PUB HLTH 439  Qualitative Research Methods

Summer 2014 (June 25 – August 27)

Day/Time: Wednesdays: 6:00-9:00 pm and weekly individual meetings with instructor as needed.

Classroom location: McGraw, 2-403

Course instructor: Maryann Mason, PhD

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Telephone: 312-227-7026</th>
<th>Office Hours by appointment</th>
<th>Email: <a href="mailto:mmason@luriechildrens.org">mmason@luriechildrens.org</a></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Professor</td>
<td>Lecturer</td>
<td>Director of Community Research</td>
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<tr>
<td>General Academic Pediatrics</td>
<td>Dept of Preventive Medicine</td>
<td>Consortium to Lower Obesity in Chicago Children</td>
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<tr>
<td>Feinberg School of Medicine</td>
<td>Feinberg School of Medicine</td>
<td>Smith Child Health Research Program</td>
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<tr>
<td>Northwestern University</td>
<td>Northwestern University</td>
<td>Children's Hospital of Chicago Research Center</td>
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Blackboard™

The syllabus and selected readings will be posted on the course’s Blackboard site, available at https://courses.northwestern.edu/webapps/login if you are registered for the course.

Course Description

Qualitative research employs a variety of methods. Examples of qualitative research methods include participant observation, open-ended, semi-structured or structured interviewing, focus group (or group interviews), life history narratives, document review (e.g. diaries, calendars) and visual records (e.g. photographs, video).

The choice of qualitative methods for research should be carefully considered as not all types of research problems are appropriately investigated using qualitative methods. Further, a key to success in qualitative research is skillful project design in which methods are
appropriately matched to the research problem and a variety of issues such as data sources, sampling, plans for analysis are carefully considered.

This course is designed as an introduction to qualitative methods. My intention as an instructor is to support students in the exploration of this complex method of research including appreciation for the method, its uses and appropriate application.

Qualitative methods, like all methods are based in our assumptions about the nature of knowing. We will begin the course with an orientation to the assumptions underpinning qualitative methods. From there we move to a more practical and applied focus to understand the decision making process for, and the choices involved in, choosing to do research using qualitative methods. Next, we will consider the steps involved in designing a qualitative research project. This involves a review of the logic of qualitative research design and important factors to consider when planning qualitative methods projects. Following this we will explore and gain initial experience with some of the more commonly used qualitative data collection and analysis methods used in social science and more specifically, public health research.

**Course Objectives**
The goal of the course is to introduce students to the use of qualitative methods in social science and more specifically public health research. In this course students will:

- Describe the decision making process behind the choice of qualitative vs. other methods of research.
- Evaluate a variety of published research articles utilizing qualitative methods as a means to review common methodologies and styles for presenting findings from qualitative research.
- Describe and discuss the steps involved in the planning and conduct of qualitative research.
- Evaluate the pros and cons of the use of various qualitative data sources and data collection strategies for a variety of research purposes.
- Complete a variety of exercises designed to give students beginning experience with qualitative data collection and analysis methods.

**Teaching Methods**
Most class sessions combine lecture or presentation, discussion and group work. We will occasionally engage in in-class exercises designed to assist in skill development. Students are expected to complete readings prior to class as a portion of each class session will be devoted to discussion of assigned readings and assignment deadlines may require use of assigned reading before covered in class.

Most classes will include a “journal club” like discussion on a qualitative research article led by a student or pair of students (each student will receive an assignment). Students will be responsible for developing several thoughtful questions to pose to the class (see blackboard document on developing journal club questions) for discussion. Bring your questions to class on the day you are assigned to lead the discussion. Students will either be assigned an article or asked to suggest an article for each week’s discussion.
Student Evaluation

a) Classroom participation is essential to the course and will count 20% toward evaluation. In terms of classroom participation I am looking for quality, not necessarily quantity. Some of the things I look for in terms of classroom participation:

- Posing of thoughtful questions relative to our topic(s) of interest
- Integration of readings/assignments into discussion
- Respect for others’ opinions/interests
- Preparedness
- Engagement in leading journal club discussion as assigned
- Extending ideas/skills covered to new situations
- Participation in in-class exercises

b) Assignments. There are a total of five assignments. Assignments count for 80% of the student evaluation. The breakdown of contribution per assignment is included in the table below.

When grading assignments I am looking for:

- Application of critical concepts
- Application of qualitative methods
- Demonstrated understanding and use of methodologies/techniques
- Writing quality (coherence, grammar, spelling, citation formats etc.)
- The extent to which the assignment is fulfilled.

Assignment #1: Due July 2th

Choosing a topic for qualitative inquiry. Complete a two-page project topic proposal briefly describing a research topic you would like to explore using qualitative methods. The proposal should clearly explain the topic you wish to investigate (who, what, where, why) and the rationale for why you are choosing a qualitative methods approach. Specifically, it should answer the following questions:

1. What is the research topic? Does it address behavior? environments?, a social phenomenon? relationships? Something else? What are the characteristics of the setting, and those involved?
2. What factors or conditions make this topic appropriate for qualitative research methods? For example is it exploratory? Is this a hard to reach population? Is there something which would make it otherwise difficult to research with other methods?
3. What can use of qualitative methods add to this project that could not be gained from quantitative methods
Conclude the paper with at least three research questions you are proposing to investigate with qualitative methods. A poorly written research question is very general, for example: why do teenagers engage in risky behaviors. A better research question is more specific, for example: Under what circumstances do urban Hispanic teenagers between the ages 14 and 16 choose not to wear helmets while riding bicycles?

The learning purpose of this assignment is to: 1) reinforce understanding of the characteristics of topics/questions that are appropriate for qualitative approaches and 2) to help you focus on topic of interest to you for further development in later assignments.

**Assignment #2: Due July 16th**

*Selecting a sampling strategy.* Complete a two-page paper reviewing sampling strategies commonly used in qualitative methods. In the first part of the paper review at least three strategies for selecting a sample for a study using qualitative methods. Explain the strategies main features and indicate the types of situations in which these strategies may be most helpful. In the second part of the paper, choose and apply a sampling strategy to the topic/research questions you developed in assignment one. Explain why you chose this sampling approach –what are the advantages? Explain potential challenges with this sampling approach to your topic.

The learning purposes of this assignment are to further your thinking about sampling in studies using qualitative methods and to familiarize you with common qualitative sampling strategies including their relative strengths and challenges.

**Assignment #3: Due July 30th**

*Selecting a data collection method.* In a two-page paper, briefly describe a data collection method that could be applied for the topic/questions you proposed in assignment #1. The paper should provide a rationale for why you made the choices you did. For example, if you are proposing a project that uses focus group techniques, why have you chosen that technique over other qualitative methods? What advantages does this approach have? What challenges will it allow you to overcome? What are some of the downsides to using this method? How might the data collection method chosen affect recruitment strategies and sampling decisions?

The learning purpose of this assignment is to engage you in thinking about the various qualitative data collection methods available to you and their fit with research purposes.

**Assignment #4: Due Aug 13th**

*Developing a data collection protocol.* Create a data collection protocol using one of the methods we covered in class (focus group format, interview schedule, observation checklist, etc) for the project you proposed in Assignment #1. A protocol is a tool that helps you streamline data collection. It guides you through the data collection process. The protocol should be feasible given the sampling strategy you proposed in your in assignment 2 and responsive to the data collection method proposed in assignment 3. For example, if in assignment 3 if you are proposing to use focus groups, you should create a focus group protocol for this assignment. Grading will be done based on the use of best practices in protocol design (are the questions in an appropriate format? Does the order make sense? Are they leading? Do they fit the
proposed audience’s likely knowledge base)?

The learning purpose of this assignment is to give you experience in the development of a data collection protocol. It should push you to consider/anticipate the many ways in which data collection methods can help or hinder a research project.

**Assignment #5  Due August 27th.**

*Applying a coding scheme:* Using a coding scheme and qualitative data provided to you by the instructor, code the assigned data. Coded transcripts should include the application of codes in the coding scheme to the data. Coding is a time intensive process and is filled with revisions and the development of analytical insight. This assignment requires you to provide hard copies of data with codes applied and a journal with notes regarding thoughts and reflections on a) suggestions for revised coding categories; b) insights on patterns/relationships within the codes, c) linkages to other concepts, theories and ways of understanding the data.

The learning purpose of this assignment is to give you experience with coding so that you may better understand and reflect on the iterative process required for coding qualitative data.

Breakdown of student evaluation components

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Evaluation component</th>
<th>% of grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attendance, classroom participation (incl journal club leadership)</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assignment 1: choosing a topic for qualitative inquiry</td>
<td>16%</td>
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<td>Assignment 2: selecting a sampling strategy</td>
<td>16%</td>
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<td>Assignment 3: selecting a data collection method</td>
<td>16%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assignment 4: developing a data collection protocol</td>
<td>16%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assignment 5: applying a coding scheme</td>
<td>16%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100%</td>
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V.  **Course Evaluation**
The MPH Program administers web-based course evaluations to students for each course near the end of the quarter. *Your completion of both the unit (course) and faculty evaluation components is required; failure to complete either of the evaluations will result in an incomplete grade until the evaluations are submitted.* You will be sent the web link and instructions via email later in the quarter. You will have about two weeks to complete the evaluations before grades are submitted. Your evaluation of the course and faculty is anonymous; your identity cannot be linked with your responses.

VI.  **Academic Integrity**
Every Northwestern faculty member and student belongs to a community of scholars where
academic integrity is a fundamental commitment. The Program in Public Health abides by the 
standards of academic conduct, procedures, and sanctions as set forth by The Graduate School at Northwestern University. Students and faculty 
are responsible for knowledge of the information provided by The Graduate School on their Web page at 
http://www.tgs.northwestern.edu/academics/academic-services/integrity/index.html
Academic misconduct includes, but is not limited to
1. Receiving or giving unauthorized aid on examinations or homework 
2. Plagiarism 
3. Fabrication 
4. Falsification or manipulation of academic records 
5. Aiding or abetting any of the above 
The PPH follows The Graduate School’s procedure for evaluating alleged academic misconduct, as outlined on the TGS website. 
http://www.tgs.northwestern.edu/academics/academic-services/integrity/dishonesty/index.html
Faculty reserve the right to use the “Safe Assignment: Plagiarism Detection Tool” that is part of the Course Management System to evaluate student assignments. Information about this tool can be found at http://www.it.northwestern.edu/education/coursemanagement/support/assessments/safeassignment.html is based on multiple components including classroom participation, team assignments and self and peer evaluations.

Texts and readings

Required text:

Additional required reading material is noted on the class schedule below. These articles/publications are available on Blackboard (as links).

Please note that reading assignments may change during the course. I will be filling a number of journal club article slots after I learn more about students’ specific interests in research and qualitative methods. This enables me to be responsive to the specific research topics and methods in which students are interested.

Additional resources of interest:
Free qualitative software trial links
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class date</th>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Readings</th>
<th>Assignments due</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| June 25    | Course overview, what are qualitative methods, when are they appropriate? | • Quinn, Chapter 1  
• Miles & Huberman, Chapter 1  
• Pope C, Mays N. Qualitative Research: reaching the parts other methods cannot reach: an introduction to qualitative methods in health and health services research. BMJ 311:42-45. |  |
| July 2     | Overview of the qualitative research process: design, data collection, sampling, analysis | • Quinn, Chapters 2 and 5  
• Miles, Huberman and Saldana, Chapter 2  
Journal club articles:  
• Schifferdecker, KE and Reed VA. Using mixed methods research in medical education: basic guidelines for researchers. Medical Education 2009: 43: 637–644  
• TBD | Assignment 1 |
| July 9     | Working with the IRB  
Guest speaker: Kathleen Murphy  
Ethics in QM | • Quinn, Chapter 7, pages 405-415  
• Miles, Huberman and Saldana: Chapter 3: Ethical Issues in Analysis  
Journal club articles:  
• TBD  
• TBD |  |
| July 16    | Topic: Data making techniques part 1: Interviewing and observation | • Quinn, Chapters 6 and 7  
• Family Health International. “Qualitative Research Methods: A Data Collector’s Field Guide. Modules 2 and 3  
Journal club articles:  
• Smith AF, Pope C, Goodwin D, Mort M. Inter professional handover and patient safety in anaesthesia: observational study of handovers in the | Assignment 2 |
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tr>
<td>July 23</td>
<td>Data making techniques part 2: Focus groups and photovoice</td>
<td>Family Health International. “Qualitative Research Methods: A Data Collector’s Field Guide. Module 4</td>
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<td>Assignment 3</td>
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<td>July 30</td>
<td>Data management</td>
<td>Family Health International. “Qualitative Research Methods: A Data Collector’s Field Guide. Module 5</td>
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<td>Assignment 3</td>
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<td>Aug 6</td>
<td>Analysis I: Coding</td>
<td>Quinn, Chapter 8, pages 462-466 Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, Chapter 4, pages 69-86 Journal club articles: TBD TBD TBD</td>
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<td>Aug 13</td>
<td>Analysis II: Advanced coding techniques</td>
<td>Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, Chapter 4, pages 86-104 Journal club articles: TBD TBD TBD</td>
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<td>Assignment 4</td>
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<td>Date</td>
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<td>Aug 20</td>
<td>Data displays for analysis</td>
<td>• Miles, Huberman, and Saldana, Chapters 5 to 11&lt;br&gt;Journal club articles:&lt;br&gt;• Judging Qualitative research: Giacomini MK, Cook DJ. Users’ Guides to the Medical Literature: XXIII. Qualitative Research in Health Care: Are the Results of the Study Valid? JAMA. 2000;284:357-363.&lt;br&gt;• TBD&lt;br&gt;• TBD</td>
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