

SOCM019 Research Methods in the Social Sciences

Module outline

2025-26

1. Module information

SOCM019 Research Methods in the Social Sciences is a postgraduate 15 credit module introducing students to methodology of modern social science research. The module is compulsory for students on MA Sociology and MRes Social Science Research programmes and is available for other postgraduate taught and research students in the HASS faculty who are interested in research designs in the social sciences. The module provides a good foundation for research students who are about to start their own empirical research project. The aim of the module is to introduce students to various research designs that are widely used in the social sciences. Many of these designs / methods are investigated in more detail in specialised modules available in the SPSPA Department.

Module convenor: Prof Alexey Bessudnov (a.bessudnov@exeter.ac.uk)

Office hours: Monday 3-4pm (Amory B213); Thursday 9-10am (online). Please email to confirm the appointment.

Classes: Monday 12.30-2.30pm (either Seminar Room 01 in Forum or Amory B218 in weeks 2 and 7. Please check your timetable). The classes will be a combination of lectures and group discussion.

2. Assessment information

Assessment for this module consists of two parts:

- **Review of a research paper (50%).** Due 6 November (week 7). 1,500 words. Your task is to write a review of a published paper (from a list provided by the module convenor) in the format of a peer review for a journal.
- **Research design (50%).** Due 11 December (week 12). 1,500 words. Your task is to write a research design for an empirical research project (possibly but not necessarily for your MA or PhD thesis).

More detailed assessment briefs for both assessments will be uploaded on ELE separately.

The university generic assessment criteria for master's students are available here: https://www.exeter.ac.uk/v8media/specificsites/tqa/lts/LTS_Handbook_Chapter_4_Annex_5_Generic_Criteria_for_Assessment_RQF_at_Level_7.pdf

3. Generative AI policy

The assessments on this module are **AI-assisted**. This means that you can use AI to help you with research and writing, but you cannot automatically generate text and pass it as your own, without acknowledging the AI contribution and without referencing.

Please see

<https://www.exeter.ac.uk/students/infopoints/yourinfopointservices/assessments/>

4. Weekly content and readings

This is a postgraduate module, and the reading list is extensive. You won't always have time to complete all the readings. For most weeks, the reading list includes chapters from a textbook on a particular topic and recently published papers with empirical applications. Be clever with your reading. Look through the textbook chapters but I don't expect you to read every single page. The content will be covered in the lectures. However, do read the textbook chapters for the methods you're interested in, you're going to use in your empirical research and you're completing your assignments on.

The empirical papers will be discussed in class. They are often cutting edge: this is the methodological frontier of the social sciences. It's a good idea to read these papers to learn where this frontier is now. If you don't have time, use AI to summarise the papers for you but please come to the class prepared.

Week 1. Introduction

No readings.

Week 2. Surveys

- Fowler, F.J. (2013). Survey Research Methods. 5th ed. Sage.
- Freese, J. & O.Jin. (2025). Online Nonprobability Samples. Annual Review of Sociology 51: 109-28.

Week 3. Survey experiments

- Mutz, D. (2011). Population-Based Survey Experiments. Princeton University Press. (Especially ch.1, 3, 4, 6.)
- Bansak, K., Hainmueller, J., & Hangartner, D. (2023). Europeans' support for refugees of varying background is stable over time. *Nature*, 620(7975), 849-854.

Week 4. Randomised controlled trials / field experiments

- Green D.P. (2022). Social Science Experiments. A Hands-on Introduction. Cambridge University Press. Ch.1-4.
- Duflo, E., Kremer, M. and Robinson, J. (2011). Nudging Farmers to Use Fertilizer: Theory and Experimental Evidence from Kenya. *American Economic Review* 101: 2350-2390.

Week 5. Natural experiments

- Dunning, T. (2012). Natural Experiments in the Social Sciences. A Design-Based Approach. Cambridge University Press. (Especially ch. 1-4.)
- Zonszein, S., Grossman, G. (2025). Voted in, standing out: Public response to immigrants' political accession. *American Journal of Political Science* 69 (2): 718-733.

Week 6. Reading week (no class)

Work on your paper reviews (to be submitted in week 7).

Week 7. Research design in qualitative studies

- Flick, U. (2022). An Introduction to Qualitative Research. 7th ed. Sage. Parts 1 and especially 2 (ch. 6-13).
- Hamilton, L.T., Armstrong, E.A. (2021). Parents, Partners, and Professions: Reproduction and Mobility in a Cohort of College Women. *American Journal of Sociology* 127 (1): 102-151.

Week 8. Interviews and focus groups

- Flick, U. (2022). An Introduction to Qualitative Research. 7th ed. Sage. Part 3. Ch. 14-17.
- Rivera, L.A. (2012). Hiring as Cultural Matching: The Case of Elite Professional Services Firms. *American Sociological Review* 77 (6): 999-1022.

Week 9. Ethnography and participant observation

- Flick, U. (2022). An Introduction to Qualitative Research. 7th ed. Sage. Ch. 18-19.
- Goffman, A. (2009). On the Run: Wanted Men in a Philadelphia Ghetto. *American Sociological Review* 74: 339-357.
- Lubet, S. (2018). *Interrogating Ethnography: Why Evidence Matters*. Oxford University Press.

Week 10. Working with text data

- Flick, U. (2022). An Introduction to Qualitative Research. 7th ed. Sage. Ch. 23-28.
- Grimmer, J., Roberts, M.E. and Stewart, B.M. (2022). *Text as Data: A New Framework for Machine Learning and the Social Sciences*. Princeton University Press. Ch.2. Social science research and text analysis.
- Friedman, S., Reeves, A. (2020). From Aristocratic to Ordinary: Shifting Modes of Elite Distinction. *American Sociological Review* 85 (2): 323-350.

Week 11. Collecting data online

- Flick, U. (2022). An Introduction to Qualitative Research. 7th ed. Sage. Ch. 22.
- Salganik, M. (2019). *Bit by Bit: Social Research in the Digital Age*. Princeton University Press. Ch.2. Observing behavior.
- Avale, M. et al. (2024). Persistent interaction patterns across social media platforms and over time. *Nature* 628: 582-589.
- Guess, M. et al. (2023). How do social media feed algorithms affect attitudes and behavior in an election campaign. *Science* 381: 398-404.

Week 12. Research ethics

- Flick, U. (2022). An Introduction to Qualitative Research. 7th ed. Sage. Ch. 9.
- Salganik, M. (2019). *Bit by Bit: Social Research in the Digital Age*. Princeton University Press. Ch.6. Ethics.
- Lewis-Kraus, G. How a Scientific Dispute Spiralled Into a Defamation Lawsuit. *The New Yorker*. 12 September 2024. <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/how-a-scientific-dispute-spiralled-into-a-defamation-lawsuit>
- The Harvard Business School internal report on Francesca Gino's case. https://datacolada.org/storage_strong/Harvard-Report-on-Gino.pdf