

# HPSC0145

## MSci Research Project in Science and Technology Studies

### Course Syllabus

2021-22 session | Dr. Tiago Mata | [t.mata@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:t.mata@ucl.ac.uk)

#### Course Information

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

Course website:	See Moodle
Moodle Web site:	<a href="https://moodle.ucl.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=24804">https://moodle.ucl.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=24804</a>
Assessment:	Research proposal 15%, final report 85%
Timetable:	3 sessions per term, see UCL timetable or moodle for details
Prerequisites:	No pre-requisites.
Required texts:	None, suggested readings only.
Course convenor(s):	Dr. Tiago Mata (responsible for management of the supervisory process, and marking, each student will work closely with an appropriate supervisor)
Contact:	<a href="mailto:t.mata@ucl.ac.uk">t.mata@ucl.ac.uk</a> (or call through Teams)
Web:	<a href="http://www.ucl.ac.uk/sts/staff/mata">http://www.ucl.ac.uk/sts/staff/mata</a>
Office location:	22 Gordon Square, Room 2.1.
Office hours:	By appointment by person or through Microsoft Booking online

## Schedule

UCL Week	Topic	Date	Activity
6-7	Abstract/topics/literatures	-	Complete moodle forums
8	Preparing a research proposal	19 October (face to face)	Read example research proposals
10	Identifying a methodology	-	Complete moodle forum
11	<b>Reading Week</b>		
12	Methods, part I	16 November (face to face)	To be advised
16	Methods, part II	14 December (face to face)	To be advised
21	Work in progress seminar	18 January (face to face)	Present 10 min pitch of your project
26	Reading dissertations	22 February (face to face)	Read example dissertations
29	Writing clinic	15 March (face to face)	Share samples of your text

## Blended format

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In the 2021-22 session we will be adopting a blended learning model. What this means for this module is that there will be some pre-recorded lectures/workshop material to be viewed and activities to be completed asynchronously on Moodle, and we will meet 3 times per term (Tuesdays, see details below and on the timetable) to reflect and discuss key steps of the research journey.

Independently, you will meet regularly with your appointed supervisor. The regularity and length of those meetings must be agreed with the supervisor and will likely change as your work develops. You should agree with the supervisor whether the meetings should be in person or virtually.

## Assessments

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### Summary

	Description	Deadline	Word limit
<b>Research proposal</b>	A proposal that identifies motivation, questions, and methodologies for your study	Tuesday 16 November 5:00 pm	2000 words
<b>Research project</b>	The thesis	Thursday 24 March 5:00 pm	10000 words

### Assignment 1. Research proposal (2000 words, 15% of grade, 16 November)

You will submit a preformatted research proposal that comprises of: research aims and research questions, rationale for aims and questions, literature review, research design and methodology. This is only a preliminary research proposal, the result of your first month and half of research, even so it must demonstrate grasp of the topic and of key literatures.

You will build on this research proposal, correcting, deepening, enriching, in the months that follow.

### Assignment 2. Dissertation (10000 words, 85% of grade, 24 March)

This is the culmination of your two-term study, a structured research report of 10,000 words, not including appendices, that poses an original question and answers it.

The nature of evidence and style of argument will differ between the various branches of science studies and students should be aware of what the appropriate standard is.

The dissertation will be marked on criteria that include: strong research question and rationale; evidence of sustained and independent research; good relation to literature and engagement with theory; appropriate choice of methodology; quality of data gathered; analysis, synthesis and reflection on that data; strength of argument; and quality of writing and expression. Further criteria include compliance with UCL ethics policies, and standard of referencing.

### **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](http://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 of advice:

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.

## Aims & objectives

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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.

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.

## Sessions

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The following sessions are complementary to the meetings held with the appointed supervisor. The purpose of these sessions is to provide overall training and guidance on the research process and to offer an opportunity for collegial collaboration between the students taking the module.

### First term

#### **19 October. Preparing a research proposal**

The first key milestone of the research project is to submit a 2000 word research proposal, due on the week after reading week.

In the first weeks of term, students will have had the chance to brainstorm about topics and with the aid of the convenor find a suitable supervisor for their project. By mid to late October you should have met your supervisor and identified possible research questions and literatures to examine.

In our face-to-face session we will read some exemplar research proposals and some not so good, to identify what research proposals do and how do that well. The proposal is an early map that helps you start your research journey.

#### **16 November. Methods, part I.**

Through a moodle forum, we will identify what research methods are most appropriate for the projects running this year. This session is one of two on methodological literatures and advice on the practicalities of doing research. This guidance is in addition to the support given by the supervisor. In the first meeting we set out the main challenges that research methods must fulfill.

In the weeks that follow the convenor will share resources and short lectures giving guidance on specific research methods and approaches.

#### **14 December. Methods, part II.**

This session concludes the reflection on methodologies by taking stock of how different methods contrast and complement each other. We will review also what a methodology section of a dissertation might contain.

### Second term

### **18 January. Work in progress seminar**

This session will be run by the students, who will individually present their project and its early findings. The presentation should be no more than 10 minutes and will be followed by classroom discussion. The purpose of this seminar is to provide students an opportunity for self-reflection and self-assessment and a chance to test their ideas with an audience that is not familiar with the topic and approaches.

### **22 February. Reading dissertations.**

In preparation for this session, students will be given a few model dissertations written in the STS department. Our face-to-face session will discuss the strengths and weaknesses of those dissertations and what lessons one might draw for ongoing individual projects.

### **15 March. Writing clinic.**

On our final meeting, with a little more than a week left before submission, we will review and discuss some of the difficulties you are finding in writing up the research. From prior experience these might include: how to separate evidence and interpretation, how to link findings with the theory and secondary literature, how to draw out the social impact of one's conclusions, among others... As in previous weeks, the agenda will be set by the students and their concerns.

## **Reading list**

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There is an extensive literature guiding students in the process of writing dissertations, and undertaking research projects. Some of that literature focuses on specific research methods and approaches, and will be discussed in the second half of the first term. There are also titles that provide overviews and start to end advice on research and writing. A few examples in that genre are:

*Doing a Successful Research Project: Using Qualitative or Quantitative Methods.* Martin Davies and Nathan Hughes. Palgrave MacMillan 2014. (available as ebook)

*Doing your research project: a guide for first-time researchers in education, health and social science.* Judith Bell. Open University Press 2010.

*The good research guide: for small-scale social research projects.* Martin Denscombe. Open University Press 2007.

## **Additional Information**

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### **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**

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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](http://www.ucl.ac.uk/sts/handbook)

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

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