

HPSC0140 Social Research Methods and Data Analysis in STS

Course Syllabus

2024-25 session | Convenor: Prof Melanie Smallman

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.

Basic course information

Course website:	See Moodle
Moodle Web site:	HPSC0140
Assessment:	See Moodle
Timetable:	See UCL on-line timetable
Prerequisites:	None
Required texts:	See Moodle
Course tutor(s):	Prof Melanie Smallman Raffaele Buono (PGTA)
Contact:	Message via moodle
Web:	https://profiles.ucl.ac.uk/3619-melanie-smallman
Office location:	22 Gordon Square
Office hours:	TBC

Schedule

Week	Date	Topic	Activity / Guest Lecture
1	4/10	Introduction. What is Social Research: (including what is “methodology”?)	<i>Prof Melanie Smallman</i>
2	11/10	Methods: Interviews and Focus Groups	<i>Prof Melanie Smallman</i>
3	18/10	Methods: Surveys and Sampling	<i>Dr Amy Unsworth</i>
4	25/10	Methods: Visual Methods	<i>Prof Jean Baptiste Gouyon</i>
5	1/11	Case Studies and preparing for your first assessment	<i>Prof Melanie Smallman</i>
	8/11	Reading Week	
6	15/11	Research Design and Ethics (and preparation for assessment 2) Note earlier time of this week's class	<i>Prof Melanie Smallman</i>
7	22/11	Methods: Documents and Archives	<i>Prof Melanie Smallman</i>
8	29/11	Methods: Ethnography and Observation	<i>Prof Jack Stilgoe</i>
9	6/12	Group presentations (Assessment 2)	<i>all</i>
10	13/12	Methods: Digital Methods	<i>Prof Melanie Smallman</i>

Assessments

Summary

	Deadline	Word limit
Research paper review	9.00, 11 November 2024	1,000 words (40%)
Research Methods presentation	In person Friday 6 th December 2024	10-12 mins (60%)

Assignments

Assessment 1 (40%)

Drawing on the methodological lessons learned to date, take one of the papers below and write a 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.

Lock, S.J. *et al.* (2014) “Nuclear energy sounded wonderful 40 years ago”: UK citizen views on CCS’, *Energy Policy*, 66, pp. 428–435. doi:[10.1016/j.enpol.2013.11.024](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.enpol.2013.11.024).

Michel Wahome & M. Graham (2020) Spatially shaped imaginaries of the digital economy, *Information, Communication & Society*, 23:8, 1123-1138, DOI: [10.1080/1369118X.2019.1701696](https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2019.1701696)

Smallman, M. (2020) “Nothing to do with the science’: How an elite sociotechnical imaginary cements policy resistance to public perspectives on science and technology through the machinery of government’, *Social Studies of Science*, 50(4), pp. 589–608. doi: 10.1177/0306312719879768.

Unsworth, A. and Voas, D. (2018) 'Attitudes to evolution among Christians, Muslims and the Non-Religious in Britain: Differential effects of religious and educational factors', *Public Understanding of Science*, 27(1), pp. 76–93. doi: 10.1177/0963662517735430.

Assessment 1 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?

Assessment 2 (60%): Group Presentation

You have the opportunity to undergo a summer research internship within UCL's Department of Science and Technology Studies. As a group, prepare a presentation that outlines your proposal for the research you would like to undertake during this internship.

Each member of your group should take part (ie speak) in the presentation (marks will be deducted from those who do not participate) and be prepared to answer questions. Using notes is fine, but try not to read from a script.

The presentation 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. You should also reflect on other methods you could have taken and explain why they were not the most appropriate.

Things to think about

- Try to choose a research topic that has a relationship with the work we do in 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
- 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. All work should contain references to methods text books and other literature.

- To structure your proposal you can follow the following format:
 1. Introduction – 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 2 Criteria (In addition to the departmental criteria in the STS Handbook)

- 1 The student follows the instructions
- 2 The student is able to formulate research questions.
- 3 The research proposed in the essay demonstrates a good understanding of the relationship between research question and methodological approach.
- 4 Each choice of research method is convincingly argued.
- 5 The document demonstrates engagement with the relevant literature and class materials.
- 6 The essay is written in a clear and accessible way with good English.

Submitting Assessments:

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

- Check your work is referenced properly. Remember the Turnitin score is not an indication of plagiarism-free work.
- 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 you upload
- Please submit files as a word document if possible.

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

Use of AI in the module

The use of ChatGPT or any other AI platform or tool to generate either ideas or written content, or to produce any other material, is prohibited in this module. This aligns with [UCL's Category 1 guidance for students here](#).

Aims & objectives

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.

By the end of this course you will:

- Be familiar with a range of qualitative and quantitative social research methods used in STS and understand their strengths and weaknesses.
- 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

We have a weekly reading list for this module, but here are a few key texts you could usefully read all of (& they also appear on the week by week lists below). The Sage Handbook covers pretty much every method you can think of, as well as analytic techniques & 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.

Tom, C., Foster, L., Sloan, L., & Bryman, A. (2021). *Bryman's social research methods*. (Sixth edition / Tom Clark, Liam Foster, Luke Sloan, Alan Bryman ; editorial advisor, Elena Vacchelli.). Oxford University Press. (available online at UCL Library)

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

Please look at the **UCL Online Reading List** for links to the key readings.

Weekly Overviews

Week 1: Introduction. What is Social Research: including what is “methodology”! (Professor Melanie Smallman)

This session provides an overview of the module and associated assignments, what social research methods and methodology are, qualitative and quantitative approaches, primary and secondary data, what strategies are used when doing research, and the different tools available that will be explored further during the module. Using two case studies we will explore how methods can be used to answer research questions.

Recommended Readings:

Bell, J., & Waters, S. (2018). *EBOOK: DOING YOUR RESEARCH PROJECT: A GUIDE FOR FIRST-TIME RESEARCHERS*. McGraw-Hill Education (UK). This is a great general textbook take a read of chapter 1 and 2.

Kumar, R. (2019). *Research methodology: A step-by-step guide for beginners*. Sage. Another great overview book if you prefer this style.

Dawson, C. (2019). *Introduction to Research Methods 5th Edition: A Practical Guide for Anyone Undertaking a Research Project*. Robinson. A very simple and concise intro but will give you all the basics in a clear manner.

Week 2: Methods: Interviews and Focus Groups (Prof Melanie Smallman)

In this session we will look at two key qualitative research methods – interviews and focus groups. We will talk about the strengths and weaknesses of each approach and look at how you might make use of the techniques and the data produced from them in research and in the workplace.

An example of STS research using interviews:

- Daniel L. Kleinman and Sainath Suryanarayanan. 2012. Dying Bees and the Social Production of Ignorance. *Science, Technology & Human Values*. 38(4): 492-517.

An example of STS research using focus groups:

- Simon J. Lock, Melanie Smallman, Maria Lee & Yvonne Rydin. 2014. “Nuclear energy sounded wonderful 40 years ago”: UK citizen views on CCS. *Energy Policy*, 66, 428–435.

Week 3: Methods: Surveys and Sampling (Guest Lecture from Dr Amy Unsworth)

This session will provide an introduction to survey-based research, focusing mainly on quantitative surveys. We’ll think about values and ethics in survey research and look at practical issues of sampling and designing a good survey instrument (questionnaire).

Recommended Readings:

- Lesley Andres (2012). *Designing & doing survey research*. Sage: London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi. *Read Chapter 2: Mapping out the survey research process. You can read more if you want to, this book is great because it spell out in detail each step of the survey research process.*
- David Gillborn (2010). The colour of numbers: surveys, statistics and deficit-thinking about race and class. *Journal of Education Policy*, 25(2), 253 - 276.

An example of STS research using a quantitative survey approach:

- Amy Unsworth & David Voas (2018). Attitudes to evolution among Christians, Muslims and the Non-Religious in Britain: Differential effects of religious and educational factors. *Public Understanding of Science*, 27(1), 76-93. *This paper is by our guest lecturer this week!*

Week 4: Methods: Visual Methods (Guest Lecture from Dr Jean Baptiste Gouyon)

The lecture will cover fundamental aspects of working with images and other visual representations as primary sources for your research. The main aspect of the lecture is to look at images as communication devices. We look at different methods to analyse visual artefacts, semiotics, intertextuality and frames.

Recommended Readings:

- Rose, Gillian. *Visual methodologies: An introduction to researching with visual materials* (4th edition). Sage, 2016. Chapter 1 & 2 (pp.1-47)
- Bauer, Martin. W. & Gaskell, George. *Qualitative researching with text, image and sound*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd. *Read Chapter 6 (pp. 94-107), then skim Chapter 13 (pp. 228-245) & Chapter 14 (pp. 247-262). [NB: the 2nd two chapters on this list focus on analysis, so worth a skim now then come back to them in week 9 if you're interested in this kind of research!]*

An example of STS research using visual methods:

- Jean-Baptiste Gouyon, (2014). Making science at home: visual displays of space science and nuclear physics at the Science Museum and on television in postwar Britain. *History and Technology*, 30(1-2), 37-60. *This paper is by our guest lecturer for this week!*

Week 5: Methods: Case Studies (Prof Melanie Smallman)

Using a case study is a powerful approach to generate an in-depth, multi-faceted understanding of a complex issue in its real-life context. It is an established research design that is used extensively in a wide variety of disciplines, particularly in the social sciences. By developing an intensive, systematic investigation of a single individual, group, community, or other unit the researcher can examine in-depth data relating to several variables. In this session we explore what case studies are, how they are conducted and how to pick relevant methods to make the

case study robust, along with discussion of the analysis process. Examples will include multi-sited research, and interdisciplinary research case studies.

In this class we will also prepare for the first assessment.

Recommended Readings:

- Robert Yin (2018). *Case study research and applications: Design and methods*. Sage: Thousand Oaks, London and New Delhi. *Read Chapter 1: Getting started: how to know whether and how to use the case study as a research method, Chapter 4: Collecting Case Study evidence*
- Thomas Schwandt and Emily F. Gates (2018). Case study methodology. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (Fifth ed., pp. 341-553). London and Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- Malcolm Tight (2017) *Understanding Case Study Research: Small-scale Research with Meaning* (First Ed., pp.224)

An example of STS research using a case study approach:

- Carina Llosa (2019). Socio-environmental conflicts as social cohesion thermometers: a case study. *Tapuya: Latin American Science, Technology and Society*, 2(1), 237-252.

Week 6: Research Design (Prof Melanie Smallman)

In this lecture we explore how you can best design research for a particular project. This includes: 1) establishing the research questions - developing critical awareness of how to phrase a research question, 2) the research process - matching topics with methods, and finally 3) reviewing methods - developing an understanding of the power and limitations of methods.

Recommended Readings:

- Bell, J., & Waters, S. (2018). *EBOOK: DOING YOUR RESEARCH PROJECT: A GUIDE FOR FIRST-TIME RESEARCHERS*. McGraw-Hill Education (UK). This is a great general textbook take a read of chapter 14 and 15.
- Matthew B. Miles, A.M. Huberman and Johnny Saldaña (2020). *Qualitative data analysis: a methods sourcebook*. 4th Edition. Sage: Los Angeles. *Read Chapter 2: Research Design & Data Management*.

Week 7: Documents and Archives (Prof Melanie Smallman)

This week we look at how to use texts as primary research sources. We will talk about how documents, whether published, archived or 'grey,' are not merely or passive containers of data to be 'mined.' What questions do we need to ask about their function, style, language and structure, and about why, how and by whom they were created, collected, circulated, classified, read and recreated?

Recommended Readings:

- Alan Bryman (2016 or 2012), *Social Research Methods*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. *Read chapters 23 Documents as sources of data and 13 Content Analysis (you can also read: Chapter 22 Language in qualitative research)*
- Creager, Angela NH, Mathias Grote, and Elaine Leong. "Learning by the book: manuals and handbooks in the history of science." *BJHS Themes* 5 (2020): 1-13.
- Yale, Elizabeth. "The Book and the Archive in the History of Science." *Isis* 107, no. 1 (2016): 106-115.

Example of STS research using documents

- Leong, Elaine. "Making medicines in the early modern household." *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* (2008): 145-168. *Written by a UCL colleague!*
- Sedona Chinn, Sol P. Hart, P. S., & Stuart Soroka (2020). Politicization and Polarization in Climate Change News Content, 1985-2017. *Science Communication*, 42(1), 112-129.

Week 8: Methods Ethnography and Observation (Prof Jack Stilgoe)

Ethnography is the signature method of cultural anthropology; it is also used by sociologists, geographers, and other social researchers. This week is about how to observe, record, and describe social action/interaction as a research method. We will cover key terms such as culture, participant observation, fieldnotes, thick description, multi-sited ethnography and digital ethnography.

Recommended Readings:

- Gobo, G. (2008). *Doing ethnography*. SAGE Publications Ltd. *Read Chapter 1: What is ethnography?, pp.2-14 and Chapter 10: What to Observe: Social Structures, Talks and Contexts, pp. 162-189.*
- Annette N. Markham (2018). Ethnography in the digital internet era: from fields to flows, descriptions to interventions. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (Fifth ed., pp. 650-688). London and Thousand Oaks: Sage.

Further Readings on the Method of Ethnography:

- Emerson, R. M. Fretz, R. I. and L. L. Shaw (2011), *Writing Ethnographic Fieldnotes. Second Edition*. University of Chicago Press. *Chapter 1: Fieldnotes in Ethnographic Research, pp. 1-20. This chapter goes into greater depth on how to observe and take notes.*
- Geertz, C. (1973), Thick Description: Towards an Interpretive Theory of Culture <https://philpapers.org/archive/GEETTD.pdf> *This is a classic articles in the history of ethnographic methods; it describes how anthropologists understand culture in relation to ways of describing practices in context.*

Examples of Ethnography in STS:

- Ethnographies of Science: Interview with the Authors: <https://journal.culanth.org/index.php/ca/ethnographies-of-science-interview> *A group interview with ethnographers of science as they reflect on their methods.*
- Rosemary McKechnie (1996). Insiders and outsiders: identifying experts on home ground. In A. Irwin & B. Wynne (Eds.), *Misunderstanding Science? The public reconstruction of science and technology* (pp. 126-151). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. *This is a superb example of STS use of ethnography.*
- Bruno Latour & Steve Woolgar (1986). *Laboratory life: The construction of scientific facts.* Princeton University Press. *Read Chapter 2: An anthropologist visits the laboratory. This is an STS classic! A pioneering work that explores how ethnography in a lab changes how we understand science as culture and practice.*

Week 9: Digital Methods

With the rise of AI and big data technologies, the opportunities for social research adopting these technologies grow too. This session will look at the principles behind digital methods and explore some of the technologies available to researchers.

See individual sessions on Moodle for further reading.

Week 10: Group presentations – Assessment 2 (All)

Please see Moodle for more details and practical arrangements.

Course expectations

Students are required to attend classes and to participate in discussions and group work.

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.