



MSc in Digital Education

COURSE HANDBOOK

**Introduction to Social Research Methods
[REDU11078]**

**Session 2018/19: Semester 2 (January
2019)**

If you require this document or any of the internal University of Edinburgh online resources mentioned in this document in an alternative format, please contact Victoria McIntyre:

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Contents

Section	Page
Contents	2
Introduction	3
Course tutors	3
Course Prerequisites	4
Course learning outcomes	4
Delivery and workload	5
Tutor input	5
Participation etiquette	5
Computer skills and equipment you need	5
Course structure and format	6
Assessment	7
The postgraduate common marking scheme	7
Credit and continuation of study	8
Readings	8
Course evaluation	8
Contact information	9

Introduction

Welcome to the Introduction to Social Research Methods course! This course is a required element of the MSc in Digital Education offered by the Moray House School of Education at the University of Edinburgh. For more information about the full MSc Programme, please contact the Programme Director, Dr Philippa Sheail: p.sheail@ed.ac.uk

This course handbook will give you information about the general course structure, the assessments, and other organisational details that you will need.

For further details about this course you should contact:

Course Organiser: Dr Philippa Sheail p.sheail@ed.ac.uk

or Co-Tutor: Dr Jeremy Knox jeremy.knox@ed.ac.uk

Course Tutors

Dr Philippa Sheail



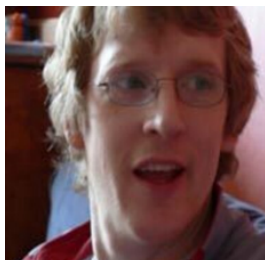
Philippa is a Lecturer in Digital Education and is course organiser for an Introduction to Social Research Methods. She also tutors on an Introduction to Digital Environments for Learning (IDEL). Her research interests are interdisciplinary, based in the area of digital and higher education, but drawing on organisational theory, cultural geography, and social theories of time. Phil is currently developing research in the library sector, with a particular interest in practices of organising in a research library context.

Dr Jeremy Knox



Jeremy is a Lecturer in Digital Education and is course organiser for 'Education and digital cultures' (EDC). He is Co-Director of the Centre for Research in Digital Education (Data Society). His research interests include critical posthumanism and new materialism, and the implications of such thinking for education and educational research, with a specific focus on the digital. His published work includes critical perspectives on Open Educational Resources (OER) and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs).

Dr Rory Ewins



Rory is a Lecturer in Digital Education and is course organizer for 'Digital education in global context'. He also leads and co-tutors on 'An introduction to digital environments for learning'. His interests include online identity and its implications for academics, the effect of university and government IT policies on academic practice, digital education and intellectual property, digital education in developing countries.

Dr Zayba Ghazali-Mohammed

Zayba is a Research Associate on the [Move2Learn project](#) at the Centre for Research in Digital Education. Her main research interests include cognitive development of young children's scientific understanding, the role of executive functions and other domain-general capabilities on conceptual progression, naïve theories of learning, and how developing language can influence scientific understanding. The Move2Learn project is investigating the role of embodied cognition and immersive technologies on science learning within museum contexts.

Course Prerequisites

This course is one of two required courses on the MSc programme, the other being the foundation course, 'An Introduction to Digital Environments for Learning' (IDEL). Part-time students normally take Introduction to Social Research Methods as their final, or penultimate, taught module, and full-time participants take it in Semester 2. This course is designed to give you the framework and contextual knowledge you need in order to plan, design and execute an independent research project for the dissertation element of the MSc in Digital Education. Therefore, this course is relevant to, and required by, those intending to complete the full MSc programme. This course is not a requirement for those wishing to graduate with the award of a Postgraduate Certificate or Diploma.

The course will support you in formulating a research question and an outline project plan. It will give you key skills in research design and enable you to position your own programme of research within the broader context of social science enquiry. It will introduce you to data collection and analysis and to key methods for conducting both quantitative and qualitative research.

Course learning outcomes

On completion of the course you will be able to:

1. Demonstrate critical awareness of key aspects of epistemology, validity and ethics as they relate to social science and digital education research
2. Locate and critically analyse published research
3. Engage critically with a range of data collection and analysis methods and approaches
4. Effectively plan a programme of research, identifying appropriate research questions and how they might be addressed by particular methodological approaches
5. Demonstrate an awareness of academic conventions in the presentation of research

For more information, please refer to the Degree Regulations & Programmes of Study course catalogue: <http://www.drps.ed.ac.uk/18-19/dpt/cxredu11078.htm>

Delivery and workload

The Introduction to Social Research Methods course has a weekly structure, like many of the other courses in the Programme. Overall, successful participation on the course will require an investment of at least 7-10 hours of study each week, with more time required around assignment preparation. Weekly activities will be made up of reading, discussions with tutors and other students, and engagement with any practical tasks set.

Tutor input

Phil and Jeremy will be your first points of contact for the unfolding content, tasks, and assessed work of the course, and you will also have the opportunity to work together with your peers to develop your understanding of the course material.

You will probably spend a fair amount of time during the course thinking ahead to the dissertation, and one major element of the dissertation period is the one-to-one relationship you will build with your supervisor. More information about that relationship and the process of the dissertation can be found in the Dissertation section of the Programme Handbook. At the end of the Introduction to Social Research Methods course, we will assign a supervisor to you on the basis of your topic area and/or research design. This may be someone from the MSc in Digital Education team, or someone from the wider School of Education, or University. If you have a particular supervisor in mind, feel free to discuss this with Phil or Jeremy. It may not be possible to accommodate your preference due to supervisor workloads, or there may turn out to be someone with expertise that would be a better match for your project, but we are certainly happy to hear your thoughts. We must emphasise, though, that it will not always be possible for you to choose your supervisor.

Participation etiquette

By the time of beginning work on this course, participants should be well aware of how to conduct themselves in online communication with other members of the course group. The basic rules of netiquette (concise, polite and supportive exchanges) should apply.

Remember too that the nature of this course, as it leads and builds towards an individual piece of research to be taken on by each participant, means that there will be a high level of personal investment in some of the ideas being exchanged. We will no doubt also find that passions can run high when the strengths and weaknesses of particular epistemological positions are discussed. We are talking about the nature of truth; not only how we come to know something, but also our beliefs about the nature of the world. People are also likely to be engaging with very pragmatic and personally meaningful investigations of their own professional practice. So, it is a serious business, in which courtesy and sensitivity may be particularly important. Having said that, input and critique from our colleagues is a vital component in the process of formulating and carrying out our research, so the open sharing of ideas is important.

Computer skills and equipment

The [Technologies Handbook](#) (in the form of a wiki) for the Programme will continue to give you the background information that you will need to access Programme-wide University systems.

As with all courses on the programme, you will need regular access to a computer that is connected to the Internet. The machine should have (and you will be expected to be able to use) browser software, a word processor, and an application such as Acrobat Reader to allow you to access files in PDF format. Some particular software will be introduced on this course (for example, for the analysis of qualitative and quantitative data) that you may not have come across before, but you will be guided in the use of this. When using

new software, however, you should always try to think of how your existing experience can be generalised to help you understand and use it. There should be links, for example, between your knowledge of a word processing application and the use of a tool for qualitative analysis, while a tool for the statistical analysis of quantitative data will almost certainly look and feel a bit like a conventional spreadsheet application. As scholars of learning you should be alert to the insights that you can gain about learning in general from your own encounters with new software applications.

Course structure and format

Introduction to Social Research Methods runs over 11 weeks (one semester), from Monday 14th January 2019. A week of study on this course includes the weekend, i.e. each week of work normally runs from Monday to Sunday. As with the majority of the courses on the Digital Education Programme, you will have a dedicated Moodle space restricted to your course group throughout the course. Registered students will be given access to the Moodle site from Monday 7 January 2019, one week before the course officially starts.

Week	Topic	Assignment due dates
Week 0 7 January 2019	Orientation and welcome	
Weeks 1 & 2 14 January 21 January	Introduction: thinking like a researcher Research design and components Knowledge, epistemology, ontology	
Week 3 28 January	A week of data Conceptualising and understanding data	
Weeks 4 & 5 4 February 11 February	Exploring methods Choose two methods to explore in detail	
Week 6 18 February	Quantitative analysis: 'How to lie with statistics' Critical perspectives on quantitative data analysis	
Week 7 25 February	Qualitative analysis: interpretation and subjectivity Critical perspectives on qualitative data analysis	
Week 8 4 March	Continuing analysis work	Analysis assignment: due 10 March 2019
Week 9 11 March	Designing a dissertation research project Abstract writing and reviewing proposals	
Weeks 10 & 11 18 March 25 March	Preparing a research proposal Ethical dilemmas and proposal preparation	
		Research proposal assignment: due 14 April 2019

Assessment

Formative feedback during Introduction to Social Research Methods will be given via the discussion forums, where tutors and students will discuss the course material and activities throughout the course. You will also have the opportunity to receive feedback on an abstract of your dissertation proposal in the final section of the course.

The summative assessment of the course will be based on two assignments, as described below. Please check the course Moodle site for full details of assessment criteria, word limits, and deadlines:

Part 1 (30%): 1000 words, due Sunday 10 March 2019

You will work with an existing set of either qualitative or quantitative data, chosen from a range of possible sets. You will perform some simple analysis and interpretation directed towards answering a series of questions posed about the data. Results of the analysis will be written up as a brief report. This will present the opportunity to develop skills and knowledge that lead directly to the second assessment, with feedback from tutors.

Part 2 (70%): 3000 words, due Sunday 14 April 2019

You will develop a research proposal for the dissertation, including the research question to be addressed, critical discussion of the methodology to be used, and an outline of how data will be collected and analysed. The proposal will also include a provisional project plan outlining key milestones and timescales for the various stages of the project.

NB: Where good reasons exist, requests for extensions will be considered, and these should be discussed with the Course Organiser well in advance of, and certainly at least 48 hours before, the deadline concerned.

The postgraduate common marking scheme

Grades will be awarded in line with the University's postgraduate common marking scheme:

Mark (%)	Grade	Description
90-100	A1	An excellent performance, satisfactory for a distinction
80-89	A2	An excellent performance, satisfactory for a distinction
70 - 79	A3	An excellent performance, satisfactory for a distinction
60 - 69	B	A very good performance
50 - 59	C	A good performance, satisfactory for a masters degree
40 - 49	D	A satisfactory performance for the diploma, but inadequate for a masters degree
30 - 39	E	Marginal fail
20 - 29	F	Clear fail
10 - 19	G	Bad fail
0 - 9	H	Bad fail

The pass mark is grade D (40%).

For more detail on the regulations which govern the course and the programme you should consult the Programme Handbook and the University's Degree Regulations and Programmes of Study (DRPS): <http://www.drps.ed.ac.uk>

In particular, the regulations governing taught postgraduate programmes are included at: <http://www.ed.ac.uk/schools-departments/academic-services/policies-regulations/regulations/assessment>

Credit and continuation of study

Successful completion of this course will give you 20 Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) points at postgraduate level 11. More details of the SCQF can be found on the Web at: <http://www.scqf.org.uk/>

The full MSc in Digital Education comprises of the foundation course Introduction to digital environments for learning (IDEL; 40 credit points) and four additional 20 credit courses (which must include this course), plus a dissertation. The list of available options is available on the programme web site at: <http://digital.education.ed.ac.uk>

The regulations governing satisfactory progress for continuation to Masters-level by work on, and submission of, a dissertation are given in your Programme Handbook.

Readings

Resources will be provided via the University's digital library, or linked online. In some cases, these will be made available as 'e-Reserve' - published papers or chapters for which specific copyright clearance has been obtained - which are held for us by the University Library as Portable Document Format (PDF) files. Others will be papers from research journals that are held by the University Library in their general online collection. You would be well advised to keep a collection of these resources and materials on your computer for future reference. Participation on the course entitles you to these materials, but access may not continue beyond the end of the course in some cases.

Course evaluation

There will be a formal, questionnaire-based evaluation at the end of the course and we will greatly appreciate your contributions at that point. Please do not let any concerns that you have about how things are progressing go unaddressed, however. This course stands at a particularly important juncture in the overall Programme – the point at which you are embarking on a significant piece of individual and independent research – so it is important that you feel comfortable about the trajectory that you are taking. Please feel free therefore to raise any questions, issues or technical difficulties as you encounter them, and we will do our best to help and support you.

Contact information

For help and advice on any aspect of the course, contact the Course Organiser in the first instance

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