

UCL'S COLLABORATIVE SOCIAL  
SCIENCE DOMAIN (CSSD)  
PH.D. NETWORK NEWSLETTER

**ISSUE I.**



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# Welcome to the CSS Domain

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UCL's Collaborative Social Science Domain (CSSD) fosters collaboration across the various social sciences within UCL, and between the social sciences and the natural and applied sciences, and the humanities across UCL departments and faculties, and beyond. Through a program of engagement and impact activities, including our Early Career Researcher Network (which includes the PhD network), we seek to build UCL capacity in this domain, encourage methodological innovation, and establish collaborative networks across disciplinary boundaries.

The new PhD coordinating group of the CSSD consists of current PhD students at UCL across a range of disciplines. The group aims to serve UCL's PhD student community with an interest in interdisciplinarity, by building and engaging a network of students across the PhD journey to share resources, offer peer support, and opportunities for collaboration; creating opportunities for networking and learning about approaches to interdisciplinary research with a social science perspective through events and communications and signposting to career resources for after the PhD.

## **Join the UCL Collaborative Social Science Domain**

If you are a member of UCL research staff and would like to join the UCL Collaborative Social Science community, simply select the UCL IRIS Collaborative Social Science theme when you complete/update your IRIS profile.

### **Join our mailing list**

Sign-up for our email updates about funding, training and other initiatives. And tell us a little more about your research interests.

**Follow us on Twitter**

## **Early Career Researcher Network**

The Collaborative Social Science Domain's Early Career Researcher Network provides support and training to researchers across UCL who are in the early stages of their career.

# Meet the Team

COLLABORATIVE SOCIAL SCIENCE DOMAIN'S  
PHD NETWORK

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## ANEEZA PERVEZ

Psychology and Human Development, IOE, UCL.

I'm Aneez Pervez a PhD student in psychology and Human Development at UCL IoE. I'm a social developmental psychologist and my research work has centred around investigating prosociality and peer relationships in children and understanding the psychosocial experiences of young adults. I believe that collaborations both within the varying fields of psychology and with other disciplines are imperative to developing an authentic understanding of human experiences.



## NUOYA TAN

Experimental Psychology, Brain Sciences, UCL.

I am Nuoya Tan, a third-year Ph.D. student in Experimental Psychology at UCL. I have been investigated human creativity at a cognitive level for the last three years. My research project aims to generate a new creative thinking task, explore the relationship between social cognition and creative thinking, and apply the knowledge of creative thinking to the engineering and marketing fields.



## **MICHAEL D'APRIX**

Institute of Archaeology, Social & Historical Sciences, UCL.

I'm Mike D'Aprix and I'm currently working on my PhD in the Institute of Archaeology. I'm studying the way method, theory, and philosophy work in archaeology to better understand the way the discipline has become diverse but fragmented. The goal is to develop ways to overcome the fragmented and divided landscape of archaeology and best utilize the diversity of its many parts to collaborate internally with other archaeology but also externally with other disciplines on a larger scale, more efficiently, and more effectively.

## **MARIA LONG**

Psychiatry, Brain Sciences, UCL.

I'm Maria Long, a part-time Ph.D. student in social psychiatry at the Division of Psychiatry at UCL. Alongside this I work as a trial manager on a research project evaluating an intervention of reducing antipsychotic medication for people with psychosis and similar disorders. I am interested in the social context of distress, qualitative methods and the potential for using collaborative social science to solve complex problems in mental health research.



## **LIU YUNCONG**

Education Practice and Society, IOE, UCL

I am Liu Yuncong, a third year PhD in the Department of Education, Practice and Society at the Institute of Education, UCL. My research is to explore how the change of the medium of instruction affect student opportunity to learn in Tanzanian secondary schools. I believe that collaborative researchers can answer bigger and more complex research questions by combining expertise and resources.

# IN FOCUS: PROF. CAREY JEWITT

## CSS CAREER TRAJECTORY



### Chair of the CSSD

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*Follow your research interests and don't be put off by those who want to pin you down to one thing or worse listen to your own anxiety that you should!*

#### Could you briefly describe your field of work for us?

I research how digital technologies shape the ways that people communicate, learn and interact with one another and the world. My current project is called InTouch and is funded by a European Research Council Consolidator Award. InTouch explores how advanced touch technologies - from virtual touch to robotic touch, are shaping what counts as touch and how digital touch is entering into our communicational landscapes. We are interested in understanding and informing how designers, computer scientists and engineers design new types of touch, as well as the hopes and fears of people for the future of touch.

The project team is interdisciplinary - we have backgrounds in Sociology, Design, Human-Computer Interaction (HCI), Ethnography and Sensory studies, and Technology studies, and we work with collaborators from within computer science and HCI, engineering, design, art, choreography, and performance art.

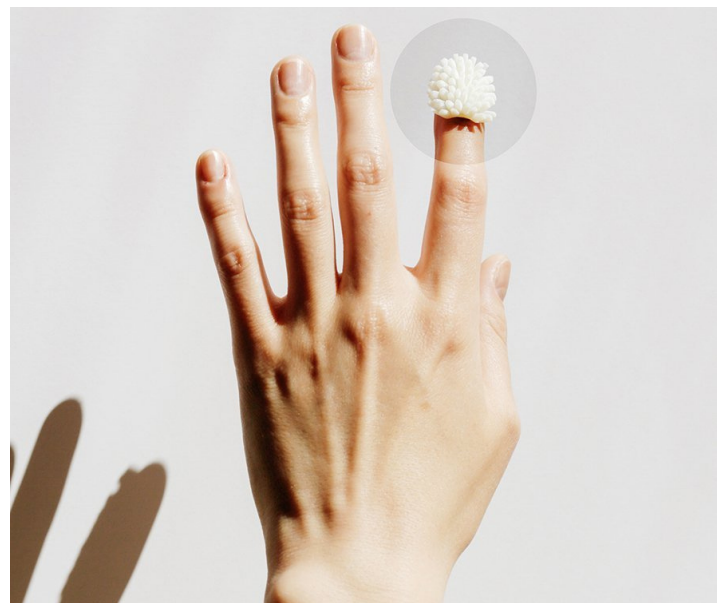
## How did you get involved in interdisciplinary/collaborative work?

From an early stage I did not fit the idea of disciplinary boundaries: I studied A' levels in Pure and Applied Maths, Chemistry and Art and was regularly told to drop Art. I didn't listen and I went on to study Fine Art. Through Art I worked with young people at risk of care and custody. I became interested in moments when talk fails and non-verbal communication takes over, and I ended up researching communication in sexual health contexts including hospitals and General Practice. I worked as an applied social researcher for 10 years during which time I did a part-time Sociology MSc in Research Theory and Methods (my maths helped with the statistics and quantitative modules).

I became obsessed with research methodology and joined the Institute of Education as a social researcher working on a series of large projects on multimodal communication in the classroom led by Professor Gunther Kress. Multimodal communication is concerned with how people orchestrate gaze, gesture, body posture and movement, and talk to make meaning, and draws ideas from different social science disciplines and practices. Over the past 20 years I have helped to bring a multimodal perspective to digitally mediated communication and this has led me to collaborate with scholars from a variety of disciplines, and to my co-founding the interdisciplinary SAGE journals *Visual Communication* and *Multimodality & Society*.

## What difficulties have you encountered - both expected and unexpected?

I have not encountered many difficulties in my work, I think I have been lucky in that the people I worked with directly have been innovative and/or interdisciplinary and have valued my trajectory from art to social science. An early mentor was my MSc supervisor, Professor Nigel Gilbert who started his career as an engineer interested in computing and went on to become a sociologist.



Fulu - a haptic fingernail by Ryo Tada.  
Image credit: Ryo Tada

That said, I have sometimes found it difficult to locate myself, and felt like I had to 'make my mind up' about who I was as a researcher. I would dread introductions where other scholars seemed to confidently announce their disciplinary label - linguist, sociologist, while I would wonder what I could rightly claim to be, and bundle together some keywords and hope for the best. Not acting on that anxiety and following what I found interesting has paid off. I now think of that disciplinary-not-fitting and uncertainty as a price worth paying for being in a space which I find liberating and creative. It took a while for me to find and claim my academic identity: now I say, 'I am an interdisciplinary social science researcher' and if more is needed, 'I work at the intersection of the sociology, art and design, and computer science/HCI'.

## What have been the most memorable parts of your journey?

Five memorable moments on my journey. First, falling in love (I am not exaggerating) with methods and research as a process - this happened through my MSc at Surrey University, the teaching was inspirational and I didn't want it to end! Second, an early conversation with Prof Gunther Kress my first academic boss, who became my mentor and friend over 20 years.

I remember going unannounced to his office after two weeks of starting my junior research contract and reeling off a list of things I really did not understand at all, and suggesting that he sack me! He just said, 'That's great, you can see what we need to do'. That conversation was valuable as it legitimated me telling Gunther when I didn't understand something and helped me to learn. Third, a feeling of absolute joy and relief when I was awarded funding for the MIDAS: Methodological Innovation in Digital Arts & Social Science project: me and my CV finally made sense - I had gone full circle and everything connected! Getting that grant helped me to fully recognise the value of my interdisciplinary way of looking - trained through art practice and sociological practice and shaped by others - notably Gunther Kress and my frequent collaborator Prof Sara Price, as well as some of the researchers and students that I have worked with. My interdisciplinary trajectory underpins the InTouch project - getting an ERC award is a fourth memorable moment on my research journey and becoming the Chair of the UCL Collaborative Social Science Domain is a fifth.

## What advice would you give PhD students and ECRs interested in collaborative work?

Follow your research interests and don't be put off by those who want to pin you down to one thing or worse listen to your own anxiety that you should!

There are many amazing and super successful scholars at UCL who have complex interdisciplinary trajectories and populate their centres with interdisciplinary teams. To name two. Nick Tyler Director of the UCL Centre for Transport Studies and Chadwick Professor of Civil Engineering, started life as a musician and works with neuroscientists, psychologists, architects, computer vision experts, and educationalists. Ruth Morgan, Director of the UCL Centre for the Forensic Sciences, Professor of Crime and Forensic Sciences and Vice Dean (Interdisciplinarity Entrepreneurship) in the Faculty of Engineering Sciences, has a background in physical and human geography which took her to forensic science and building an interdisciplinary approach to the challenges contemporary forensic science faces. UCL is a brilliant place to be an interdisciplinary researcher!



Remote Contact: Motion Prints

# IN FOCUS: Interdisciplinary PhD work at UCL

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SHAMSUN NAHAR -  
PHD CANDIDATE -  
UCL IOE

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## Understanding the linguistic choices of Islamist extremists through the application of interdisciplinary studies

### What is your project about and how did you decide upon it?

For my PhD project, I am researching literature that is produced by Islamist extremist groups like 'Islamic State'. Specifically, I analyse the way that the Islamic scripture has been manipulated by such groups to fit their narrative and how it has then been used to persuade others into adopting the same political aims.

I've always had two real passions; these being getting to know about religions and languages. I remember going to a bible study for a little while, just to educate myself on Christianity.

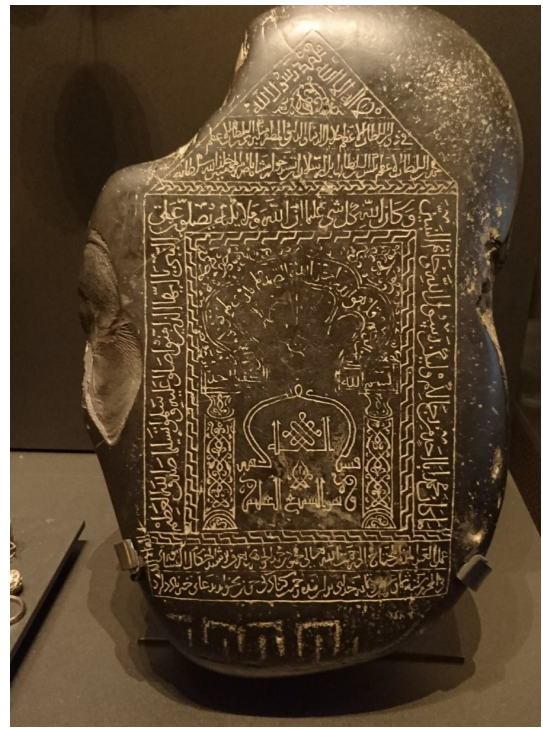


My bible study group were attending this talk one day by a Christian apologist, so I went along too, but the talk itself seemed very much a *this is why Islam is wrong* rather than *this is why Christianity is right*. At the end of the talk, the speaker held up an A5 copy of a Bible and a pocket-size copy of the Qur'an and he said "the bigger the better", and I kid you not, the crowd went wild with laughter and applause.

Anyway, the speaker spoke about how there were so many passages in the Qur'an that advocate violence, and he read them out one after another (and I made note of them so I could research them when I got home). He then asked the crowd what the word 'radical' meant. This got me thinking, and I realized that for me 'radical' was 'something that deviates from the norm', but the crowd all shouted back "ROOT".

His next statement was "then the radical Muslim must be one who follows it at the root and believes what the Qur'an says. The bad Muslim is the moderate Muslim". I found this very strange, but the hoots and cheers made it very clear that the audience were all big fans of the speaker, and this was, most likely, not the first talk they were attending. But I guess most importantly I realized that a group of people had adopted this man's definition and perception of Islam and Muslims.

My mind instantly began to join the dots and I realised that if he can manipulate language and scripture to suit his needs, then this may also be the case with Islamic extremists. So, I researched all the parts of scripture he referenced, looked at their history and chose to become well versed in the subject. I just had a feeling that I had to do something with this information and combat this kind of brainwashing and manipulation, so I applied for a PhD that looks at both religion and language, and I really couldn't be happier.



## what makes your project interdisciplinary?

To analyse the way that scripture is manipulated, I use a two-pronged approach. I combine the Discourse Historical Approach (a type of Critical Discourse Analysis in Linguistics) with Content Analysis and Rhetorical Criticism (types of Textual Analysis in Cultural Studies).

## What motivated you to design an interdisciplinary project?

As I was designing my methodology, I found that having a methodological approach that was embedded in only one discipline meant that the analysis I would conduct would be limited. I really needed to combine two disciplines to be able to examine the many facets of what was happening. I chose to apply DHA because it allows me to look at the historical perspective of the ideologies that are expressed through discourse. It allows me to look at what a person intended to say at the time of writing and not just what is being interpreted. For example, there are a number of verses in the Qur'an that are violent - there's no question about it - but these verses were written during a state of war and persecution.

It shouldn't be extrapolated to mean that Muslims ought to kill whoever or whatever the verse states today, in this modern age. This provides the historical background against which the scripture was produced, as well as the background in which the literature was written. I then use branches of Textual Analysis to analyse the actual messages embedded in the text, and how they try to persuade the audience into accepting and adopting their way of thinking. I ask questions of how this might radicalise others, and hope my work can contribute to counter-narrative formation.

## What do you enjoy most about working across two departments?

I don't want to say something cheesy like what I enjoy most is that I can learn so many new and different things, but it's true. Applying analytical techniques from two different disciplines means I'm not restricted with how in depth I can get with my analysis. Moreover, I think I would feel like my hands were tied if I was limited to just linguistic approaches, as while this would add to literature it would tell a one-sided story.

## What challenges have you faced?

When I initially started to think about my methodological approach, I felt quite stumped because I couldn't really get the breadth or depth of analysis that I really wanted to. It took reading about different approaches and trying them out, pairing different approaches together to see if they could fit properly. My supervisor will confirm that for my Upgrade paper, I jig sawed several different approaches together. It was hard and very frustrating. I kept finding myself back at square one. It took reading and learning multiple approaches in my own area of study as well as others to try and get something to fit. When I finally decided to work across two department, I felt my research was getting somewhere!

## Do you have advice for other PhD students currently doing or wanting to do interdisciplinary work?

Yes, read outside of your own field and approaches in your department/discipline. A lot of the work I do is quite different to what my supervisor does or is used to, so it's been a learning curve for us both in some ways. He's been very open to new things and accepting when I've come with something new to the table. It just meant that I had to know the ins and outs of what I wanted to do and to be able to show him that my ideas were workable. You must be able to demonstrate that what you're saying is the best approach. If you feel restricted in one discipline, look at another, or even a third. Just remember nothing will magically work and it's at best a trial-and-error process.



# NEWS & EVENTS !

## SAVE THE DATE!

### UPCOMING INTERDISCIPLINARY CONFERENCE AND POSTER COMPETITION

Block **November 18th** in your Calendars!  
we are bringing an amazing and informative  
one-day virtual conference to you!

Starting at **9.30 am till 4.10 pm (with plenty  
of breaks)** - you will have the chance to hear  
and learn from our keynote speakers,  
discussion panels, and take part in a unique  
poster competition!!

Not only will you be able to present a poster  
and compete for a prize you will have a fun  
day full of information about how you can  
make most of your time at UCL and set the  
stage for a stellar career beyond your  
doctorate



## NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES & EVENTS

The ECR and Ph.D. network hold  
networking opportunities and events for  
Ph.D. students and ECR at UCL

You can find out about our past events  
and all upcoming events and the latest  
news on our webpage or through the  
domain's social media





## CONNECT WITH US!

Would you like us to feature your work in our next newsletter? or would you like to find someone outside your discipline and institute to collaborate with?

UCL has a wide range of competitions (e.g. Grand challenges & UCL changemakers) that offer to fund interdisciplinary projects.

So what are you waiting for - email us at [m.reade@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:m.reade@ucl.ac.uk)