



MSc in Digital Education

COURSE GUIDE: Introduction to Social Research Methods

**Session 2017/18: Semester 2
(January 2018)**

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 Angela Hunter.

Email: digitaled@ed.ac.uk

Phone: +44 (0)131 651 1196

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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 of the University of Edinburgh. For more information about the full MSc Programme you should contact the Programme Director, Dr Christine Sinclair (christine.sinclair@ed.ac.uk).

The course guide will give you information about the course structure, the assessments, and other organisational details that you will need. For further details about this course you should contact the Course Organiser, **Dr Jeremy Knox** (jeremy.knox@ed.ac.uk) or co-tutor **Dr Rory Ewins** (rory.ewins@ed.ac.uk).



Jeremy Knox



Rory Ewins

Course Prerequisites

This course is one of the two required courses on the MSc programme, the other being the foundation course *Introduction to digital environments for learning* (IDEL). Part-time students normally take *Introduction to Social Research Methods* (formerly *Research Methods*) as their **final 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 a programme of independent research for the dissertation element of the MSc in Digital Education; indeed, it will form the first stage of this work. As such, this course is relevant to, and required by, those intending to complete the full MSc programme. Participation is not required for those wishing to graduate with the award of a Certificate, or Diploma.

The course will enable you to formulate 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.

Those who have established and significant experience in research, particularly in the social sciences and education, **may wish to consider applying for accreditation of prior research experience**, which grants the equivalent credits and exempts you from the requirement to participate in the course. For example, those already holding a research degree, or with equivalent practical experience, may wish to make such an application. Contact Dr Christine Sinclair (christine.sinclair@ed.ac.uk), as Programme Director, for more information.

Course learning outcomes

On completion of the course you will be able to:

- demonstrate an awareness of the key epistemological issues in social science research
- identify appropriate research questions and how they might be addressed by particular methodological approaches
- locate and critically evaluate relevant literature
- engage with a range of data collection methods
- have a critical awareness of issues relating to research reliability and validity, and ethical considerations
- demonstrate skill in the analysis of quantitative and qualitative data
- effectively plan a programme of research
- demonstrate an awareness of academic conventions in the presentation of research.

Delivery and workload

The *Introduction to Social Research Methods* course has a week-by-week structure, like many of the other courses in the Programme. However, one key difference is that this course encompasses a Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) delivered in the [edX platform](#), in which you will participate alongside members of the public – see the *structure and format* section below for more details. Overall, successful participation on the course will require an investment of 7–10 hours in a week. This will be made up of reading, communication with tutors and other students, and engagement with the practical tasks that are set.

Tutor input

Your tutors (Jeremy and Rory) will be the first points of reference for the unfolding content, tasks and assessed work of the course, and you will also have the opportunity to work together to develop your understanding of the course material; with each other, and with the public participants of the MOOC.

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 Guide* for the Programme. 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 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, free from undue concern for typographical quality) 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, the input and criticism of our colleagues is a vital component in the process of formulating and carrying out our research, so the open sharing of ideas is important, and you should not hold back.

It is also worth noting that 8 weeks of this 12-week course will be undertaken through participation in a MOOC (see the *structure and format* section below for more details). You will therefore be engaging in discussions with members of the public who will not be enrolled at the University, and who may not have experienced the kind of etiquette you will be used to from our programme. We hope your time with us will allow you to demonstrate productive conversation to our MOOC colleagues.

Computer skills and equipment

The *Technologies Guide* for the Programme will give you the background information that you will need (for example, about browser configuration) in order for you to access the University systems.

As with all courses in 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 12 weeks, or one semester, from **Monday 15th January 2018** until **Sunday 15th April 2018**. A week of study on this course includes the weekend, i.e. each week of work runs from Monday to Sunday.

The middle section (8 weeks) of the course is a Massive Open Online Course, or MOOC. This means that you will be participating in an open course alongside members of the public, not necessarily enrolled at the University. However, you will have a dedicated MScDE Moodle space restricted to your student group throughout the course, as well as additional tasks and assessments.

You will be able to find more detail about the course on the Moodle site: <https://www.moodle.is.ed.ac.uk/course/view.php?id=1159>, and the edX MOOC: **[link to follow]**. Registered students will be given access to the Moodle site from Monday the 8th of January 2018. The edX MOOC will begin on Monday the 29th of January 2018.

Note: week numbers on this course refer to the middle 8 weeks of the MOOC. You will undertake two introductory weeks before 'week 1' of the course, as well as two final weeks after 'week 8'.

Week	Topic	Assignment due dates
Introductory fortnight in Moodle – MScDE students only		
15/01/18 - 28/01/18	Introduction: thinking like a researcher Research design and components Knowledge, epistemology, ontology	
MOOC begins on the edX platform: 'SOCRMx'		
Week 1 29/01/18	Introduction Orientation and welcome activities	
Weeks 2 and 3 05/02/18	Part 1: Exploring Methods Choose two methods to explore in detail	
Week 4 19/02/18	Mid-course assessment Reflective writing (blog post), review research literature.	Research review assignment due at the end of week 4
Week 5 26/02/18	Part 2: Data analysis Overview of analysis techniques	
Week 6 05/03/18	Quantitative analysis: 'How to lie with statistics' Critical perspectives on quantitative data analysis	
Week 7 12/03/18	Qualitative analysis: interpretation and subjectivity Critical perspectives on qualitative data analysis	
Week 8 19/03/18	Final Assessment Peer assessment task: reflecting on data analysis case study/literature	Analysis assignment due at the end of week 8
Final fortnight in Moodle – MscDE students only		
26/03/18	Designing a dissertation research project Abstract writing and reviewing proposals	
02/04/18	Preparing the research proposal Independent proposal preparation	Research proposal due 29 th April 2018

Assessment

Formative feedback during Introduction to Social Research Methods will come through a series of group video tutorials and the discussion forums, where tutors and students will discuss the course material and activities throughout the course. Formative feedback may also surface through comments from peers on your personal blog. You will also have the opportunity to receive feedback on an abstract of your proposal in the final section of the course, and attend a one-to-one tutorial related to your dissertation proposal assignment.

The summative assessment of the course will be based on three elements as described below. See the course Moodle site for full details of assessment criteria, word limits, and deadlines.

Research Review (30%): You will choose one of two published research articles to review. In your assignment, you will explore various aspects of your chosen article, including its theoretical stance, how it describes and explains the research that underpins it, and how it uses the research data to inform the arguments it makes. The goal of your review is to analyse the strengths and weaknesses of the paper in research terms, and to show your understanding of how research is reported. (1000 words, due end of week 4).

Data Analysis (20%): You will report back on the analysis exercise you undertook during part 2 of the course – the process you followed, the decisions you made about the analysis, and what you found. You will formulate a research question which can be addressed (at least in part) by reference to your chosen data. You will then carry out the analysis and write an account of your findings. (1000 words, due end of week 8)

Research Proposal (50%): This final assignment will also be the proposal for your dissertation project. It will describe the research topic or question you plan to address, the background to this topic including an indication of what your literature review will contain, your research methodology, timescale, and ethical considerations. (2000 words, due Sunday the 29th of April 2018)

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 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 your Programme Handbook and the University's Degree Regulations and Programmes of Study (DRPS) which are to be found on the Web at: <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 will comprise 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

The following textbook has been identified as providing a useful foundation for the theoretical and technical aspects of the course:

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

We recommend that all course participants obtain (or to have easy access to) a copy of this book.

Other resources will be provided 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, and 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.

Dr Jeremy Knox

Lecturer in Digital Education
The Moray House School of Education
The University of Edinburgh
Holyrood Road
Edinburgh EH8 8AQ
jeremy.knox@ed.ac.uk
+44 (0)131 651 6347

The MSc Programme Secretary is:

Angie Hunter

angela.hunter@ed.ac.uk
+44 (0)131 651 1196