

HPSC0145

MSci Research Project in Science and Technology Studies

Course Syllabus

2024-25 session | Professor Simon Lock | simon.lock@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. 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:	https://moodle.ucl.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=24804
Assessment:	Research proposal 15%, final report 85%
Timetable:	To be arranged between students and convenor/supervisors
Prerequisites:	No pre-requisites.
Required texts:	None, suggested readings only.
Course convenor(s):	Professor Simon Lock (responsible for management of the supervisory process, and marking, each student will work closely with an appropriate supervisor)
Contact:	simon.lock@ucl.ac.uk
Web:	http://www.ucl.ac.uk/sts/staff/lock
Office location:	22 Gordon Square, Room 2.2
Office hours:	Tues 11-12 (in person or online)

Schedule

This module will run as a fortnightly supervision session between the students and the module convenor in term 1 and then once suitable project supervisors have been identified in regular supervision meetings between them and the students.

Time slots will be arranged in the first week of the term.

Assessments

Summary

	Description	Deadline	Word limit
Research proposal	A proposal that identifies motivation, questions, and methodologies for your study	Tuesday 3 December 2024 5:00 pm	2000 words
Research project	The thesis	Tuesday 29 April 2025 5:00 pm	10000 words

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

You will submit a 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 couple of months 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)

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.

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

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.

Reading list

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.

Succeeding with your masters dissertation: a step-by-step handbook. John Biggam. McGraw-Hill Education 2017.

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.

Generative AI Statement

Students are permitted to use AI tools for:

- Drafting ideas and planning or structuring written materials
- Reviewing and critically analysing written materials to assess their validity
- Helping to improve your grammar and writing structure – especially helpful if English is a second language
- Experimenting with different writing styles
- Getting explanations

Students are **not** permitted to use AI tools for:

- Writing the dissertation or research proposal. Any use of AI must be documented (see below).

Students **must** correctly document their use of AI tools so that it can be appropriately acknowledged. Please see the library's guidance, here - <https://library-guides.ucl.ac.uk/referencing-plagiarism/acknowledging-AI>

Please be aware that you are responsible for ensuring that the assessment that you submit correctly references the use of other people's ideas and work. If you submit AI generated text that has used the work of human authors and it is not appropriately referenced, this may count as academic misconduct.

For further information on using AI in your assessments, please visit - <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/students/exams-and-assessments/assessment-success-guide/engaging-ai-your-education-and-assessment>

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.
