NUTR 0310: Qualitative Research Methods
Spring 2024

Class Meetings: Wednesdays, 9-12 (on-line)
Instructor: Ellen Messer, PhD
Contact: Ellen.Messer@Tufts.edu Office Hours: TBA
Tufts Graduate Credit: 3 SHU

Prerequisites:

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, observation, in-depth interviews, focus groups, visual methods, analysis, and writing/dissemination.

Course Objectives:
(1) Appreciate the principles of qualitative research design (what are qualitative research methods; why use them, in what situations?) and evaluate the appropriateness of qualitative vs. quantitative methods for different contexts.
(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 3 (from required plus additional readings) and take responsibility for leading class discussions of readings or related exercises on a rotating basis (25 percent of grade). There will also be optional (recommended, not required) weekly discussion boards where class participants can ask questions, initiate and participate in additional discussions on the weekly topic.
- In the research project (described below) 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 guide, (4) interview recording and transcription, (5) thematic qualitative analysis incorporating results of 3 / 4. The final report (10 pages), due end of term (May 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. 17. 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 guide 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 and preliminary analysis 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.

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<th>Assignment(s)</th>
<th>Grading Weight</th>
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<td><strong>1. Weekly class attendance, participation, and leadership; critical responses to readings and exercises</strong></td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>2. Qualitative Research Project</strong></td>
<td>75% (10% each for first 5 bullets; 25% for final presentation, policy implications, final paper)</td>
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<td>• 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</td>
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groups, etc.) Also indicate a description of your proposed sample and sample justification. Due: Jan.31.

- Field note (observation) exercise. Due Feb 14.
- Interview Guide. First Draft due Feb. 21. Develop a draft interview guide that will be used to help address your key study questions. On Feb 21, send an electronic copy to professor before class. 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 Feb 28. 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. 13. 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 Mar 27. Review the information you gathered in your interviews to create a draft 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. 3.

- Oral presentation of findings. 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. Appendices.

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, which will also present any updated readings. Participants will be able to use this website for discussions and project communications.

Hennink, M., I. Hutter, A. Bailey (2020) *Qualitative Research Methods. 2nd ed.* Sage. Good basic text that “workshops” qualitative methods for nutrition and public health. Complemented by readings covering mixed methods, innovative and participatory methods, activist and advocacy research projects/components. (See “Announcements” on CANVAS for ways to access this text through purchase or Hirsch Library circulation desk reserves.)

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/CANVAS.


**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* handbook https://nutrition.tufts.edu/sites/default/files/documents-forms/2023-2024PoliciesandProceduresHandbook_0.pdf. 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 (https://students.tufts.edu/community-standards/support-resources/academic-integrity-resources).

**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 curricula and achieve their personal academic potential. If you have a disability that requires reasonable accommodations please contact 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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<tr>
<th>DATE</th>
<th>Week</th>
<th>TOPIC</th>
<th>ASSIGNMENTS &amp; ACTIVITIES</th>
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<tr>
<td>Jan. 17</td>
<td>1</td>
<td><strong>Introduction: Overview</strong></td>
<td>Interviewing one-on-one; formulating research questions; ethics; hopes &amp; fears</td>
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| Jan. 24  | 2    | **Research design: ethics and quality**    | Peer discussion of research questions  
Comparative summaries of readings on research design, including ethics and quality; the IRB                                                                                                                      |
| Jan. 31  | 3    | **Mixed methods: Frameworks and process**  | Peer discussion of research questions  
Comparative summaries of readings on mixed methods, including ethics and quality. **Research question due.**                                                                                       |
| Feb. 7   | 4    | **Science and Advocacy: Reflection, recruitment and participation strategies** | 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.                                                                                                                                         |
| Feb. 14  | 5    | **Observations and Recordings: Time, space, and social units** | **Field note (observation) exercise due.**  
Peer discussion of observation frames and field notes, time & space frameworks  
Comparative summaries of readings  |
| Feb. 21  | 6    | **Interviewing I**                         | **First draft, Interview Guide due.**  
Peer review of questions  
Comparative summaries of readings  |
| Feb. 28  | 7    | **Interviewing II**                        | **Final draft, Interview Guide due.**  
Peer review of questions  
Comparative summaries of readings  |
| Mar. 6   | 8    | **Rapid Assessment Methods; Focus Groups** | Focus group exercise & discussion.  
Comparative summaries of readings  |
**Verbatim transcript of interviews due.**                                                                                                                      |
## Detailed Course Schedule:
Weekly Readings, Learning Objectives and Assignments

### Module 1: Introduction

**Learning Objectives for Module 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; hopes & fears
• Thinking about a research topic and constructing quantitative/qualitative research questions

Required Readings for Module 1:
QRM, Ch. 1-2 (4-25) “The Nature of Qualitative Research” and (206-210, 211-212) “grounded theory”


For Discussion:


Additional Readings

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


Swift, J. and V. Tischler (2010 Qualitative Research in nutrition and dietetics: getting started. J_Human nutr. & Dietetics 23 (6):559-566

**Module 2: Designing Qualitative Research**

**Learning Objectives for Module 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

**Case Studies: Melissa Fuster, Ph.D.**

**Exercises:**

- Discussion of research design in case studies
- Peer discussion of research questions

**Required Readings for Module 2:**


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. Authors (pp.75-79) 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

Dufour, Darna and Barbara Piperata (2017) Design in Biocultural Studies of Food & Nutritional Anthropology. (AFN I: 31-43)


Module 3: Mixed Methods

Learning Objectives for Module 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

Guest Speaker: Invited

Exercises:

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

Required Readings for Module 3:

QRM Ch.3 (26-49) “The design cycle”

For discussion:

Chung, K., L. Haddad, J. Ramakrishna, and F. Riely (1997) Identifying the Food Insecure. The Application of Mixed Method Approaches in India. IFPRI. Access at:  
http://ageconsearch.umn.edu/record/42909/files/Identifying%20the%20food%20insecure.pdf

http://jn.nutrition.org/content/136/5/1420S.long


Additional Readings


**Module 4: Science and Advocacy: Reflexivity, Recruitment, Participation, and Action Strategies.**

**Learning Objectives for Module 4:**

Be able to analyze how gender, class, race/ethnicity, generation/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 Module 4:**

QRM. Ch. 4 “Designing Participatory Research” (50-66) and Ch. 5 “Ethical Issues in Qualitative Research”) (70-85); Ch. 6 (92-113) “Sampling and Participant Recruitment”


*For Discussion:*


Dickinson, Maggie (2020) *Feeding the Crisis Care and Abandonment in America’s Safety Net*. Ch. 1 (Pp. 1-23) This opening chapter, with insightful observations and reflexivity, positions the researcher in her participatory and professional roles.

Berger, R. (2015) Now I see it now I don’t. Researcher’s position and reflexivity in qualitative research. *Qualitative Research* 15,2:219-234


Additional Readings:

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

**Learning Objectives for Module 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 Module 5:

QRM, Ch. 9 (170-200) “Observation” (pp. 193-194 “pre-test” & p.195 field notes are useful exercises). Observation exercises, with different types of field notes distinguishing interpretations from raw data (p.199), also instructive. Observation with visual aids (pp.187-189) should be reviewed for Session 9.


For Discussion:


Additional Readings


Class Exercises:

- Conceptualizing and recording space, time and time allocation
- Each student shares field notes/analysis with peers: observation situation.
- Update: Each student shares research plan with the class

Module 6: Observation and Interviewing I

Learning Objectives for Module 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.

Guest Speaker: Invited. The Dollar Stores Research Project

Exercise: Workshopping Interview Guides

Required Readings for Module 6:

QRM Ch.7 (116-136)


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

For Discussion:


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.)

Module 7: Interviewing II

Learning Objectives for Module 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

10:30 Guest Speaker: Jennifer Oslund (unconfirmed)

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

Required Readings for Module 7:


For Discussion:


Additional Readings:

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.


Module 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 Module 8:
QRM Ch.8 (138-168)
Mack et al. Module 4, “Focus Groups”
Perez, Ramona L. (2017) Focus Groups in Qualitative or Mixed Methods. AFN 2:101-111

For Discussion:

Researchers used focus groups to structure adaptation of nation-wide Strong Women, Healthy Hearts intervention for mid-life and older African American women.
https://doi.org/10.5993/AJHB.45.4.12


Rapid Assessment Methods

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

Learning Objectives for Module 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

Guest Speaker: Erin Hennessy, Ph.D. (unconfirmed)

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

**Required Readings for Module 9:**


**Case studies for discussion:**


Dumas, Sara et al. (2017) “Men are in front at eating time but not when it comes to rearing the chicken”: Unpacking the gendered costs and benefits of livestock ownership in Kenya. *Food Nutr. Bull* (Dec 2017) Make sure to access and study the supporting materials (accessible through urls on sidebar of the main text. Access at: [Link](http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0379572117737428)

**Additional Readings**


Module 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

10 AM Guest Speaker: Carlota Dao, Ph.D. (unconfirmed)

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 Module 10:
QRM, Ch. 10 (208-234) & 11 (235-266)


For Discussion:


Additional Readings:


Module 11: Writing Qualitative Data: research reports, blogs, op eds., Participatory Action

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
  • Participatory action

Exercise:
  • Building arguments, supporting them with evidence.

Required Readings for Module 11:

Ch. 12 QRM, (268-288) and 13 (292-319)


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

Additional Readings

Dickinson, Maggie (2020) *Feeding the Crisis Care and Abandonment in America’s Safety Net*. Ch.6: “No Free Lunch. The Limits of Food Assistance as a Public Health Intervention.” (Pp. 117-142) An excellent example of advocacy writing, based on interviews with low-income clients, food-bank personnel, government officials.

**Module 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 Module 12**


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

**Module 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 Module 13:**


Additional Readings:
