



Module Syllabus

HPSC0041 Dissertation

module description

HPSC0041 is a full-year, one-unit course for third-year students. Students undertake a research project largely of their own design in the field of science and technology studies. Project management is their responsibility. An appropriate supervisor is agreed with the course coordinator, and research is discussed during regular tutorials. Students submit a 10,000-word dissertation summarising their findings. They also deliver a presentations presenting their work-in-progress.

Moodle: <https://moodle.ucl.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=37543>

Module tutor

tutor	Your supervisor is your principal point-of-contact.
module organiser	Tiago Mata
email	t.mata@ucl.ac.uk
office location	22 Gordon Square, room 2.1.
office hours	Tuesday 11-12 (office), Thursday 11-12 (online/Teams)

Timetable and room information

Students are expected to schedule, at the minimum, fortnightly sessions with their supervisor. The regularity of those meetings may change in the course of the year.

Throughout the year we will run several workshops to support the dissertation work: on ethics, on research planning and organisation, on topics selected by the students, on work in progress. These will be advertised and listed on the Moodle site.

Assessment

Students registered for this module have the following assessment:

Type	Description	weight (%)
Written	Dissertation (10,000 words)	80
Oral	Oral examination (20 minutes)	20

Schedule

activity	due date	instruction
dissertation (10,000 words)	22 April 2024, 5pm	Submit through Moodle as one file
Oral examination (20 minutes)	On week of 20 May 2024	Dates and times to be agreed

Aims and objectives

This course provides an opportunity to pursue an independent project under the guidance of a supervisor. The main aims of HPSC0041 are:

1. pursue an independent project in science and technology studies, developing some of the student's own academic interests
2. review and appraise existing literature
3. develop research, analysis, writing and editing and organisation skills through an extended exploration of a single topic
4. integrate different themes and approaches in science and technology studies
5. work independently and critically, with tutorial support
6. enhance the understanding of the demands, and the inevitable compromises, of academic work, including project definition and management

During the course, students will demonstrate their progress by the following activities:

1. meeting with their supervisor regularly to discuss progress
2. recording notes on their work: reading, original empirical work, draft chapters, questionnaire responses, or other material
3. submitting a 10,000 word dissertation — including abstract, contents page and full bibliography — by the specified deadline
4. performing in an oral examination where they will answer probing questions about their research choices and insights.

Reading list

There are no required readings for all projects on this module.

On the Moodle site we offer some suggested readings on project management and on specific aspects of the research process. These do not replace subject specific research guidance that students should seek from their assigned tutors.

Course plan

It is useful to think of various milestones across the academic year that should give students a grip on the pace of their work.

The first milestone is at the **start of the session** when students are expected to have elaborated a research plan (undertaken during the summer). While not formally assessed, the research plan will assist the module coordinator and your supervisor in monitoring project development and play a vital role in formative assessment.

The second milestone is a couple of workshops in **February** where students will come together to give account of their progress and will receive peer feedback. (In previous years this was done by way of a work-in-progress individual presentation, but we are discontinuing that practice from this year.)

One key milestone in the dissertation is the date when the first complete draft is finished. It is recommended that students aim to achieve this **several weeks before the final deadline for submission**, to allow time for editing and honing the argument. Please bear in mind that your supervisor is likely to have numerous teaching and research commitments over Easter and may be unable to meet with you, especially at short notice. It is strongly recommended that you and your supervisor discuss expectations for when the first draft will be circulated and what kind of feedback will be provided. Don't underestimate how long it takes to go from the first complete draft to the final dissertation.

The submission of the dissertation is scheduled for the first day of term 3, 22 of April, but the work of the module is only completed a month later. On the week of 20th of May, students will be examined orally by their first and second dissertation marker and queried on the research choices and insights of their work. To prepare for the viva students are encouraged to re-read their thesis and to review their research notes and data.

Matters of policy

Basic procedures and regulations are provided in the *STS Student Handbook* which can be found on Moodle.

Students are reminded that HPSC0041 is a required component in all BSc degrees in Science and Technology Studies (e.g., V550, V551, L391). Failure in 0041 disqualifies a student from these BSc degrees. There are no exceptions.

Meetings with supervisors: Students are expected to meet with their supervisors on a fortnightly basis. They are expected to take the initiative to ensure this schedule is kept. Students also are responsible for their progress between supervisions. The structure of supervision meetings should be determined by supervisor and student working together. Students should expect to play an active and substantial role in all supervision sessions. Students also are expected to be proactive in identifying difficulties and bringing them to the attention of their supervisor, in the first instance, and the undergraduate tutor or their personal tutor, otherwise.

Drafts: Students can expect up to one reading of the dissertation draft if it is submitted prior to the last day of term 2. **Additional readings of drafts or readings after the last day of term 2 are at the tutor's discretion.**

Additional assistance of experts: While the supervisor serves as the student's principal point-of-contact throughout the project, students are encouraged to bring additional expertise into their research project. Consultation with the supervisor is recommended on the choice of these external experts. Students with principal supervisors outside the STS teaching staff will have a subsidiary supervisor appointed within STS. Use them for internal consultation, especially on procedure and criteria for assessment.

Research Ethics: If your project involves human participants (e.g. you're conducting observations, running interviews or focus groups, recording an oral history, distributing

questionnaires or any other form of 'live' data collection) then you need to apply for ethical approval **BEFORE** collecting any data (at least two weeks in advance). No ethics approval when researching human participants means a zero grade, so it's important to get it right. See the Moodle course page for more details information.

Use of UCL e-mail address for contact: Owing to the nature of 0041, the course coordinator will distribute general messages normally via supervisors, the 0041 Moodle site, and to student UCL e-mail addresses. Students are expected to check these locations on a regular basis, especially near the dates of scheduled events, such as the presentations. Failure to access these locations is no excuse for failure to conform to distributed instructions.

Deadlines for submission of dissertation: The digital version of the dissertation must be uploaded via Moodle by 5 pm on the day of the deadline. Work submitted after this deadline normally will not be accepted. Supervisors cannot grant extensions. Extensions require the most extraordinary circumstances (e.g., lengthy hospitalisation or imprisonment) and require the written agreement of the undergraduate tutor, normally well in advance (except when the circumstances are unforeseeable). Poor time management (e.g., failure to manage a heavy workload near the due date) or loss of data on a computer or hard drive is an insufficient reason for an extension. Ultimately, the student is responsible for meeting this deadline.

Data management: Students are responsible for backing-up copies of their dissertation and making sure that these back-ups are accessible for printing or submission should the primary copy be unavailable or mislaid at the submission date. Loss of data will not be accepted as an excuse for missing deadlines.

Opportunity to rewrite dissertation or repeat presentation: There are no opportunities to rewrite written materials or to repeat presentations.

Plagiarism: The *UCL Student Handbook* defines plagiarism as "the presentation of another person's thoughts or words or artefacts or software as though they were [your] own". Students are expected to know the College and Department policies in detail and to avoid even the appearance of inappropriate behaviour. In demonstrated cases of plagiarism, or other irregularities, in this course, the student will receive a 0 F for the course and will be referred to the department and College officials accordingly. All coursework is subject to scrutiny.

Use of Generative AI: In the past months UCL has issued extensive guidance on the use of AI in assessments. There is no overall policy for the dissertation and students should seek specific guidance from their tutors/supervisors. Whatever the model chosen, students should declare all use of AI tools.

Use of essays from previous courses: Staff expect 0041 projects to be synthetic - incorporating knowledge from previous courses, new research, and consultations. Occasionally students wish to assimilate coursework from previous years into 0041 writing. In STS, the rule is simple. Material may be submitted for assessment *once and only once* in the course of a degree. Hence, for instance, an essay submitted in a course during the second year cannot also be submitted (in whole or in revised form) as a chapter in the 0041 dissertation. This constitutes self-plagiarism and is sufficient to constitute a serious irregularity.

Additional examiners: Normally, 0041 coursework is assessed first by the supervisor. Additional examiners in STS will assess these items. Provisional marks and commentary will be distributed to students at the first opportunity. To ensure fairness, all assessed materials

are made available for scrutiny by an examiner external to UCL. Marks are considered final only after the STS board of examiners has approved them in their annual meeting near the close of Term 3.

Disputed marks: Students are strongly advised in the first instance to discuss and resolve any grievances over marks informally with their supervisor. If informal discussion fails to resolve the matter satisfactorily, and there appears to be genuine and substantive grounds for appeal, the student should submit a written explanation of their grievance to the chair of the STS board of examiners. Thereafter, a final formal written appeal can be made to the College Registrar.

Mechanisms for student feedback: Students have a variety of means for commenting on the course and their supervisory arrangements. First, they may comment directly to their supervisor. Second, they may comment to the course coordinator. Third, they may consult their personal tutor or the undergraduate tutor. The department schedules regular meetings of the Student Staff Consultative Committee to which all students are invited. Comments are welcome in those meetings, too.