HPSC0126 Social Research Methods and Data Analysis in STS

Course Syllabus

Course Information

This course introduces students to the theory and practice of research methods in STS and social science more generally, comprising both qualitative and quantitative methods. It will cover research design; qualitative and quantitative methods; research management and ethics; and the epistemology of social research. The course is strongly recommended for any students wanting to undertake empirical social science research for their dissertation, and for students who want to familiarise themselves with how social scientists (particularly within STS) undertake research. In addition, for those wishing to apply for ESRC +3 PhD funding, it is designed to cover the core training requirements specified within the *ESRC Postgraduate Training and Development Guidelines (2015)*.

Basic course information

Course website:	https://moodle.ucl.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=37568
Moodle Web site:	HPSC0126
Assessment:	Essay (1500 words) 40%; Presentation (10 minutes) 60%
Timetable:	Mondays 2-4 pm, 25 Gordon Square, 107
Prerequisites:	None
Required texts:	See Moodle
Course tutor(s):	Tiago Mata
Contact:	t.mata@ucl.ac.uk
Office location:	22 Gordon Square, room 2.1
Office hours:	11:00-12:00 Tuesdays (office)
	11:00-12:00 Thursdays (online/Teams)

Schedule

Week	Date	Topic	Activity
1	2/10	Introduction. What is Social Research: (including what is "metholodogy"?)	Mentimeter and discussion
2	9/10	Decolonizing Methodologies in STS and unpacking a research paper (preparing for your first assignment)	Classroom debate
3	16/10	Methods: Surveys and Sampling	Analysing survey results
4	23/10	Methods: Documents and Archives	Analysing documents
5	30/10	Methods: Interviews and Focus Groups	Coding interview transcripts
6	6/11	**Reading Week**	
7	13/11	Methods: Ethnography and Observation	Classroom debate
8	20/11	Methods: Visual Methods	Interpreting media
9	27/11	Methods: Case Studies	Planning a case study
10	4/12	Methods: Digital approaches	Trying out digital tools
11	11/12	Research Design	Review of module

Assessments

Summary

	Description	Deadline	Word limit
Video presentation	Research pitch	20 November 2023	10 min (max) (60%)
Essay	Methodological critique	13th December 2023, 5pm	1500 words (40%)

Aims

This module introduces students to the theory and practice of research methods in STS and in social science more generally, comprising both qualitative and quantitative methods.

Objectives

The module will review research design; qualitative and quantitative methods; research management and ethics; and the methodology of social research. The course is strongly recommended for any students wanting to undertake empirical social science research for their dissertation, and for students who want to familiarise themselves with how social scientists (particularly within STS) undertake research. In addition, for those wishing to apply for ESRC +3 PhD funding, it is designed to cover the core training requirements specified in the *ESRC Postgraduate Training and Development Guidelines (2015)*.

By the end of this course you will:

- Be introduced to a range of qualitative and quantitative social research methods used in STS and understand their strengths and weaknesses.
- Be introduced to underlying epistemological, ontological, ethical and axiological issues underpinning social research
- Know how to formulate research questions.
- Understand the relationship between research questions and methodological approach.
- Have engaged with the relevant academic literature on research methods.

Reading list

Every week a topic specific reading list will be provided, but I also suggest a few books that you could usefully turn to for reference and for an overview of the issues in social science research. Bryman's textbook is the most widely used source in modules of this kind across the social sciences. The *Sage Handbook* compliments Bryman by covering every method you can think of, as well as analytic techniques and theories of knowledge. *Decolonizing methodologies* presents a comprehensive view of all the aspects of carrying out research, but from a very clear stance about the power of research.

- Bryman, Alan (2016 or 2012) *Social Research Methods*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Miles, Matthew B. and A.M. Huberman and Johnny Saldaña (2020). *Qualitative data analysis: a methods sourcebook.* 4th Edition. Sage: Los Angeles.
- Norman. K. Denzin & Yvonne. S. Lincoln (Eds.) (2018), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (Fifth ed) Sage: London, Thousand Oaks & New Delhi.
- Smith, Linda Tuhiwai (2012). *Decolonizing methodologies: research and indigenous peoples* (Second Edition ed.). London: Zed Books.

Assignments

In order to be deemed 'complete' on this module students must attempt both the assignments.

Assessment 1 (60%) group presentation

Imagine the scenario where you have the opportunity to undergo a summer group research project within UCL's Department of Science and Technology Studies. As a group you will submit as a video presentation a research proposal for a project you would like to undertake during this period.

The proposal should explain what question you want to investigate, why you want to carry out this research, and outline how you would undertake the project, describing which methods and analytical approaches you will take and why you have selected these (rather than other methods).

Things to think about
- Try to choose a research topic that is relevant to science and technology studies. It might help you to look at the research profiles of staff on the departmental website or to think about other modules you have taken and the kinds of questions that arise in these modules.

- Consider feasibility, be the right about of ambitious, think that you have only a summer and your team to undertake the project.

- Remember that your choice of a research method(s) should be guided by your research question.

- You can choose your methods from the range covered in the course.

- Document your claims, make references to methods textbooks and other literature.

- To structure your proposal you can follow the following format:

    1. Introduction and motivation – statement of research question and why it is interesting/needs to be answered

    2. Background – what we already know about the topic of your question

    3. Methods – how you will investigate the question (description), why you have chosen this method (critique), what are the shortcomings of the methods (critique), what other methods did you consider and why did you reject them (critique)?

    4. Conclusion – summarise your key points and confirm the approach you will take.

Assessment criteria (In addition to the departmental criteria in the STS Handbook)

- The group has followed the instructions, and has structured the presentation according to the steps laid out above and/or a standard research proposal format.

- The group has formulated clear research questions.

- The research proposed in the presentation demonstrates a good understanding of the relationship between research question and methodological approach.

- Each choice of research method is convincingly argued.

- The presentation demonstrates engagement with the relevant literature and class materials.

- The presentation is delivered in a clear and accessible way and each member of the group has contributed to the video.

Video presentation submission:
Assingment 1 must be submitted as a video file through moodle. **The presentation should be no longer than 10 minutes.**

You will not be graded on format or presentation, but solely on the content. That being said you will want to make sure that the video is clear, with good audio that is clearly understood and visuals that are are engaging and easy to follow.

The format can be as plain as a narrated slide presentation (this can be done natively on most presentation softwares or by recording a zoom meeting). You would also record yourself speaking in a classroom like setting, but this is likely to be more technically diffciult. If you like to produce video you are free to experiment, but remember to put substance over form since it is the former that will be assessed.

Assessment 2 (40%) - Essay

Drawing on the methodological lessons learned to date, take one of the papers below and write a 1500 word review of the methods used. Things you might want to describe:

- What was the research question?
- What methods were used?
- Were they appropriate? Explain why you think that.
- What other methods could have been used? Explain why they might be better/worse.

A. Akrich, M., Cochoy, F. (2023) A Masked Truth? Public Discussions about Face Masks on a French Health Forum. *Minerva* 61, 315–334.

B. Cave, S., Dihal, K., Drage, E., & McInerney, K. (2023). Who makes AI? Gender and portrayals of AI scientists in popular film, 1920–2020. *Public Understanding of Science*, 32(6), 745–760.

C. Myelnikov, D., & Peres, S. (2023). The Cold Futures of Mouse Genetics: Modes of Strain Cryopreservation Since the 1970s. *Science, Technology, & Human Values*, 48(4), 727–751.

D. Sariola, S. (2023). Mistrust: Community engagement in global health research in coastal Kenya. *Social Studies of Science*, 53(3), 449–471.

E. Tranter, B., Lester, L., Foxwell-Norton, K., & Palmer, M. A. (2023). In science we trust? Public trust in Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change projections and accepting anthropogenic climate change. *Public Understanding of Science*, 32(6), 691–708.

Assessment criteria (please also refer to those given in the Departmental Handbook)
1. Has the student identified the research question?
2. Has the student identified the research methodology?
3. Has the student understood that the choice of research methods is linked to the question being asked?
4. Has the student understood the pros and cons of different social research methods?
5. Is the assessment written in clear English?
6. is the assessment structured in a logical way?

7. Has the student presented their assessment in a coherent and well-argued way?

Submitting Essay assessments:
You **MUST** submit your assessments using the submission points below.

- [Check your work is referenced properly using Turnitin](#).
- Reference all works appropriate, including page numbers. Include a bibliography at the end of the essay.
- Include a statement on the use of AI for the writing of the essay. The statement can be a single sentence: "I have not used AI tools for research or writing this essay" or it can be detailed, naming the tools, the uses made of the tools and your reflection and evaluation of their usefulness.
- Do not put your name anywhere on the work that you upload - **only use your UCL student number/candidate number.**
- Do not put your name in the filename of any work you upload (we see the filename!).
- Put the essay number or a brief essay title in the filename of what you upload.
- [Get help using Turnitin](#):
- [check your work for plagiairism](#)
- [submit your assessment](#)
- [read your feedback](#).

Important policy information

This module adopts a *category 2 approach to AI*, "AI tools can be used in an assistive role."
Students will find further guidance on how to use and reference AI on the following pages:
https://www.ucl.ac.uk/students/exams-and-assessments/assessment-success-guide/engaging-ai-your-education-and-assessment
and
https://library-guides.ucl.ac.uk/referencing-plagiarism/acknowledging-AI

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.