



MSc in Digital Education

Course Handbook

Introduction to Social Research Methods

REDU11078

Semester 2, 2019/20 (January 2020)

If you require this document or any of the internal University of Edinburgh online resources mentioned here in an alternative format, please contact our programme secretary, Shannon Payne:

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Introduction

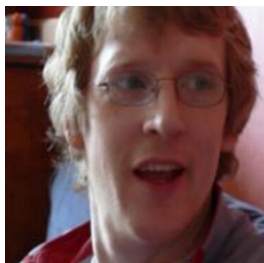
Welcome to Introduction to Social Research Methods. This course is a required element of the MSc in Digital Education offered by the Moray House School of Education and Sport at the University of Edinburgh. For more information about the full MSc programme, please contact the Programme Director, Dr Philippa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

This handbook provides information about the general course structure, the assessments, and other organisational details that you will need. Further details are available from the course organiser, Dr Rory Ewins, or the course Moodle site, open from 6 January 2020:

<https://www.moodle.is.ed.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=1411>

Course tutors

Dr Rory Ewins



Rory is a Lecturer in Digital Education and is course organiser for this course and 'Digital Education in Global Context'. He also teaches on 'An Introduction to Digital Environments for Learning'. His interests include digital education in developing countries, digital citizenship, intellectual property, online identity and its academic implications, and the effect of university and government IT policies on academic practice.

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Dr Huw Davies



Huw is a new Lecturer on the Digital Education programme in 2020. He is a sociologist specialising in how people, society, and digital technologies mutually develop and influence each other. This involves synthesising 'traditional sociology' concerned with structures, race, gender, and class with new digital, computational methods. Recently, Huw has been researching digital skills and literacies, digital inequalities, the internet of toys, the freelance economy, and introduction of AI into education.

Dr James Lamb



James is a Lecturer in Digital Education and teaches on 'An Introduction to Digital Environments for Learning' and 'Education and Digital Cultures'. He is also responsible for coordinating dissertation support on the Digital Education programme, which includes contributing towards the final stages of the Research Methods course. His teaching and research interests are concerned with learning spaces, multimodality and sonic methods.

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Course requirements and outcomes

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). It is not required for those wishing to graduate with the award of a Postgraduate Certificate or Diploma. The 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. Normally, you will take it as your final or penultimate taught course.

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.

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/19-20/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.

Course structure and format

The course runs over 11 weeks (one semester) from Monday 13 January 2020, with orientation the week before. Each week of work normally runs from Monday to Sunday. As with most courses on the Digital Education programme, you will have a dedicated Moodle space restricted to your course group throughout the course. This will open on Monday 6 January 2020, one week before the course officially starts:

<https://www.moodle.is.ed.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=1411>

Week	Topic	Assignment due dates
Week 0 6 January 2020	Before we begin: orientation and welcome activities	
Week 1 13 January 2020	A week of data: thinking creatively about what 'data' is, and ethical issues surrounding it	
Week 2 20 January 2020	Researching 'Digital Education'	
Weeks 3-5	Analysing data	
Week 3 27 January 2020	Quantitative analysis: how to lie with statistics	
Week 4 3 February 2020	Qualitative analysis: interpretation and trustworthiness	
Week 5 10 February 2020	Data analysis assignment	First assignment due: 16 February 2020
Weeks 6-8	Collecting data	
Week 6 17 February 2020	What do we believe about knowledge?	
Weeks 7 & 8 24 February & 2 March 2020	Gathering and generating data: choose your own adventure in research methods	
Weeks 9-11	Preparing for the dissertation	
Week 9 9 March 2020	Planning and designing a dissertation project	
Weeks 10 & 11 16 & 23 March 2020	Writing a dissertation and proposal	Second assignment due: 19 April 2020

Tutor input

Rory will be your first point of contact for the unfolding content, tasks, and assessed work of the course, and will be joined at different points by other colleagues on the programme. You will also have the opportunity to work with your peers to develop your understanding of the course material.

You will 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 dissertation process can be found in the Dissertation section of the Programme Handbook. At the end of this course, we will assign a supervisor to you on the basis of your proposal topic and research design, taking into account supervisor workloads and areas of expertise. This may be someone from the MSc in Digital Education team, or someone from the wider School or University.

Participation etiquette

By the time of this course, participants will 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 for each participant, means that there will be a high level of personal investment in some of the ideas being exchanged. Passions can also 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 are 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 essential.

Computer skills and equipment

The [Technologies Handbook](#) for the programme (in the form of a wiki) will continue to give you the background information necessary to access University systems.

As with all courses on the programme, you will need regular access to a device connected to the Internet, and at key moments to a full computer. The device should have (and you will be expected to be able to use) browser software, a word processor, and an application to allow you to read PDF files. 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.

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.

While the course has no set text, it would be useful to acquire one or more research methods textbooks, of which there are many, to provide additional perspectives throughout the course and your dissertation. One that we recommend is:

Coe, R., Waring, M., Hedges, L. and Arthur, J. (eds) (2017). *Research Methods and Methodologies in Education*. Second Edition. London: Sage.

You can find an e-book of the previous 2012 edition by searching the catalogue of the University Library.

Another useful text available as an e-book in the University Library is:

Cohen, L., Manion, L., and Morrison, K. (2018). *Research Methods in Education*. Eighth Edition. New York: Routledge.

A highly readable guide to the practicalities of research (not currently available as a University Library e-book) is:

Thomas, G. (2017). *How to Do Your Research Project: A Guide for Students*. Third Edition. London: Sage.

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 discuss 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 16 February 2020

You will work with an existing set of either qualitative or quantitative data, chosen from a range of possible sets, to perform some simple analysis and/or interpretation directed towards answering a series of questions posed about the data. You will then write up the results of the analysis as a brief report. This will present the opportunity to develop skills and knowledge that lead directly to part 2 of the assessment, with feedback from tutors serving as feedforward.

Part 2 (70%): 3000 words, due Sunday 19 April 2020

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 (if relevant). The proposal will also include a

provisional project plan outlining key milestones and timescales for the various stages of the project.

Where good reasons exist, requests for extensions will be considered. If you think you will need one, please submit a Coursework Extension Request Form (available from the university website) to your Personal Tutor, who will then liaise with the Course Organiser and Programme Director. You will need to allow sufficient time before the deadline for a decision to be made. Requests for extensions of more than 7 days, or to waive late penalties, involve applying for Special Circumstances, which you would also do via your Personal Tutor.

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 consists of the foundation course 'An introduction to digital environments for learning' (IDEL, 40 credit points), four additional 20-credit courses (which must include this course), and a dissertation. The list of available options is available on the programme web site at: <http://digital.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.

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 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 your trajectory. Please feel free 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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