

HPSC3032 Investigating Contemporary Science

Course Syllabus

2013-14 session | Dr Jean-Baptiste Gouyon | j.gouyon@ucl.ac.uk

Course Information

STS aims to provide students with the intellectual and other skills to analyse trends in science and technology. This course asks students to use – and develop further - these skills to investigate deeply, assess and present their findings on a chosen issue in the contemporary politics of science. As a third year module, this course has been designed to make most use of acquired skills and knowledge in a way that moves students towards the world of work. In particular, the kinds of capacities demonstrable in a successful completion course are similar to those needed by an investigative reporter or a researcher for a think tank

Basic course information

Course website:	See on Moodle
Moodle Web site:	HPSC3032
Assessment:	Coursework 1 (4,000 words) (60%), Coursework 2 (2,000 words) (40%)
Timetable:	www.ucl.ac.uk/sts/hpsc
Prerequisites:	No pre-requisites.
Required texts:	No required texts.
Course tutor(s):	Dr Jean-Baptiste Gouyon
Contact:	j.gouyon@ucl.ac.uk
Web:	www.ucl.ac.uk/silva/sts/staff/
Office location:	22 Gordon Square, Room B14
Office hours:	Tuesdays, 11-13 Wednesdays, 13-15 or send an email at j.gouyon@ucl.ac.uk to make an appointment.

Schedule

UCL Week	Topic	Date	Activity
21	Introduction	14/01	
22	What makes good investigative reporting ?	21/01	Read investigative journalism
23	Story choice discussion	28/01	Identify probable topic.
24	Newsroom	04/02	Report progress.
25	Newsroom	11/02	Report progress.
26	Reading Week		
27	Newsroom: Identifying the scoop. Essay 1 Deadline	25/02	Identify scoop
28	Newsroom	04/03	Report progress.
29	Newsroom	11/03	Report progress.
30	Newsroom	18/03	Report progress.
31	Composing the final edition Essay 2 deadline	25/03	Stories published.

Assessments

Summary

	Description	Deadline	Word limit
1	Background Report	24 February 2014 11.59 pm	4,000
2	News article	24 March 2014 11.59 pm	2,000

Assignments

This term's course will be assessed on the basis of two pieces of written work and one short oral presentation.

The first piece of written work is a 4000 word background report (60%). It tells me what is known about the issue from published sources. What are the known facts of the case? This piece needs to be written in the same format as a regular essay: you need to give full references and a bibliography.

The second piece of written work is a 2000 word news article reporting the findings of the investigation (40%). This reports the scoop – what you have found out from your investigation

that goes significantly beyond what was known from published sources alone. The news article should be pitched as if it was towards the 'general editor' of a national broadsheet newspaper. The editor would be most impressed by a headline on the front page, of course, but other stories would be accommodated. One difference, however, is that you will be able to write more words than a typical national newspaper story on science. A good model, in terms of length and approach, is the 'Feature News' stories reported in *Nature*.

Written work should be handed in via moodle (moodle.ucl.ac.uk). Do not e-mail coursework direct to the course tutor without prior permission.

Criteria for assessment

The departmental marking guidelines for individual items of assessment can be found in the STS Student Handbook.

Aims & objectives

STS aims to provide students with the intellectual and other skills to analyse trends in science and technology. This course asks students to use – and develop further - these skills to investigate deeply, assess and present their findings on a chosen issue in the contemporary politics of science.

As a third year module, this course has been designed to make most use of acquired skills and knowledge in a way that moves students towards the world of work. In particular, the kinds of capacities demonstrable in a successful completion course are similar to those needed by an investigative reporter or a researcher for a think tank.

Through encouraging critical engagement with the political world, this course contributes to UCL STS's Global Citizenship programme.

Guided by the tutor, the student chooses a live, contentious issue on the contemporary politics of science. The issue is investigated through a combination of methods, including some from the following: desk research, face-to-face or phone interviews, questionnaires, or participant observation.

The intended learning outcomes are:

- In-depth knowledge of an issue in the politics of contemporary science, including facts and context.
- Competence in bringing the scholarly tools of STS to analyse an issue in the politics of contemporary science.
- Competence demonstrated of giving an account and explanation of an issue in the politics of contemporary science to both online audiences and presentation audiences.
- Knowledge of the legal, ethical and other regulatory freedoms and constraints of research and reporting contemporary issues (such as media law and freedom of information legislation).

Reading list

General Background Reading

John Pilger (ed.), *Tell Me No Lies: Investigative Journalism and its Triumphs*, London: Vintage, 2005.

This is a collection of post-1945 reports by investigative journalists, starting with Wilfred Burchett's report from Hiroshima and going up to the so-called war on terror. Good inspirational reading.

David Randall, *The Universal Journalist*, 3rd edition, London: Pluto Press, 2007.

There are lots of how-to guides to being a journalist, but this one is the best. Lots of good practical advice mixed with examples drawn from the history of journalism. Written by a working journalist.

Steve Miller and Jane Gregory, *Science in Public: Culture, Communication, Credibility*, London: Plenum, 1998.

You probably know this one already! Written by two STS staff members, this is the book that tells you about the public face of science, including how news values shape science reporting.

Martin Bauer and Massimiano Bucchi (Eds.), *Journalism, Science, and Society*, New York and London: Routledge, 2007.

This book is a collection of essays on the history and the practice of science journalism. Particularly useful for this module are the essays in the second part, in which professional science writers discuss the rules and constraints of their practice.

Starting Investigations

Where do stories come from? Randall lists the following, in descending order, for a typical national newspaper covering domestic news:

In Government departments agencies

Off-diary (contacts, observation)

Courts, inquiries

Universities

Pressure groups, unions, etc

Political sources

Specialist press

Commercial companies

Consumer magazines

International organisations

Police

You are investigating the politics of contemporary science, which means that your sources might be different. You will start by identifying a broad topic to investigate.

Here are some idea of where to start:

- 'News' pages of general science journals and magazines: *New Scientist*, *Nature*, *Science*, as well as the science pages of national newspapers, and the science news webpages of news organisations such as the BBC

- Newsfeeds of websites of research-active organisations, for example universities (including UCL), research institutes, government laboratories, science-based industrial companies. But remember this is just the start of an investigation – don't fall in to the trap of 'press release' journalism!

- Science news feeds of Facebook and Twitter

- The research campaigns and reports of NGOs, especially those that comment on, or use, scientific research. Examples include environmental organisations (such as Greenpeace, GeneWatch UK, etc), local organisations set up to oppose large scale projects, and so on.

- A special case of the NGOs are the science advocacy groups: organisations that campaign on science or represent activist scientists. Examples include:

Campaign for Science and Engineering (CASE): <http://sciencecampaign.org.uk/>

British Science Association: <http://www.britishtscienceassociation.org/web/>

Union of Concerned Scientists: <http://www.ucsusa.org/>

- Government departmental reports on science and research. For example:

Government Office of Science (GO Science, in BIS): <http://www.bis.gov.uk/go-science>

Ministry of Defence (the science parts): <http://www.science.mod.uk/>

Department of Health: <http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/index.htm>

Research Councils: <http://www.rcuk.ac.uk/Pages/Home.aspx>

- The government collects and publishes statistics on science. These are known as SET Statistics. They are crucial not only for 'following the money' but also can help prompt ideas for topics:

<http://www.bis.gov.uk/policies/science/science-funding/set-stats>

- Commercial research and development is one of the best topics for pioneering investigative work. A useful place to start is a publication called R&D Scoreboard which sets out some statistics on commercial R&D:

<http://www.bis.gov.uk/policies/innovation/business-support/research-and-development/randd-scoreboard>

Beyond that, each company has a website, which you should regard as marketing and a source for some initial ideas rather than an objective or complete source of knowledge of privately-funded science.

- The Parliamentary committees investigate many aspects of public life, especially where public money is spent. There are two specialist science and technology select committees, one for the Commons and one for the Lords. Both investigate contemporary issues in science and technology, calling and interviewing witnesses and publishing reports. A great place to start.

Science and Technology Committee (Commons)

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/science-and-technology-committee/>

Science and Technology Committee (Lords)

<http://www.parliament.uk/hlscience>

- Finding and accessing public records. You can investigate a contemporary issue by examining public records. Public records older than 30 years will (except in some circumstances) be available at the National Archives, which are in Kew, west London.

Browse the catalogue via:

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/catalogue/default.asp?j=1>

Records more recent than 30 years can be made available by using a Freedom of Information (Fol) request. More info here:

http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/governmentcitizensandrights/yourrightsandresponsibilities/dg_4003239

You should have an initial response to a Fol request in 20 days, so they are a possible tool to use.

Tools and methods: we will discuss in class. They include: document research, telephone interviews, talking to contacts, archive visits, Fol requests, and more.

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.
