

Working & Nursing Study with Professor Katherine Johnson

Thu, 02/15/2018 - 00:00

|

Alexa newcomb@tulane.edu

[View PDF](#)



I've now completed the first couple weeks of my new internship and I'm feeling energized! I'm Alexa, a junior from Seattle studying public health and Spanish (and I've just added a political science minor!). This is my first semester back at Tulane after spending the fall studying urban public health in Buenos Aires, Argentina. I'm incredibly excited to be working as a research assistant with Dr. Katherine Johnson, a professor and researcher in Tulane's sociology department, on her Working & Nursing study. This is a qualitative study collecting working women's breastfeeding experiences, victories and struggles in the New Orleans area, and using this

information to evaluate workplaces and impel necessary policy change.

Dr. Johnson's study is intriguing to me because it is a question of reproductive rights for women who choose to resume work after having a child, while recognizing breastfeeding as the best option for them and their child. I want to learn about these mothers' undoubtedly varied experiences and how they are able, or struggle, to exercise their rights and achieve a work-feeding balance. The study also represents an intersection between public health, sociology and reproductive justice that allows me to explore research approaches common in each field. Moreover, I'm eager to gain specific qualitative research skills such as reviewing academic literature, conducting interviews, and learning how data is interpreted and conclusions are drawn from a qualitative project. I ultimately want to work in legal advocacy for women and families, and will always be thinking how I can apply this learning to my future.

During my first meeting with Dr. Johnson, she described how she conducts the interviews and how she likes to make it as convenient as possible for the mother to meet. She's met mothers on and off campus, at their homes or coffee shops nearby, in whatever space is most comfortable for them to share their experiences. She also explained that the current recruiting methods she has been using to interview mothers have resulted in large numbers of mostly white, middle or upper middle-class working women reaching out. Actively recruiting women from a greater variety of socioeconomic and ethnic/racial demographics is a big goal for her currently. I then received my first main task in Dr. Johnson's project, which is to compile a literature review surrounding the role of factors like race and socioeconomic status in breastfeeding, and what disparities or specific issues might exist.

This has been going pretty well, and I'm almost ready to consult with Dr. Johnson over my major findings. Literature reviews can be tricky because you never really know when you're 'done' per se, but there are always new perspectives and nuances I'm discovering as I tap my sources. Amidst all this, last week I visited the newly renovated lactation room – the Mothers' Room – in the LBC to evaluate it for particular traits and personal feelings I had from visiting it. I recorded information for Dr. Johnson like its location, the foot traffic surrounding it, certain amenities it did or didn't have, and words and feelings that came to mind when I saw it. I took some photos as well and made sure I recorded every detail as to paint a vivid picture for her, as she wasn't there. I repeated this process at two more lactation centers on the Uptown campus the next day: I journeyed to the Reily Student Recreation Center

and Tulane Law School to visit these lactation spaces. Next week, I'll be visiting Tulane's downtown campus to investigate the spaces there. This information will add to similar documentation of other workplace lactation rooms across New Orleans.

After orienting myself with the literature and some terminology and key concepts surrounding breastfeeding, I will move on to conducting quality checks on interview transcripts, which involves listening over recordings and matching it to the transcription to ensure accuracy, and even assist in conducting interviews myself. I'm very excited to interview mothers or assist at one point. For now, the goal is to always be on the hunt for new information!