NUTR 809  
Applied Qualitative Research Methods  
Spring 2015

Credit Hours: 2.0  
Class Time: Tuesday 2-4 pm  
Class Location: Michael Hooker Research Center 2005

Instructors: Margaret Bentley, 130 Rosenau, 919-966-9575, pbentley@unc.edu, http://sph.unc.edu/profiles/margaret-bentley-phd/  
Valerie Flax, 2217A McGavran-Greenberg, 919-966-3807, flax@unc.edu, http://sph.unc.edu/profiles/valerie-flax/

Office Hours: by appointment

Target Audience: This course is required for doctoral students in the Department of Nutrition’s Intervention and Policy division. Master of Public Health and doctoral students in other departments may take the course with permission of instructor.

Prerequisites: This course has no prerequisites. Students who have obtained permission of instructor will be able to enroll in the course with the assistance of the Department of Nutrition’s Student Services Manager, Joanne Lee.

Course Description: This course is designed to introduce students to qualitative research methods with an emphasis on their use in nutrition-related program design and evaluation. The course will use a combination of didactic, interactive and applied techniques to teach knowledge and skills relevant to qualitative research. This is an introductory course by design and additional coursework in qualitative methods, particularly data analysis, is strongly recommended for those students who want to conduct qualitative research.

Students will work individually and in small groups on a series of assignments that will give them exposure to some of the key methods in qualitative research, including key informant and in-depth interviews, unstructured and structured observational methods, and focus group discussions. Students will also learn how to read data interpretively and to use software (Dedoose) to code transcripts for analysis. Students will be evaluated on their assignments and their class participation.

Course Goals and Objectives:  
The goal of this course is to develop skills in how to formulate qualitative research questions for nutrition research; how to collect qualitative data using interview, focus group and observational methods; and how to carry out qualitative data analysis.

By the end of this course, students will:  
1. Become familiar with the paradigms that are frequently used in qualitative research.  
2. Develop a research plan and research questions.  
3. Conduct in-depth interviews and observations.  
4. Create and use a qualitative coding scheme.
5. Analyze a dataset and prepare a data display matrix.
6. Prepare a presentation based on analysis of the data collected in this class.

**Course Text:** There is one primary textbook for the course, “Qualitative methods in public health: a field guide for applied research” by Priscilla Ulin, Elizabeth Robinson and Elizabeth Tolley. It is expected that students will purchase the primary textbook or borrow a copy from the library. The textbook will be complemented with other readings available on Sakai.

We will provide you with a copy of *Rapid Assessment Procedures (RAP): ethnographic methods to investigate women’s health* by Joel Gittlesohn, Pertti Pelto, Margaret Bentley, Karabi Bhattacharryya, and Joan Jensen

**Sakai:** The syllabus, slides for class, and other course material are posted on Sakai.

**CITI Training Requirement:** All students in the course are required to have completed CITI Human Subjects Training. Information on completing the training can be found at the CITI website: [http://www.citiprogram.org/default.asp?language=english](http://www.citiprogram.org/default.asp?language=english). Please complete the training by January 21st. Once you have completed the training (or if you have completed it in the past) please email a copy of the certificate to Valerie Flax for our records.

**Course Requirements and Evaluation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignments</th>
<th>Proportion of grade</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
<th>Group or Individual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research Framework, Questions &amp; Interview Guide</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>February 3</td>
<td>Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-depth interview transcript</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>February 20</td>
<td>Individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-critique of second interview transcript</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>March 17</td>
<td>Individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation: Unstructured and Structured</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>March 31</td>
<td>Individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data analysis: Codebook &amp; Display Matrix</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>April 14</td>
<td>Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-class presentations</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>April 21</td>
<td>Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class participation and lead discussion of one article</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Individual</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Several of the group assignments include an individual reflection or self-critique. The reflection or self-critique will be graded individually and the other portions of the assignment will be graded as a group. See below for more details.

**Assignments:**

There are several assignments throughout the semester, some of which you will do individually and some as a group, including a final presentation of your research project on a specific nutrition-related topic. On the first day of class, January 13, we will brainstorm and select research topics and divide the class into small groups. On the second day of class, January 20, you will start working in your groups to begin developing your research plan and questions. To limit the amount of time you spend outside of class meeting with your group, we will give you
some class time to work in your groups throughout the semester. Each group member will interview two individuals and do one structured and one unstructured observation. Individual interviews and observations will be read and graded separately, but the group work requires that you aggregate your data for analysis, interpretation, and identification of patterns. The final group project will be a detailed PowerPoint of the entire project, including your framework, research plan, methods, data analysis, and results. Please include your name and your group name both in the name of your document (e.g., Rodriguez food truck group interview 1.doc) and at the top of the first page of the document.

The instructors will try to give feedback on assignments in a timely manner so that you can take their comments into consideration before moving to the next step in the process of data collection and analysis.

Samples of different assignments from previous years are posted on Sakai for your reference.

1. **Research questions and interview guide (15%)**
   Your group will work together to select a research topic. Based on the aims of your research and existing literature, you will develop research questions and an in-depth interview guide. (5 points for research questions, 10 points for interview guide)

2. **In-depth interview transcript (10%)**
   You are expected to conduct a total of 2 in-depth interviews. For this assignment, conduct the first interview only. You will do a word-for-word transcription of your interview and submit it. We will look for use of open-ended questions, good probes, and rich responses from the interviewee. We recognize that not everyone is a good respondent, but a good interviewer can usually get a reasonable amount of information by using good interviewing techniques. We will take lack of previous interviewing experience into consideration in grading the first interviews. (10 points for transcript)

3. **Self-critique of second interview transcript (15%)**
   Using the feedback you received on your first interview, you will conduct a second interview with another person. Transcribe this interview and write comments in the margins about your interviewing skills (for example, leading question, missed probe, good probe, double-barreled question, etc.). We would like you to include two paragraphs at the end of the transcript where you critique your interviewing skills and reflect on the process of data collection and your role in it. (7.5 points for interview, 7.5 points for self-critique)

4. **Unstructured and structured observation (15%)**
   You will conduct two observations related to your research aims. The first will be an unstructured observation where you will take notes during the observation. The second will be a structured observation. You will develop a structured observation datasheet with your group and each group member will use it to conduct one observation. You will submit the notes from your unstructured observation and the datasheet from your structured observation. When you submit the assignment, please include 2 paragraphs reflecting on the process of collecting observation data and your role in the process. (5 points for unstructured observation, 5 points for structured observation, 5 points for reflection)
5. **Data analysis: codebook & display matrix (15%)**
   To analyze your data, you will work with your group to develop a set of codes. The codes could be topical, based on themes, or based on a social theory. The codebook should include the names of the codes and their definitions. After coding the data, develop at least one display matrix as part of your analysis. Although the assignment is done by the group, individual group members should also submit 2 paragraphs reflecting on the process of creating codes and a matrix and your role in the process as a researcher. (5 points for codebook, 5 points for display matrix, 5 points for reflection)

6. **In-class presentation (20%)**
   Using the data collected by group members and the analysis carried out by the group, prepare a presentation that describes your framework, research plan, methods, and results. Include a discussion of the importance your findings to public health/nutrition. Please ensure that all group members have a chance to present.

7. **Class participation and lead discussion of one article (10%)**
   You are expected to attend class, participate in group assignments, and actively participate in discussions. Depending on the class size, we will ask each student or pairs of students to lead a class discussion (approx. 15 min) of the methods in one of the assigned articles. (5 points for leading discussion, 5 points for class participation)

**Grading:**
The grading scheme for determining final course grades is as follows:

- H = 92-100
- P = 70-91
- L = 0-69

**January 13 Introduction to the course and to qualitative research methods**

**Goals:**
1. To review the syllabus and discuss the assignments.
2. To introduce the basic principles of qualitative research methods, discuss how qualitative methods compare to quantitative methods, and identify when qualitative methods appropriate to use in research.
3. To select topics for group projects and form groups.

**Assigned Readings:**
- Ulin: Chapter Two: The Language and Logic of Qualitative Research
January 20  Developing a research plan and formulating qualitative research questions

**Goals:**
1. To identify types of research topics that are appropriate to explore qualitatively.
2. To discuss different perspectives on the use of theories and conceptual frameworks in qualitative research.
3. To clarify how research questions and intervention questions differ.
4. To identify different types of interview questions.
5. To allow groups to meet and begin planning your research.

*Assigned Readings:*
- Ulin: Chapter 3: Designing the Study (pp. 33-49).

January 27  Observational Methods I: Overview of Observational Methods

**Goals:**
1. To discuss the different types of observations that can be conducted.
2. To review how researchers select an event/situation/actors to observe.
3. To discuss how researchers collect data during an observation and how observation data is used in analysis.
4. To allow groups to meet to plan your unstructured observation.

*Assigned Readings:*

February 3  Key Informant and In-Depth Interviews

**Goals:**
1. To discuss different sampling strategies for qualitative research studies.
2. To discuss what constitutes a good qualitative study participant.
3. To review ways of building rapport with informants while still remaining objective enough to ask useful questions.
4. To discuss reflexivity in qualitative research.
5. To practice interviewing on videotape and receive feedback

*Assigned Readings:*
- Ulin: Chapter 4: Collecting Qualitative Data: The Science and the Art (pp.71-89)

**February 10**  
**Interview Techniques: Probing, Active Listening**

**Goals:**
1. To review what probes are, why they are critical to data collection, and how to use them effectively.
2. To discuss the meaning of active listening, why it is important in qualitative interviews, and how to develop active listening skills.
3. To practice interviewing on videotape and receive feedback

**Assigned Readings:**

*Optional* (this is another resource if you want more guidance on questions and interviewing techniques);

**February 17**  
**Observational Methods II: Structured Observations**

Eric Hodges (Associate Professor in UNC’s School of Nursing) will be the guest speaker.

**Goals:**
1. To review different uses for structured observations in nutrition research.
2. To go through an example of using structured observation of videotaped data.
3. To practice coding using a structured observation form.
4. To allow groups to meet to design your observational datasheet.

**Assigned Readings:**

**February 24**  
**Focus Group Discussions**

**Goals:**
1. To discuss when it is appropriate to use focus group discussions rather than interviews or observations.
2. To review steps for planning focus group discussions and skills required to moderate focus groups.
3. To discuss how to design a focus group discussion guide and how this might be different from an interview guide.

**Assigned Readings:**
- Ulin: Chapter 4: Collecting Qualitative Data (pp. 89-95)
- Ulin: Appendix 6: Topic Guides for Focus Group Discussions on Reproductive Health
- Ulin: Appendix 8: Common Errors in Moderating Focus Groups

**March 3 Focus Group Discussion Practice**

**Goals:**
1. To practice conducting focus group discussions as the moderator and notetaker.
2. To receive feedback on skills as a moderator.

*No assigned readings for this session*

**SPRING BREAK**

**March 17 Data Management and Data Analysis I: Overview of the process**

**Session on the use of Dedoose qualitative data analysis software**
Eli Lieber (President of Dedoose) will be the guest speaker.

**Goals:**
1. To review strategies for managing qualitative data.
2. To provide an overview of the qualitative analysis process.
3. To discuss the goals of qualitative analysis.
4. To review the common steps involved in qualitative data analysis.

**Assigned Readings:**
- Ulin: Chapter 5: Logistics in the field (pp. 125-128)
- Ulin: Chapter 6: Qualitative Data Analysis (pp. 139-159)

**March 25 Data Analysis II: Coding/Themes**

**Goals:**
1. To discuss what coding means in qualitative research.
2. To review different types of codes and how one goes about the process of coding.
3. To discuss identification of themes in qualitative data.
4. To allow groups to meet and work on codes for your data.

**Assigned Readings:**
  – skip the part about CAQDAS coding

**March 31**

**Formative and process research: Applications of Qualitative Data**
Amy Corneli (Scientist in Behavioral and Social Sciences at FHI360) will be the guest speaker. **NOTE: Class will be held in MHRC 0001**

**Goals:**
1. To introduce students to the formative research process.
2. To discuss how to use qualitative methods as part of formative data collection.

**Assigned Readings:**

**April 7**

**Data Analysis III: Matrix Development**

**Goals:**
1. To discuss the purpose of matrices in qualitative analysis.
2. To review ways to set up comparisons in a matrix.
3. To allow groups to meet and begin developing a matrix using your data.

**Assigned Readings:**

**Optional** (this provides more guidance on making comparisons and data analysis in qualitative research):
April 14  Writing and representation in qualitative research: Telling the story of your data  
*Goals:*  
1. To discuss the writing, argumentation, and representation in qualitative analysis.  
2. To provide an overview of the use of numbers and tables in the presentation of qualitative data.  

*Assigned Readings:*  
- Ulin: Chapter 7: Putting it into words: reporting qualitative research results  

April 21  Final presentations  

*Honor Code:* Students are expected and permitted to work together on conducting their research project and analyzing the data. Individual assignments should be completed by the student on his or her own. All reflections should be done on an individual basis.  

*Syllabus Changes:* The professors reserve the right to make changes to the syllabus, including assignment due dates, when unforeseen circumstances occur. These changes will be announced as early as possible so that students can adjust their schedules.