Comparative summaries of readings</td>
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<td>Mar. 6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Interviewing II</td>
<td>Final draft, Interview Guide due. Peer review of questions Comparative summaries of readings</td>
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<td>Mar. 13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Rapid Assessment Methods; Focus Groups</td>
<td>Focus group exercise discussion. Comparative summaries of readings</td>
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Detailed Course Schedule:
Weekly Readings, Learning Objectives and Assignments

Class 1: Introduction

Learning Objectives for Class 1:

➢ Distinguish qualitative from quantitative research & understand the rationale for each approach.

➢ Identify the strengths and limitations of qualitative research methods

➢ Learn about the ways qualitative research is used in food & nutrition studies

➢ Explain the role of representation and social construction of knowledge, and appreciate the interpretative approach to the world.

• What is qualitative research
• Qualitative research tools and contexts for using them
• Qualitative versus quantitative approaches: inductive & deductive, ETIC & EMIC
• Ethnographic methods: Traditional and rapid assessment
• Critical Theory, social construction of knowledge, and relativism

Exercises:
• Interviewing one-on-one; respectful questioning and listening skills
• Thinking about a research topic and constructing quantitative/qualitative research questions

Required Readings for Class 1:
QRM, Ch. 1-2 (1-28) “The Nature of Qualitative Research” and (206-210) “grounded theory”


For Discussion:


Additional Readings


Messer, Ellen (2017) Introduction to Public Health Nutrition Methods. AFN 3 (29-41) Read introductory sections, pp.29-34


Swift, JA nd V. Tischler (201) Qualitative Research in nutrition and dietetics: getting started. *J. Human nutr. & Dietetics* 23 (6):559-566  


**Class 2: Designing Qualitative Research**

**Learning Objectives for Class 2:**

➢ Understand the decisions involved in designing qualitative research: research questions, locale/area, study unit, sampling/respondents, ethics, data collection, analysis.

➢ Identify the elements of a high quality qualitative research study

➢ Articulate strengths and limitations of a qualitative study

➢ Critically engage in the process of how to go about moving from your research questions to decisions about whom, what and why you are going to research.

- Defining Research Questions
- Objectives and style of research and their implications for design
- Making decisions on research strategy
- Who and when to investigate
- Mapping the Community(ies), Networks, and Field Site(s)
- Determining time concepts and frames, and methods to study them
- Documentation and semiotics (signs, symbols, and derivation of meaning)
- Insiders and outsiders: community participation

**Exercises:**

- *Designing the study: sketching the food & policy landscape*
- *Discussion of research design in case studies*
- *Peer discussion of research questions*

**Required Readings for Class 2:**


Dufour, Darna and Barbara Piperata, Design in Biocultural Studies of Food & Nutritional Anthropology. (AFN I, 31-43)


*For Discussion:*


Mars, Gerald and Valerie Mars (2004) Doing It Wrong. Why Bother to Do Imperfect Research? (75-85) IN *Researching Food Habits. Methods and Problems.* H. Macbeth and J. MacClancy, eds. NY: Berghahn. Read pp.75-79. Authors argue that sometimes “good enough” is sufficient; in this case that their “findings are sufficiently coherent and consistent to be supplemented or countered by library research or developed by other researchers… Research is always ongoing and incomplete.” (p.79). Are their findings and interpretations convincing? Why?

*Additional Readings*


Class 3: Mixed Methods

Learning Objectives for Class 3:
➢ Identify different types of qualitative research design
➢ Explain the rationale for using mixed methods in particular study designs
➢ Understand the concept of fieldwork and specify the steps required for obtaining access and entry.
➢ Introduction to fieldwork and field notes

Exercises:
• Comparative assessment of mixed methods studies
• Peer discussion of research questions

Required Readings for Class 3:
QRM Ch.3 (29-60) “The design cycle”


For discussion:


Additional Readings


Learning Objectives for Class 4:
Be able to analyze how gender, class, ethnic, generational/age, and power differentials affect generation of knowledge, interactions and representation. Recognize and evaluate different genre and narrative structures of representation.

➢ Recognize and appropriately specify ethical and safety considerations for a given field site and situation.
➢ Specify the gender and political, geographic, ethnic, religious (PGER) issues and considerations for a given project.
➢ Distinguish among different types of “participatory” and “action” research
➢ Clarify justice dimensions of qualitative research

○ Gaining Access and Entry
○ Ethical Considerations – implementing IRB and Beyond
○ Practical issues involved in fieldwork
○ Being away
○ Stakeholders, Gatekeepers, and Key informants
○ Safety and security issues
○ Political Positioning and Stakeholder/Actor Analysis

• Icon, index, frames, and symbol
• Genre and medium
• Narrative and Discourse Strategies
• Gender, class, ethnic, age/generational and power differentials

Exercise:
• Reflections: In what ways does your ethnicity, gender, nationality, political position and/or class give you access and in what ways does it limit your access? How do ethical and justice concerns influence your research questions and choices?

Required Readings for Class 4:
QRM. Ch. 4 (“Ethical Issues in Qualitative Research”) (62-79); Ch. 5 “(81-107) “Participant Recruitment”


For Discussion:


Class 5: Observations and Recording: Time, Space, and Social Units

**Learning Objectives for Class 5:**

- Distinguish appropriate conceptual and recording frames for time, space, and social units
- Appreciate the importance of field notes and recording in qualitative research.
  - Develop skills in writing field notes and recording.
  - Making decisions on writing field notes and recording
  - Techniques of writing different types of field notes
  - Iterative process of recording and interpretation
  - Field notes and ethnography

**Required Readings for Class 5:**

QRM, Ch. 8 (169-200) “Observation”


**Additional Readings**


Class Exercises:
- Conceptualizing and recording time and time allocation
- each student shares field notes/analysis with peer
- Each student shares their research plan with the class

Class 6: Observation and Interviewing I

Learning Objectives for Class 6:
- Identify research questions that are best suited to particular observation or interview techniques
- Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of different approaches to structuring interview guides
- Develop research questions and a one-on-one interview guide that facilitates their exploration
- Identify different techniques that can be used to facilitate one-on-one interviews, especially when working with individuals from other cultures

Required Readings for Class 6:

QRM Ch.6 (108-134)

In-depth interviews, Module 3 of Qualitative Research Methods: A Data Collector’s Field Guide (Mack et al.) Access at: https://www.urbanreproductivehealth.org/sites/mle/files/datacollectorguideenrh.pdf

Zycherman, Ariela (2017) An Introduction to Cultural Domain Analysis in Food Research. AFN 2:159-169 (pile sorts, etc.)

Paxson, Heather (2017) Participant Observation and Interviewing Techniques. AFN 2:


Gonzalez Turmo, Isabel and Jose Mataix Verdu (2004) Methods for Obtaining Quantitative Data on Food Habits in the First Half of the Twentieth Century. (161-167) IN Researching Food Habits. Methods and Problems. H. Macbeth and J. MacClancy, eds. NY: Berghahn. (The authors describe methods they developed to overcome difficulties inherent in interviewing older adults, whose memories may not be reliable, as they sought to authenticate how diets (especially consumption of bread, vegetables, wine, and olive oil) had changed over three periods.)

Class 7: Interviewing II

Learning Objectives for Class 7: Interviews and Case Studies

➢ Develop a structured interview schedule.
➢ Conduct an unstructured interview to elicit detailed information.
➢ Design and carry out a life history interview.
➢ Interview preparation and IRB (HSR) considerations
   • Qualitative, in depth versus survey interviews
   • Life Histories, historical evidence, and the ethnographic present
   • Levels of structuring: advantages and disadvantages of approaches
   • Eliciting information and silences
   • Triangulation
   • Providing Feedback

Exercise:
• Peer review of questions and structure in interview guide

Recommended Readings for Class 7:

Spradley, James. 1979. The Ethnographic Interview, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston. This is overall a very good methodological introduction to ethnographic fieldwork. For this week, read the sections on constructing and using interview questions. As you have time, read more.


For Discussion:

Class 8: Rapid Assessment and Focus Group Methods
Learning Objectives for Class 8:

➢ Articulate when focus groups are an appropriate qualitative methodology in research studies
➢ Develop an appropriate sampling and recruitment strategy for focus group interviews
➢ Practice techniques for facilitating a group interview
➢ Make informed decisions about how best to record and analyze focus group data
➢ Be able to organize and plan a focus group session.
  • Setting up focus groups, advance planning
  • Defining the group, its boundaries, and size
  • Settings and timing
  • Open ended versus directed conversations, moderating
  • Recording and capturing information
  • Dealing with conflicts and differences
  • Conducting a focus group

Exercise:
  • Focus Group Exercise

Required Readings for Class 8:

QRM Ch.7 (135-168)
Mack et al. Module 4, “Focus Groups”
Perez, Ramona L. (2017) Focus Groups in Qualitative or Mixed Methods. AFN 2:101-111

For Discussion:
Rapid Assessment Methods
https://medanth.wikispaces.com/Rapid+Ethnographic+Assessment Positive Deviance study (reading to be added)

Class 9: Visual and Audio Methods -- Photography and Mapping

Learning Objectives for Class 9:

➢ Be able to use visual methods in qualitative research.
➢ Learn about opportunities for the use of photography and mapping in research.
  • Why use visual and audio methods
- Auto photography
- Strengths of using visual methods in research
- Weaknesses in using visual methods in research
- Potential dilemmas and ethical issues

Exercise:
- Use of visual methods (photograph, video, mapping etc.) for food chain, sustainability and food-waste analysis.

Required Readings for Class 9:


Case studies for discussion:


Additional Readings


*Case Study for Discussion:*

**Class 10: Organizing, and Analyzing Qualitative Data**

**Learning Objectives for Class 10:**

➢ Be able to organize and analyze qualitative material using different organizational strategies and categories.
➢ Be able to recognize the limitations of the data collected from the field.
➢ Be able to recognize, derive, and analyze the relevant and “significant” themes and narratives in data.
➢ Learn to use qualitative data analysis software.
- Organize field notes, interview and focus group transcripts, and other records
- Patterns – spatial, temporal/seasonal, significant events
- Iteration
- Identify themes
- **Coding data**
- Preparing matrix
- Reading and re-reading fieldnotes
- Writing as a way of analyzing data

**Exercise:**

- *Organizing field data, identifying themes and drawing preliminary analysis, using and comparing sorting methods, including exercise featuring hands-on use of (NVIVO) software.*

**Required Readings for Class 10:**

QRM, Ch. 9-10 (201-267)


Class 11: Writing Qualitative Data: research reports, blogs, op eds.

Learning Objectives for Class 11:

➢ Be able to write qualitative data with clear arguments and effective use of evidence for multiple audiences.
  • Thinking about the audience: policy, academic, public?
  • ‘Quality’ in qualitative research
  • Thick description
  • Organizing arguments
  • Use of evidence

Exercise:

• Building arguments and supporting them with evidence.

Required Readings for Class 11:

Ch. 11 QRM, pp. 268-293


For Discussion:
Comparison of an ethnography, research report, advocacy piece, promotional piece, and op ed on (NYC) food banks.

Class 12: Presentation of the Research Findings

**Learning Objectives for Class 12:**
- Understand decisions that need to be made when preparing qualitative research findings for oral and written presentation
- Identify standards for presentation of qualitative findings in oral and written formats
- Be able to present research findings orally, attend to audience interests and respond to questions.
  - What are the most important findings?
  - How does the research matter for your particular audiences?

**Required Readings for Class 12**


**Exercise:**
- **All participants present their research findings**

Class 13: Translating Research Findings into Policy Consideration

**Learning Objectives for Class 13:**
- Be able to recognize and report on the policy and program implications of qualitative findings. Be able to specify the limitations and theoretical relevance of one’s findings.
  - What do policy makers want?
  - Role of evidence in policy making
  - Claims and counter claims

**Exercise:**
• Class discussion on the policy and program relevance of our findings

Required Readings for Class 13:

