



# HPSC0097

## Research Project 2024-2025

### Syllabus

#### Course Description

The Research Project is the culmination of your master's degree, it is a necessary part of obtaining a master's degree as opposed to a diploma. It involves carrying out research and from that research producing a report (dissertation).

You will be guided through the process by an academic supervisor and supported by training workshops in research and writing skills, ethics, and academic integrity.

Students are expected to conduct some original research as part of the overall project. This normally involves reviewing relevant literature, identifying a research question, choosing an appropriate research method to answer that question, gathering data (or ideas), and developing an argument or series of insights that are relevant to significant conversations within the discipline. The definitions of novelty, relevance, and method differ across disciplines within the STS Department.

<b>Moodle Page</b>	Search HPSC0097 Research Project
<b>Assessment</b>	Research Report: 10, 000 words (100%)
<b>Credits</b>	60 (representing 600 hours of study)
<b>Timetable</b>	See UCL Timetable
<b>Course Convener</b>	Dr Rory Jubber
<b>Convener Contact</b>	<a href="mailto:rory.jubber@ucl.ac.uk">rory.jubber@ucl.ac.uk</a>
<b>Office Location</b>	Room 3.3 , 22 Gordon Square

## Schedule

Date	Activity
<b>Term 1</b>	Settle into the intellectual environment of the department. Find where your interests lie.
Monday 9 December 12:00-13:00 Gordon House 106	<b>Getting Started on the Research Project</b> In-person session. All students attend. Last lecture of HPSC0073. With Rory Jubber
<b>Term 2</b>	Informal conversations about projects. Talk with peers and staff about project ideas. Workshops to help develop ideas and manage formalities
TBC 1 <sup>st</sup> half term 2	<b>Desk vs Empirical Projects</b> In-person session. All students attend. With Rory Jubber
TBC 2 <sup>nd</sup> half term 2	<b>Research Review: Methods, Safety, and Data</b> This session focuses on ethics for projects that (1) collect data from human subjects, (2) collect sensitive data, or (3) involve unusual safety concerns. Preview guidance <a href="http://ucl.ac.uk/sts/ethics">ucl.ac.uk/sts/ethics</a> .
<b>Monday 24 Feb 2025, 17:00</b>	<b>Research Topic Statement Due</b>
Friday 28 March 2025	<b>Supervisor assignments distributed.</b> Convenor to distribute supervisor assignments. Once notified students are to contact their assigned supervisor and arrange one conversation at the beginning of term 3.
<b>Term 3</b>	Students are expected to organise in-person meetings with their project supervisor during Term 3. Students also will have access to workshops in Term 3
TBC	<b>Philosophical Dissertation Research and Writing</b>
TBC	<b>Science Policy Dissertation and Writing</b>
TBC	<b>Sociological Dissertation Research and Writing</b>
<b>21 May 2025</b>	<b>Deadline for Research Review applications</b> Cut-off date for those needing research review. No applications accepted after this date.
TBC	<b>Historical Dissertation Research and Writing</b> With Frank James
<b>Summer</b>	
During Summer	Students should organise in-person or online fortnightly meetings with their project supervisor.
<b>31 July 2025, 17:00</b>	<b>Cut-off date for supervisory obligations.</b>
<b>13 August 2025, 17:00</b>	<b>Research Report Due</b>

All due dates are 17:00 London time.

# 1. Essential information

## 1.1 Module Deadlines and Assessment

There are three key components of the Research Project:

### I. Research Topic Statement

Word count: 300 words  
Portion of overall marks: None but submission is mandatory  
Due date: By 17:00 on Monday 24 February 2025

Students are required to submit their Research Topic Statement to provide a summary of their chosen research topic, identify their preferred supervisor and justify how the project can either be construed as an STS or HPS research project. A form will be provided for you to follow.

### II. Research Report

Word count: 10,000 words  
Portion of overall marks: 100%  
Due date: By 17:00 on Wednesday 13 August 2025

The research report (commonly called, 'the dissertation') is the written text about your research that you will submit.

## 1.2 Supervision

The **supervisor** is your first point-of-contact. The supervisor oversees the student's project management. They interact with the student to ensure project progression. They can offer intellectual guidance and networking. The supervisor offers to review draft material of project work subject to limits described elsewhere in the syllabus. The supervisor is assigned before the end of Term 2. Students have one supervisor only and that supervisor must be a member of staff within the STS Department.

### 1.2.1 Identifying and Approaching a Potential Supervisor

You will need to identify and speak with a potential supervisor for your project. It is important to identify someone who you feel will be a good match for your topic. To help you identify the right person you can check the [STS Academic Staff Website](#) which lists each member of staff's research interests.

You will need to contact this person and arrange a meeting to discuss the quality, scope, and feasibility of your ideas and how they fit with the requirements of the research project. You can approach more than one potential supervisor in stage prior to the submission of the Research Topic Statement on 24 February.

The principal form of academic input for the research project comes through discussions with your supervisor. These meetings should be face-to-face, either in person or by a TEAMS/Zoom meeting.

**Email alone is insufficient as a supervisory tool.**

### **1.2.2 The Role of the Supervisor - Their Responsibilities and Yours**

The main responsibilities of the supervisor are to assist you with your project management and to advise you on criteria for assessment. Students are encouraged to consult others in the course of their project, within STS and elsewhere. However, this assistance is voluntary and at the discretion of all parties.

**Please note that after 31 July 2024 supervisors are not obligated to meet or provide feedback.** This means that the 2 month period from 1 June 2024 until 31 July 2024 constitutes a critical window during the summer in which you can seek written feedback on draft work and arrange meetings with your supervisor.

You can expect four hours of supervision time from your supervisor, some of which will be one-to-one and some of which may be in groups.

Discuss with your supervisor how best to use this time. Aside from the 31 July endpoint, we do not lay down any expectations here because how and when you can best use your time with your supervisor varies with the nature of your project. Your supervisor will advise you on this but be proactive about this. It is a good idea to discuss a timeline for your project with your supervisor and to establish a definite timetable of draft submission dates and supervision meetings. Again, the nature of this timetable will vary with the type of project. Please ensure that you discuss with your supervisor when you will hand in draft work, for instance draft chapter. Commenting on these drafts is a significant task and supervisors need to schedule time for this in advance.

As independent learners, students must take responsibility for arranging these meetings. It is wise to schedule supervisions well in advance. It is unwise to disappear for long periods of time, then reappear with a large set of needs. Project management is part of the STS criteria for assessment for this module. Supervisors also may make themselves available for additional consultation, but this is done at their discretion and with no obligation.

### **1.3 Module convenor**

The **convenor** is your second point-of-contact. They organise the module, guide students through initial stages of development, monitor supervisory contributions, and troubleshoot should problems arise. They also oversee the assessment process and ensure comparability of marking.

Students continue to have access to their **personal tutor** until the end of their degree. The personal tutor is a key point-of-contact for pastoral support and careers guidance.

### **1.4 Attendance requirements**

HPSC0097 requires students to be in attendance in-person at UCL until after the end of Term 3 on 13 June 2025. This is to ensure substantial in-person interaction between student and supervisor, as well as in-person interaction between the student, their peers, and others in the STS community.

## 3. Aims and Objectives

### 3.1 Aims

The research project is the culmination of a master's programme. The overall aims focus on research, research planning, and research reporting. Students will be encouraged to:

1. Undertake independent research that makes an original contribution to knowledge, or produces a novel synthesis of existing materials relevant to significant conversations in the discipline
2. Plan their project in advance, describe how it will be managed, and reflect upon its value
3. Work independently and manage a complex project within strict time constraints
4. Comply with relevant ethical, safety, and documentation processes as appropriate to the work
5. Select and deploy research methods that are appropriate to the data collection within the project
6. Relate their original research to existing literature on the subject and relate their work to general themes in their relevant scholarly literature
7. Balance description, analysis, and synthesis within the context of scholarly writing
8. Assemble their rationale, methods, findings, and analysis into a substantial piece of writing that presents a clear thesis and a cohesive evidence-based argument or analysis
9. Reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of their research and methodology, understanding how they might improve their efforts in future work

### 3.2 Objectives

By the end of this module students should be able to:

1. Demonstrate an ability to plan a research project, such as is required in a research proposal prior to the launch of their work.
2. Demonstrate an ability to comply with ethical, safety, and documentation processes appropriate to their project.
3. Demonstrate expert knowledge in the subject of their research project, such as through an integrated literature survey.
4. Demonstrate expert knowledge in the research methods appropriate to generating reliable data for their research questions.
5. Demonstrate the ability to project manage and to make constructive use of expertise associated with their project, while working as an independent learner.
6. Demonstrate an ability to relate their original data to existing literature, or to create a novel synthesis of existing materials.

7. Demonstrate an ability to assemble their findings into a substantial piece of writing that presents a clear thesis and a cohesive, evidence-based argument.

8. Demonstrate an ability to balance description, analysis, and synthesis within their project report.

9. Demonstrate an ability to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of their research and methodology, with constructive advice on how they might improve their efforts in future work. Typically, the model for a research report will be an academic journal article or an MPhil thesis.

## 4. Module Timeline

HPSC0097 is a long-term commitment, it is a 60-credit module and 600 hours of work are expected. That equates to 16 weeks of full-time labour, and it is equivalent to the workload of four regular modules in the degree.

For time management purposes, the module divides into five phases.

### Phase 1: Informal Conversations

Students are strongly encouraged to discuss possible project ideas with tutors, fellow students, and other science communication professionals. All projects begin with open-ended conversations and scoping exercises. These should be non-committal. Informal conversations can begin in Term 2. All STS staff welcome conversations, and all staff know students will be seeking to have them. It's the student's responsibility to initiate discussions. To start a conversation, email a member of staff and request time for a short conversation.

To assist in project scoping, the convenor will organise a series of advice sessions during Term 2 and 3. These will build on modules and other activities around the department. Student hoping to undertake an empirical project may benefit from our module, HPSC0126 Social Research Methods and Data Analysis in STS.

### Phase 2: Title, Topic and Supervisor Allocation

The first formal step in the module requires the student to submit the "Research Topic Statement". This will be done via a form available via Moodle. This is not assessed but its submission is required. The Research Topic Statement is due on 24 February 2025.

The main purpose of Research Topic Statement is for students to identify a topic that falls within HPS or STS and to allocate an appropriate supervisor to the student based on their project idea. The project choice is understood to be a provisional but serious attempt to define a topic. At the least, it should give a general indication of focus and method.

Students who do not submit the Research Topic Statement will be assigned a supervisor without consultation. They may also have a project assigned to them by the supervisor.

### Phase 3: Term 3 Activities and the start of formal supervision meetings.

Through term 3 there will be a number of discipline specific workshops that will offer advice to students on how to conduct research within and writing on the various disciplinary areas that comprise HPS and STS. Students should attend the workshops in which their research project falls. In cases where a project falls across multiple disciplines, the student should attend all relevant workshops (consult the schedule for the dates of various disciplinary workshops.)

All projects evolve, and students can expect their final work to deviate somewhat from their research topic statement. Supervisors will monitor that evolution. Supervisors must be involved in any process that leads to a fundamental change in project ambitions or design.

The main reason for the attendance requirement in Term 3 is to ensure students have access to in-person consultation with supervisors and others who might contribute materially and intellectually to the project.

## Phase 4: Do the Work

Students are expected to commit substantial time to their project during Term 3 and during the summer. HPSC0097 is a 60-credit module and 600 hours of work are expected. That equates to 16 weeks of full-time labour, and it is equivalent to the workload of four regular modules in the degree. If you are devoting significantly less time and effort to your project, you should review your commitments and discuss the load with your supervisor.

In-person engagement with staff and others in the STS community is expected in London until the end of Term 3. Afterwards, depending on the project, remote supervision may be acceptable.

## Phase 5: Submit

Projects are due in August (see Schedule). Digital upload is required. Students are not required to submit paper copies. Criteria for assessment will be discussed in Term 3.

Please do not leave large amounts of work on your project to the last minute. Part of what is being tested here is your ability to manage a substantial research project and to complete the project on time. Such time management is critical to many commercial and academic projects.

## 5. Ethics

Ethics is a subject you must discuss with your project supervisor at the very start of your work. Where required, approvals must be in place prior to data collection. Students who fail to obtain appropriate approvals before data collection risk a mark of zero for their project, as unethical research cannot be accepted and demonstrating knowledge of ethical practices is a key learning objective for the module.

Research review is the process of you asking for permission to undertake the research you want to do. All research is reviewed by the supervisor. In some cases (e.g., when research involves more than low risk, when humans are subjects, or when laws place restrictions on what research we can allow) we use formal review processes. STS includes three subjects in its process of review:

- methods – how will you conduct data collection and analysis?
- safety – what might risk your safety or the safety of others, including your research subjects?
- data – will your data need special handling owing to a sensitive or legal issue?

Your supervisor is the first point-of-contact on research review. They will advise on which elements, if any, of your project require special application. The ultimate responsibility for ensuring compliance rests with the student as the researcher. Training in research review is part of your degree programme.

STS resources on research review are online: <[ucl.ac.uk/sts/ethics](http://ucl.ac.uk/sts/ethics)>.

## 6.1 Consider Methods

Without exception, any research involving “intervention or interaction with living human participants or the collection or study of data derived from living human participants” must receive ethical approval of methods *prior to the start* of data collection.

The main purpose of “Consider methods” review process is to protect our research subjects and to ensure we use methods that carry least risk. The main consequence for researchers who use methods review is an increased confidence that their approved methods will be safer and more efficient than might otherwise be the case.

### *Social Science Methods*

Your project uses social science methods when it seeks to collect data from individuals about personal identity and their sense of self, provokes introspection or self-evaluation, or reaches into sensitive areas (as defined by UK law). Projects using social science methods are subject to “**Consider Methods**” in the STS research review process.

Examples of social science research questions:

- “How do you think your sexuality influences your interpretation of the data?”
- “In three words, tell me how you felt when you thought they had stolen your data?”
- “Why do you believe that is the morally right thing to do?”
- “How does it feel to wake up every day knowing you have this disease?”

When categorisation is ambiguous, STS normally applies a precautionary principle, considering the research to be of a social science nature.

### *Methods Not Allowed in HPSC0097*

Some methodological choices are prohibited in HPSC0097.

- You cannot involve children (anyone under age 18 years old) in any way.
- You cannot involve anyone who can be considered vulnerable according to UK law.
- You cannot use empirical social science methods in a country outside the UK.

The reasons vary. In general, the reason is practical: the time required to obtain methods approval is too long given the time available for the project. Moreover, supervisors cannot be expected to commit the resources needed for appropriate safeguarding and fellowship. The restriction on international work is in place because UCL insists we avoid practices that might be considered imposed, extractive, or exploitative. UCL also insists on local engagement in research practices, meaning UCL students cannot simply helicopter into a community, collect data, and leave. As a practical matter, we cannot put appropriate monitoring systems in place for HPSC0097 projects, so we cannot support projects with data collection involving humans undertaken outside the UK.

## 6.2 Consider Safety

UCL has a duty of care to students during their research. When research requires students to work off-site or in unusual circumstances, a review of safety is required. “Consider Safety” is the process STS uses to review safety. The goal of a safety review is to identify significant risks and to consider how best to mitigate or reduce those risk. The safety of people working with you on the project requires consideration, too.

Examples of notable safety risks in project work:

- travel to a location abroad or a location unfamiliar to you
- work unaccompanied with people you barely know or work in locked premises
- work in environments where hazardous material or equipment is used
- work when you carry expensive equipment through unfamiliar locations



Mitigation is the process of finding ways to reduce the risks you identify. Examples of mitigations:

- travel to an unfamiliar location: mitigation might involve travelling with a friend, sharing travel details with a trusted person, maintaining a checking-in timetable with a trusted third party or with UCLSafeZone
- work unaccompanied with people you barely know: mitigation might involve keeping only to open public spaces and not working behind locked doors without additional people present
- work in hazardous environments: secure safety equipment and training prior to entry
- carry expensive equipment: use a taxi service to nearest trusted location or arrange a courier to transfer equipment at a later date

In many cases, mitigating risk is simply a matter of astute planning. However, risk mitigation is never trivial. It is core to best practice in all research.

### 6.3 Consider Data

Some data collected in research must be handled in secure ways. This is a legal requirement. STS uses the “Consider Data” process to identify how a student researcher will comply with data handling requirements. It also is designed to help students think about professional data handling and preservation.

### 6.4 STS Research Review Procedures

STS research review procedures are described at <http://www.ucl.ac.uk/sts/ethics>.

Some key points in our advice to students on compliance:

1. allow at least two weeks between submitting an ethics application and the date of your first planned data collection
2. your supervisor must approve your research review applications *before* you submit it to the department
3. take credit for doing this well. Note the ethics approval number in the introduction of your project report. You may also include blank copies of consent forms, interview schedules, questionnaires etc. if you feel they provide evidence of your prowess operating in an appropriately ethical manner. **Appendices do not count towards your overall word count.**
4. do not include confidential information in your dissertation (such as signed consent forms, interview transcripts, or completed questionnaires) without first removing revealing information. Anonymise quotations from research interviews.

As independent researchers, students must comply with UCL policies. This is absolutely vital, and because UCL has legal duties in this area, a project will be penalized for failing to have approvals in place. For instance, researchers who use living humans as research subjects in any way, but who fail to secure approvals prior to data collection, will receive a mark of zero for this module, at the discretion of the STS Board of Examiners. Unethical research will not be rewarded.

## 6. Important Policy Information

Refer to the [STS Student Handbook](#). We follow the rules of that handbook.

### 6.1 Engaging with AI

UCL provides guidance for “[Engaging with AI in Your Education and Assessment](#)”.

### **AI classification**

This module has a **Category 2** rating regarding use of AI tools.

#### *Category 2: AI tools can be used in an assistive role\**

Students are permitted to use AI tools for specific defined processes within the assessment.

AI tools can be utilised to support the development of specific skills as required by the assessment. Students can leverage AI for tasks such as data analysis, pattern recognition, or generating insights. There will be some aspects of the assessment where the use of AI is inappropriate.

Examples of where AI might be used in an assistive category include:

- drafting and structure content
- supporting the writing process in a limited manner
- as a support tutor
- supporting a particular process such as testing code or translating content
- giving feedback on content, or proofreading content.

## **6.2 Extensions and Mitigations**

This is a long-term project, and time management is a learning objective. Short-term extensions normally are not considered.

Information about extensions and mitigations is provided in the [STS Student Handbook](#). Individual tutors cannot grant extensions on their own initiative, so please do not ask. STS respects all SORAs and ECs approved elsewhere in the university; normally, these are communicated to STS automatically.

## **6.3 Project Feedback**

Marks and feedback for the project report (100% of the grade) and in turn HPSC0095 as a whole will be confirmed and fixed in term 1 of the 2025/26 year at the STS Board of Examiners. This module is viewed as the culmination of the degree.

## **6.4 Course Communications**

Communicate with your supervisor through the channel they recommend.

Communications from the convenor will use several paths:

- Moodle Announcements: the principal means for communications in this module.
- If we have a matter for you specifically, we'll communicate via your UCL email address. We don't use other email addresses. I'll put "0097" in the subject line to help you filter.  
Hint: If you want help managing email using filters, see UCL IS's "how-to" guides:  
<https://www.ucl.ac.uk/isd/how-to-guides>

If you need to communicate with the convenor, use their email address. Do not message your supervisor or convenor using Teams chat.

## 7. FAQs

### Do I need a project supervisor?

Yes. A supervisor is required.

### Do I need a supervisor in STS?

Yes. They must be a member of STS academic staff. This is required to ensure comparability and clarity about the scale of the project as well as to allow for certain quality assurance processes to be in place. The main responsibilities of the supervisor are to assist the student with project management and to advise towards the criteria for assessment.

### Can I have two supervisors?

No. HPSC0097 does not permit second supervisors, subsidiary supervisors, or external supervisors. The supervisor's role primarily is project management and coordination. You don't need two people for that.

We do encourage you to discuss your work informally with staff and peers in the STS community. They are under no obligation to dedicate their time to support you, but conversation and engagement are key skills in a research community. You also are welcome to enlist others to consult you informally on your project. This includes content or technical experts, other students working in adjacent projects, other students who have relevant experiences, and external professionals. You also are encouraged to consult support services at UCL, such as the [Academic Communication Centre \(ACC\)](#).

### How much time/help can I expect from my supervisor?

You can expect around four hours of supervision time from your supervisor. This time will be distributed evenly over the life of the project and not compressed into a crunch period. Please discuss with your supervisor how best to use this time.

We consider you to be independent researchers, and it is important that you take control of and are responsible for the management of your own project. This includes organising meetings with your supervisor and discussing your needs.

**Email alone is insufficient as a complete supervisory tool** but it will be used to supplement face-to-face supervisions.

### What do I do if my supervisor is not available when I need them?

Contact the convenor should access to your supervisor become a persistent problem.

You should ask your supervisor about their availability during summer months. Staff are entitled to take leave, and staff have heavy research commitments during the summer. This means their availability can be quite different from your expectations. It's perfectly polite to ask.

Tutors are expected to give students substantial advanced warning about periods when they will be unavailable for prolonged periods during the summer. Students are expected to respect these periods of absence and plan their needs accordingly. One distinction is crucial: (1) when staff are on *leave*, they are off work (i.e., not expected to maintain contact with their supervisees or to undertake UCL duties); however, (2) when staff are *working remotely*, they are on work (i.e., expected to maintain contact and to be available for normal duties even if performed remotely).

After 31 July your supervisor will not assist with your project at all.

### What do we do in supervisions? Is it like a class?

No, it is not like a class lecture or seminar. What you do in supervisions depends largely on you. As independent learners, students must take responsibility for arranging these meetings and for proposing the agenda. Describe your needs and be clear where you want assistance. Give your supervisor advanced warning of some of your questions. This is part of the process of "managing your supervisor",

and it is a strategy designed to make the most of the small amount of face-to-face time you have available to work with them.

It is wise to schedule supervisions well in advance. It is especially unwise to disappear for long periods of time, then reappear with a large set of needs when a deadline is fast approaching.

#### What happens if I lose my material mid-way through the project?

You still have the deadline to meet. In sum, it's your responsibility to maintain back-ups.

Protect yourself against loss of research material and writing by maintaining a system for secure, redundant, up-to-date back-up. Loss or theft will not be accepted as a reason for failing to meet a deadline. Storage of materials on UCL's IS network is strongly advised. A copy of physical items, such as written notebooks, can be deposited with supervisors for the duration of the project.

As a warning, loss of project materials through accidents and theft have occurred in the past; these have had devastating effects on the unprepared. All students are advised to create redundancies to protect their project. Again, you are in charge of this project and we look to you to show best practice.

#### Which words count in the word count and which do not?

Words counted towards the total word count include the main body of the report and supporting footnotes or endnotes. The word count does not include: bibliography, front matter (title page, keywords, abstract, table of contents, acknowledgments), appendix material, supplemental data packages, tables, table and figure legends, or documentation of ethics protocols or approvals.

Work with your supervisor to ensure you are within the range of tolerance. Our basic expectation is that you produce a scale of work that is commensurate with the 60-credit value of the module. Our longer-range ambition is to see work done to a high professional standard appropriate to the task.

The 10% rule applies.

#### Can I re-use other coursework in my final project?

Students cannot get credit for work twice. This applies across degrees and jobs as well as across modules. UCL's policy on self-plagiarism prevents the same work receiving credit twice. This means rote duplication is not allowed.

Research reports cannot reuse research undertaken previously used for module credit without explicit agreement. This applies to material submitted for credit in other degree programmes, other institutions, or other employment. Translations alone are unacceptable, too.

Students should work closely with their supervisors to ensure compliance: better to ask than to guess. Relationships must be explicit – meaning, you must document relationships clearly and openly.

#### Do I need to keep a project notebook?

Notebooks are not required, but *STS strongly recommends* you keep a regular written account of your work, such as a daily record or a scheduled diary. Digital or paper. Make regular entries that are substantial records of your work. A project notebook can be an invaluable way to record your reflections about the work as it develops (and before you forget the insights you have). It also can prove useful should examiners query research methods, research integrity, or research process.

Project notebooks are a standard part of best practice in many working environments. They help you keep track of work and of the many details that come and go quickly and are hard to recall later. They help account for your time to managers. In our world where remote working is an important part of employment, these kinds of records can boost the confidence your boss has in you as an employee.

#### Why have the 31 July cut-off for supervisory relations?

Staff need time to undertake other work over the summer, and staff need time for their annual leave. This cut-off creates a fair and uniform buffer zone for all staff supervising projects. It also highlights the need

for good project and time management from students during Term 3 and the period of the summer leading up to the project due date.

You also can expect your supervisor to be unavailable for some other parts of Term 3 and the summer. Communicate with your supervisor to determine their availability.

[end]