

HPSC0097 Research project

Syllabus

2021-22 session | Dr Cristiano Turbil | c.turbil@ucl.ac.uk

Course description

The Master's degree culminates in a research project of the student's own design. This project is documented by a final research report or dissertation. The student's work is guided by an academic supervisor. It also is supported by a variety of key skill programmes. Students are expected to construct a research project that includes original research, deliberate and well considered methodological choices, and shows relevance to significant conversations within the discipline. The dissertation should represent the very best research and analysis a student can produce.

Basic course information

Assessment		
Coursework	100%	Project report
Credits	60	Representing 600 hours of study
Convenor		Dr Cristiano Turbil
Contact		c.turbil@ucl.ac.uk
Web		
Office location:		22 Gordon Square, Room 4.3
Office hours:		Monday 12:00-1:00pm (face-to-face), Tuesdays 11:00-12:00pm (Online) or by appointment

The HPSC0097 Convenor is responsible for overall management of the supervisory process and for the overall management of the marking process. They organize all module related activities. They are responsible for quality assurance. They are the first port-of-call for students with concerns over provision in this module. The primary contact will be the project supervisor who will be appointed by the module convenor.

Aims and Objectives

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, using a proposal to describe their undertaking, 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

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 a 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.

Module Plan

Phase 1: Informal conversations

Students are strongly encouraged to discuss possible project ideas with tutors, fellow students, and other research professionals. All research projects begin with open-ended conversations and scoping exercises. These should be non-committal. These conversations should begin in Term 2, becoming increasingly focused and developed. Students are welcome to discuss their project ideas with STS tutors, their peers, and anyone in the community with relevant expertise.

To assist in project development, STS will organize a series of advice sessions during Terms 2 and 3.

Research preparation workshops

Students are encouraged to attend all sessions as part of their wider professional training. Students interested in research methods generally across the social sciences, especially contemporary STS, should have taken the module HPSC0126 Research Methods and Data Analysis in Science and Technology Studies.

Phase 2: Identify topic

The first formal step in the module involves identifying a preliminary project title and writing an abstract of no more than 100 words. This requires submitting a completed registration form. Writing an abstract for a research proposal or for completed research work is an important transferable skill.

Students will find the "HPSC0097 project registration" form on UCL Moodle for the module. Students who do not submit a completed registration form will be assigned a project. The project title is understood to be provisional.

Supervisors will be assigned to students after the project title/ abstract forms have been submitted.

Supervision:

A supervisor is required. 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 the student on criteria for assessment. STS does allow formal assignments of co-supervisors or secondary supervisors. 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.

You can expect your supervisor to read and comment on a full draft of your research proposal and of your project. You can expect four hours of supervision time from your supervisor, some of which will be one to one and some of which will be in groups. Please discuss with your supervisor how best to use this time.

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. Please be proactive about this. We are training 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.

It is a good idea to discuss a time line for your project with your supervisor, and to establish a definite timetable. 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 a research proposal draft and a project draft to them for comment. Commenting on these drafts is a significant task and supervisors need to schedule time for this in advance.

Compliance with UCL ethics, safety, and documentation protocols

STS has clear procedures in place to manage compliance with UCL's policies on research ethics, safety, and data protection. Supervisors will steer students through those procedures as appropriate. Workshops also will be provided.

STS procedures are described online at www.ucl.ac.uk/sts/ethics.

As independent researchers, students must comply with all relevant UCL policies. This is absolutely vital, and because UCL has legal duties in this area, a project will be penalized for failing to have in place appropriate protocols. For instance, researchers who use living humans as research subjects in any way, but who fail to secure ethical approvals prior to data collection, will receive a mark of zero for this module, at the discretion of the STS Head of Department taking advice from the STS research integrity subcommittee.

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 data collection
2. your supervisor must approve (and sign!) your ethics application before you submit it at departmental level
3. after your protocols have been approved, append a copy of your ethical approval certificate to the dissertation and project proposal. You may also choose to include blank copies of consent forms, interview schedules, questionnaires etc. if you feel that they provide evidence of your prowess in operating in an appropriately ethical manner. These appendices do not count towards your overall word count.
4. do not include confidential information in your dissertation. This includes signed consent forms, interview transcripts, or completed questionnaires without first removing revealing information.

Phase 3: Project proposal

In Term 3, students write a 2,000-word project proposal.

The supervisory purpose of this proposal is to refine key research questions, review existing scholarship and identify required resources. A further purpose is to require the student to identify the methods they believe will be most relevant for engaging the research questions to be investigated. STS staff can provide substantial feedback with respect to project definition, relevant literature, framing, and methods. Relevant compliance documentation should be appended, even if in pre-submission form.

Writing such a proposal is also an important transferable skill. You may well have to write project proposals when you get a job, or for PhD applications. It is important to understand how to write such proposals well to have the best chance of success. This is not straightforward. There are often important balances to be struck (e.g. scope of project vs. completion on time) and it is important to get your main idea across as clearly and concisely.

STS will aim to return assessments for the proposal within two weeks of submission. These should be discussed with the supervisor.

The proposal should reflect a student's best effort. At the same time, we recognize research often raises new questions. Some redefinition of topics and titles is common later in the research process. Students should keep their supervisors up to date on these developments, and they can expect a reasonable amount of adaptation.

Phase 4: Summer term research

Students are expected to commit substantial time during the summer to their research project. Supervisions The principal form of academic input for the research project normally comes through discussions with the designated supervisor. The majority of these meetings should be face-to-face, either in person or via video- or audio-conferencing technology. Email alone is insufficient as a supervisory tool, though it very likely will be used to supplement these supervisory interactions. Supervisors also may make themselves available for additional consultation, at their discretion.

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.

Students must appreciate that summer is the period when academic staff normally make use of their accumulated annual leave and when they undertake research as part of their other academic responsibilities. This means they are balancing demands on their time as complex as during the teaching terms. At the same time, 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).

A student's supervisor is not the only person who may advise on projects and writing. Others include peers and subject experts. In general, other STS academic staff will not agree to add supplemental

supervisory attention for a project or read draft manuscripts. This is because they have their own primary supervisory commitments.

Work-in-progress conference

In early July, students will be invited to deliver a short work-in-progress presentation. This is not assessed. Work-in-progress presentations provide important milestones in project development. They offer moments to collate results, seek ties to existing literature, and synthesize many pieces into a working whole. They also are important in relation to career development, offering opportunities to increase experience giving presentations of research work and engaging peer audiences.

Phase 5: Submit project report

The project report is due near the end of August, with the specific due date posted on Moodle. Digital upload is required. Students are not required to submit paper copies of their project report. The project report is assessed. A separate document presents STS criteria for assessment regarding the project report. This is posted on the Moodle site. Please do not leave large amounts of work on your project to the last minute. Short term last minute extensions are not usually considered. 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.

Schedule and workshops

Date/time	Activity	
Term 2	Informal conversations	
TBC January	Workshop: Getting started – Research ethics, data protection and safety	
TBC February	Workshop: Research proposal – expectations	
4 March	DEADLINE: project registration form due.	Submit via Moodle - form is available on HPSC0097 Moodle site.
10 June	DEADLINE: 2,000 words research proposal due	Upload through HPSC0097 Moodle site
June	Workshop: Work in Progress Presentations	
July	Work-in-progress conference	Convenor will organize a conference for students to discuss work-in-progress and to receive advice from peers
Thursday 1 Sept 2021 at 12pm	DEADLINE: 10,000 words research report due	Upload through HPSC0097 Moodle site

Additional Information

Research notebook

Students are strongly advised to maintain a research notebook, either digital or paper, and to keep this up-to-date. A research notebook can prove useful should examiners query research methods, research integrity, or research process.

Prevent data loss

Protect yourself against loss of research material and writing by maintaining a system for secure, redundant, up-to-date back-up of research material and writing. Loss cannot be accepted as a reason for failing to meet a deadline. Storage of materials on UCL's ISD network is expected as a minimum, and other mechanisms – such as cloud storage – are recommended (subject to data protection restrictions). A copy of written notebooks can be stored by supervisors for the duration of the project. Loss of project materials through accidents and theft have occurred in the past; these have had devastating effects on the unprepared. All students are warned to create redundancies to protect their project from similar calamities. Again, YOU are in charge of this project and we are looking to you to show good project management, which includes backing up data, project drafts and other material.

Extensions

This is a long-term research project, and time management is a learning objective. Short-term extensions normally are not considered. Applications for extension must be made through the processes described in the STS Student Handbook. Personal Tutors are the first point of contact on extension requests.

Word counts

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. Otherwise, UCL standard policy on word counts will apply.

Re-using coursework from other modules

Text and ideas in the research proposal may reappear in the dissertation if significantly developed or further elaborated; however, UCL's policy on self-plagiarism prevents the same work receiving credit twice. This means rote duplication is not allowed. Students should work closely with their academic supervisors to ensure compliance: better to ask than to guess

Citation format

STS is an interdisciplinary domain, combining subjects with quite different traditions for citation. STS has no single approved approach to serve as a house style. In general, STS expects students to use one consistent style within any single piece of work. That style must be clear, explicit, and meaningful. In every instance, it must allow an examiner to locate efficiently and specifically material referred to. As a recommendation, students should use a style frequently used in the literature relevant to their research project. Most journals have style guides in their notes to contributors. Students should discuss options with their supervisors, and they should keep in mind that efficient citation is one element in the criteria for assessment.

Images

Images may be used when appropriate. They should not be used merely as decoration. When used, images must include a caption that identifies the image source unless the image is generated by the author. Most uses of images in unpublished student work fall under "fair use" rules. STS does not require images to be pristine or of publishable resolution. Hence, within reason, watermarks and low-

resolution images are acceptable provided the reader can follow the author's deployment. When using images, students should reduce the file size of their images as low as is feasible.

Criteria for assessment

STS publishes guidance on our criteria for assessment for all coursework via the Moodle page for each module. Please consult carefully those criteria and discuss them with your project supervisor.

Important policy information

Details of college and departmental policies relating to modules and assessments can be found in the STS Student Handbook www.ucl.ac.uk/sts/handbook

All students taking modules in the STS department are expected to read these policies.
