

**Figueroa Interdisciplinary Group (FIG) Research Laboratory
NS 4000/4010/8990/9990 (cross-listed with BIOG 4990)
Independent Research – Academic Year 2026-2027
Cornell University, Division of Nutritional Sciences**

Principal Investigator: Dr. Roger Figueroa, Ph.D., M.P.H., M.Sc.

Lab Meeting Time and Location: Tuesdays 1:00pm-2:00pm
Martha Van Rensselaer Hall

Lab Website: www.figlab.org

Lab Email Address: figlab@cornell.edu

Graduate Research Assistants: Gwyneth Frederick, M.P.H., Elisabetta Ferrero, M.P.H.

Mission Statement

The FIG Research Laboratory is a group of interdisciplinary nutrition scientists conducting academic research and developing strategies to address food and nutrition security to advance health equity. Our mission is to leverage community assets, diverse methods, and team science to build capacity for equitable health in priority populations.

Diversity and Inclusion Statement

The Division of Nutritional Sciences (DNS) is “committed to an inclusive environment that treats all individuals with fairness, dignity, and respect” (<https://www.human.cornell.edu/dns/about/deistatement>). As research laboratory in DNS, our goal is to cultivate a learning environment where everyone is welcomed, celebrated, and respected.

While working together to build this community we ask all members to:

- Share their unique experiences, values, and beliefs.
- Be responsible for listening and attempting to understand the views of others.
- Address your fellow lab members with respect.
- Appreciate the opportunity that we have to learn from each other in this community.
- Value each other's opinions and communicate in a respectful manner.
- Keep discussions that the community has of a personal (or professional) nature confidential.
- Use this opportunity together to discuss ways in which we can create an inclusive environment in this course and across the Cornell community.

“Self-care and Work-Life Balance” Statement

The FIG Research Laboratory urges its group members, as artistically and eloquently proposed by [O'Dwyer, Pinto, & McDonough](#) (2017), to: “demand and protect the time, space, and reflective practice” to balance activities within and outside of academia. We encourage our members to adopt strategies that best suits their productivity and selfcare needs.

General Expectations

There are no set of requirements or general expectations for members of the FIG Lab beyond conducting ethically-sound, rigorous laboratory research. In doing so, members are expected to delve into areas not very well understood yet (or requiring better understanding).

In such process, we are encouraged to:

- Ask good questions
- Formulate testable hypotheses
- Design, implement, execute (and other times evaluate) research processes
- Analyze data without a bias towards a particular “answer”

Many times, in research, we will fail to reject null hypotheses and our challenge is to learn from these and examine new research questions and/or test new hypotheses. While more experienced members of the team may have ideas about what to try, please remember that in research, the whole point is that no one really knows yet.

Training

Members of the FIG Lab should consult with Cornell’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) regarding individual needs for ethics and responsible conduct of research (RCR) training to conduct academic research. In addition, it is highly recommended to acquire training through CITI prior to participating in any research activities in the lab. Consult with the director if you have further questions.

Lab organization

The FIG Research Laboratory is physically located in Ithaca, NY (Cornell University campus). The specific location is Martha Van Rensselaer Hall (MVR), room 3206. The FIG Lab director, Dr. Figueroa, is at his faculty office down the hallway from MVR 3206 (room 3215).

Group and individual meetings

Based on individual availability, members of the FIG lab will meet as a group and individually as agreed upon. Each academic term, the team will come to a consensus about a regular schedule for term meetings to discuss research projects.

Data security and storage

In the FIG lab, two (2) key approaches will be considered to address data security, storage, and management. First, members of the FIG lab will consult with specialists across the data lifecycle, the Cornell Institute for Social and Economic Research (CISER) prior to working on research projects that require handling/managing data. Secondly, an archive to store files, including data files, will be developed through Cornell Box (<https://cornell.account.box.com/login>). In the meantime, consult Dr. Figueroa on best practices until these two approaches are pursued regularly by members of the lab.

Breaks and vacation

Members of the FIG lab are encouraged to take breaks and vacation as needed. It would be ideal to provide a notice in advance of any break or vacation plans, but not required. Please consult with your immediate departmental unit and/or university’s policies regarding breaks and vacation.

Authorship Guidelines

Decisions regarding authorship will be agreed upon in the early stages of abstracts, grants and manuscripts development. Constructive discussions to assign authorship order and roles can also be set up as an on-going process in situations where early decisions might need to be re-visited. In particular, changes to authorship order and roles may take place based on the level of project involvement within the research lifecycle (i.e., from project initiation to completion). As a general authorship guideline, see [this resource](#) from NIH to conceptualize authorship contributions and roles.

Coursework

There are no course pre-requisites or requirements to participate in the FIG lab's research. If you are a student in DNS, please adhere to the recommendations from your graduate and undergraduate curriculum advisors. I do recommend a baseline understanding of research methods in quantitative, qualitative, and mixed method research. Please contact me if you would like to consult on specific plans to take new courses relevant to your research in the FIG lab.

Dissertations & Theses

Whether you are an undergraduate or graduate student, there is an opportunity to work within the FIG lab to complete your final project towards completion of your degree-granting academic program (i.e., Honor's Thesis, Master's Thesis, or Doctoral Dissertation). Such experience should be conceptualized as a foundational career stage to be leveraged post-graduation. It is expected of each student to develop a final project that makes a clear contribution to the existing knowledge base in the field (i.e., address specific gaps, develop a new method or measure, among others). As an iterative process, your project will evolve over time and many factors will shape the final output (i.e., approach, resources, support, skills, timeline). Ideally, the final output will be disseminated in the form of a conference abstract and/or academic journal article. For students working on doctoral dissertations, a set of 2-3 conference abstracts and/or academic journal articles are usually generated within dissertation research.

Dr. Figueroa is available to work with each student on their final projects as research chair or as a committee member. Students are expected to reach out to Dr. Figueroa in the early planning stages to facilitate the process. All students should follow the guidelines established by the university and/or their respective academic units.

Funding

As a result of recent institutional [statements](#) on the university's financial austerity, new funding opportunities may be limited at this time. As new funding opportunities become available, the research team will be notified accordingly. In the meantime, please consult Dr. Figueroa if interested in discussing funding opportunities further.

Establishing Independence & Transferable Skills

(<https://careercenter.umich.edu/article/phd-transferable-skills>)

As early-career trainees and future professionals in your respective fields, it is critically important that you develop transferable skills to maximize the training opportunities afforded to you by the FIG lab. Some examples of transferable skills that you should develop over time include:

- Analysis & Problem-Solving
- Interpersonal & Leadership Skills
- Project Management & Organization
- Research & Information Management
- Self-Management & Work Habits
- Written & Oral Communication

You are always welcome to consult with Dr. Figueroa about brainstorming ideas or planning your projects. Nonetheless, you are encouraged to use your own good judgment and execute responsibility as you work independently on your projects. It is expected that by the time each trainee completes their training, a majority of transferable skills would be mastered, which will equip each trainee post-graduation to function as independent practitioners, researchers, educators, and professionals.

Career Paths

Career goals usually evolve over time, especially for early-career trainees. Most opportunities within the FIG lab will prepare you for an academic career. Nonetheless, many of you may prioritize careers in other sectors (i.e., healthcare, industry, policy), and Dr. Figueroa will work with each of you to maximize your training within the FIG lab to make you marketable in any sector post-graduation.

Professional Development & Scientific Meetings

Participating in activities that enrich trainees' professional development are encouraged to all members of the FIG lab. These may involve conferences, courses, institutes, trainings, workshops, among others. As a reference, Dr. Figueroa recommends that each trainee elect to participate in these activities if/ when their work fits the scope of a particular program, they wish to participate in. Please consult with Dr. Figueroa if you have any questions.

Minimizing Conflicts

It is critical that we work together on minimizing conflicts while participating in educational and research activities. Some key assets that may be leveraged to being most assertive in the work that we do include regular communication, setting up realistic expectations, team consensus, among others. If any concerns or misunderstandings arise, please do not hesitate to bring anything up to the team's attention. You may also communicate any concerns to external sources of support at the university level and beyond.