

Undertaking Research in International Relations

925M1

(15 Credits)

MA Core Course

Summer Term 2010

Course Description

The purposes of this course are twofold: to provide students with basic tools (a) to undertake research in International Relations; and (b) more specifically, to produce a 15,000 word dissertation.

Students on the MA programmes in Conflict Security and Development, Geopolitics and Grand Strategy, Global Political Economy, International Relations, and International Security all have to produce a 15,000 word dissertation. This course is designed to help students prepare for the dissertation, in several inter-related ways. First, weekly workshops will examine generic issues of research design, epistemology, method and sources, and provide a forum for students to share and develop research ideas. Second, these workshops will be complemented by individual sessions with dissertation supervisors. Third, the assessment for the course – a research plan – and the feedback on this assessed work should help in the development of the dissertation research project.

Concurrently, the course is designed to develop generic and transferable skills for undertaking research in international Relations – whether in further University study, or in the world outside. The weekly workshops are designed to pose general questions about how to design and build theoretically and empirically rigorous research projects. Equally, the assessment should help students develop skills relevant to preparing project proposals and making research grant applications.

Learning Methods

(1) Workshops

The course is taught through four workshops of up to three hours each, over the first four weeks of the summer term; these workshops are meant to be complemented by individual supervisions. The times, dates and subjects of the workshops are as follows:

Week	Date and time	Subject
Week 1	Friday 23 April, 9 am-12 noon	Research Design
Week 2	Monday 26 April, 9 am-12 noon	Sources
Week 3	Thursday 6 May, 9 am-12 noon	Qualitative Methods I
Week 4	Monday 10 May, 10 am-1 pm	Qualitative Methods II

The venue for all four sessions is the Terrace, top floor in the Conference Centre in Bramber House.

The workshops will be convened by Jan Selby. His office is Arts B381. Jan is officially on research leave this term, so does not have office hours. Where issues relate to the workshops specifically, these should be directed to Jan, preferably during or at the end of the workshops. Where they relate to your individual dissertation, they should be raised with your supervisor.

(2) Supervision

Each student will already have been allocated a dissertation supervisor. The role of the supervisor is to provide guidance to you in developing your dissertation project, both during this course, and afterwards during the further development of the dissertation.

Students are formally entitled to a total of four individual supervisory sessions of half an hour each. It is recommended that two of these supervisor sessions should be during the first five weeks of the summer term – so that supervisors can provide guidance on the early stages of dissertation design, and on the research plan due in week six. Students

are advised to utilise most if not all of the available supervision during the summer term as there is no guarantee or requirement that their supervisor will be available during the summer vacation.

Supervision will involve help with the design and construction of the dissertation. Supervisors will also normally be one of the assessors of the presentation, be the first marker of the research plan, and be responsible for giving feedback on both of the above. Supervision does not, however, involve the reading of draft chapters.

It is the responsibility of the student to initiate supervision meetings.

(3) Independent Research

Whilst the workshops and supervisions constitute your formal contact time on this course, you should be spending most of your time doing independent research – the official documentation says you should be doing 30 hours per week. This independent research should be concentrated firmly on your dissertation topic. The hope is that each week you will bring your developing ideas about your project to class; and in turn, that you will be able to reflect on issues that are raised during classes and through that develop your research plans. The aim of the course is to help you think through your own, individual research. And because of this, readings and preparation on generic issues of research methods, and other general homework for the workshop, are kept to a minimum. There are no core readings for this course; however, later on in this syllabus you will find suggested readings in research methods, which you should consult as much or as little as you think appropriate.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course a successful student should be able to:

- plan and design a small research project;
- identify and evaluate contending epistemologies and research methods;
- find and utilise a wide range of sources appropriate to the research project; and
- present a research project proposal, both in oral and written forms.

Course Assessment – Research Plan

The course is assessed through a maximum 2500 word research plan due by 4pm on Thursday of week 6 (27 May), to be handed in at the Global Studies school office. 4pm is the absolute deadline and work submitted after this time will be recorded as late. There is no non-contributory assessment on this course. Please submit 2 copies with cover sheets.

The requirements for the research plan are modelled on a research funding application. Funding application forms tend give quite precise details on what information is required, e.g. a non-technical summary and a statement on likely beneficiaries, both with word limits. Modelled on this, for the dissertation research plan you will need to provide information as under the headings on the following page. Information should be provided under each heading, with the maximum word limits being observed. Please note that there is some flexibility over the word limit under each heading – depending on the nature of your project, you may not for example need 200 words on ethics, or 800 words on research design and method – but the word length under each heading should not exceed that requested, and total word length should not exceed 2500 words.

The research plan should be submitted in week 6 along with a dissertation title approval form signed by your supervisor.

Detailed assessment criteria for the research plan appear at the end of this document.

DISSERTATION RESEARCH PLAN

Dissertation Title

Give brief dissertation title

Supervisor

Give name of supervisor

Summary

Describe the proposed research in simple terms in a way that could be understood by a general audience [max 200 words].

Objectives and Rationale

List the main objectives of the proposed research; locate the proposed research in relation to existing literatures, controversies or debates; and outline who the research may be of interest to, and where appropriate who may benefit from the research [max 1000 words].

Theoretical Framework

Outline the theoretical framework within which your research is located [max 500 words].

Research Design and Method

Outline how the proposed research will be conducted, in terms of research design, methodology and/or sources [max 800 words].

Ethical Information

Please explain what, if any, ethical issues you believe are relevant to the proposed research project. If you believe an ethics review is not necessary, please explain your view [max 200 words].

Structure

Outline the proposed chapter structure of the dissertation [max 400 words].

Bibliography

Please reference any works referred to in this research plan [no word limit].

Books and Readings

There are no set readings for the course – your reading should be concentrated on your dissertation topic. However, you may find it useful at some point to do some reading on research design or method. The following should get you started:

- Bechhofer, F. and Paterson, L., *Principles of Research Design in the Social Sciences* (London: Routledge, 2000).
- Bell, J., *Doing Your Research Project: A Guide for First Time Researchers in Education and Social Science* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1993).
- Blaikie, N., *Approaches to Social Enquiry* (Cambridge: Polity, 1993).
- Blaxter, L., C. Hughes and M. Tight, *How to Research* (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2006), 3rd edition.
- Bryman, A., *Social Research Methods* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 3rd edition
- Burton, D., 'Design issues in survey research,' in Burton, D. (ed.) *Research Training for Social Scientists* (London: Sage, 2000), pp. 292-306 (compare with ch 12 in same volume).
- Collier, D. and J. Mahoney, 'Insights and pitfalls: selection bias in qualitative research,' *World Politics*, Vol. 49, No. 1 (1996), pp. 56-81.
- Creswell, J. W., *Research Design: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches* (London: Sage, 1994).
- Ember, C. and M. Ember, 'The logic of cross-cultural research'. In C. Ember and M. Ember (eds.), *Cross-Cultural Research Methods* (Walnut Creek: Altamira, 2001).
- George, A.L. and A. Bennett, *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2005).
- Greene, J.C. et al., 'Combining qualitative and quantitative methods in social inquiry' in B. Somekh and C. Lewin (eds.) *Research Methods in the Social Sciences* (London: Sage, 2005), pp. 274-280.
- Hakim, C., *Research Design: Successful Designs for Social and Economic Research* (London: Routledge, 2000).
- Hammersley, M., 'On feminist methodology,' *Sociology*, Vol. 26, No. 2 (1992), pp. 187-206.
- Hammersley, M. and R. Gomm, 'Bias in social research', *Sociological Research Online*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (1997), <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/2/1/2.html>
- Hammersley, M., *Taking Sides in Social Research. Essays on Partisanship and Bias* (London: Routledge, 2000), introduction and chapter 1.
- Harding S. (ed.), *Feminism and Methodology* (OUP: Milton Keynes, 1987).
- Harding, S., 'After the neutrality ideal: science, politics and "strong objectivity"', *Social Research*, Vol. 59, No. 3 (1992), pp. 568 - 87.
- Hay, C., *Political Analysis* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2002).
- Hollis, M. and S. Smith, *Explaining and Understanding International Relations* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1991).
- Illingworth N. 'The internet matters: exploring the use of the internet as a research tool' *Sociological Research Online*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (2001), <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/6/2/illingworth.html>
- Kirk, J., Miller, M., *Reliability and Validity in Qualitative Research* (London: Sage, 1986).
- Kurki, Milja and Colin Wight (2006) "International Relations and Social Science," in Dunne, Tim, Milja Kurki and Steve Smith (eds.) *International Relations Theories. Discipline and Diversity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), pp.13-33
- Marsh, C. 1979. 'Problems with surveys: method or epistemology?' *Sociology* 13, 2, 293-305.
- O'Leary, Zina, *The Essential Guide to Doing Research* (London: Sage, 2004).
- Platt, J. (1996) Has Funding Made A Difference To Research Methods? <http://www.socresonline.org.uk/1/1/5.html#top>
- Puchala, Donald J. (2003) *Theory and History in International Relations* (London: Routledge)

- Punch, K.F., *Introduction to Social Research, Quantitative and Qualitative Approaches* (London: Sage, 2003).
- Robson, Colin, *How to do a Research Project* (Malden: Blackwell, 2007).
- Rosenberg, Justin (1994) "The International Imagination: IR Theory and 'Classic Social Analysis'," *Millennium*, 23(1): 85-108.
- Sayer, Andrew, *Method in Social Science* (London: Routledge, 1992), 2nd edition.
- Scheyvens, R. and Storey, D. (eds.), *Development Fieldwork: A Practical Guide* (Sage, London, 2003).
- Seale, C. (ed.) *Researching Society and Culture* (London: Sage, 1993).
- Smith, Steve (1996) "Positivism and beyond," in Smith, Steve, Ken Booth and Marysia Zalewski (eds.) *International Theory: Positivism and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), pp. 11-46.
- Smyth, M. and Robinson, G. (eds.) *Researching Violently Divided Societies: Ethical and Methodological Issues* (London: Pluto, 2004).
- Sylvester, Christine (1994) "Empathetic Cooperation: A Feminist Method for IR," *Millennium*, 23(2): 315-334.
- Warwick, D (1993) "The Politics and Ethics of Field Research," in Bulmer and Warwick, *Social Research in Developing Countries*, London, UCL Press.
- Weber, Max (1918/1991) "Science as a Vocation," in Gerth, H.H. and C. Wright Mills (eds.) *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (London: Routledge), pp. 129-156.

Feedback

The course will be evaluated by you using an anonymous Course Evaluation Questionnaire which will be completed towards the end of the course. Feel free, though, to raise issues with the convenor as they arise during the course.

Guide to the Course Week by Week

Week 1: Research Design

Aims

The first workshop will:

- introduce the structure of this course, including the assessment mode;
- overview the requirements for the MA dissertation;
- overview key issues in research design; and
- allow time for you to discuss, in groups, your MA dissertation topics and possible research designs.

Preparation

In preparation for this workshop you should each try to translate your broad research topic or area into a small number of research questions. Bring your list of research questions with you, and also try to put them in a provisional order of priority.

Week 2: Sources

Aims

This workshop will:

- map the range of possible types of sources for your dissertations;

- allow time for you to reflect, in groups, on what types of source might be appropriate to your research projects and designs;
- allow time for you to reflect, in groups, on how you might access these sources, and the various options and difficulties you may face in doing this;
- be attended by library research support staff, who will overview and answer any questions on use of databases, archives and other documentary sources; and
- discuss issues relating to sampling, validity and reliability.

Preparation

In preparation for this workshop you should reflect on the possible range of sources that you could conceivably use within your dissertation research. These may be anything from academic books and articles, to newspaper articles, historical archives, policy documents and government statistics, to individual policy makers, experts or lay people.

Week 3: Qualitative Methods I

This workshop will:

- provide an introduction to undertaking literature reviews;
- involve a practical exercise on literature reviewing;
- provide an introduction to content (or discourse) analysis;
- involve a practical exercise in content analysis;

Preparation - none required.

Week 4: Qualitative Methods II

Aims

This workshop will:

- provide an introduction to interviewing;
- involve some interview role playing.
- include a brief presentation and discussion on research ethics; and
- provide an opportunity for wrap-up discussion of generic research design and methods issues.

Preparation

In preparation for this workshop you should reflect on any outstanding questions, problems or conundrums of how to design and undertake your dissertation research (and everyone should have outstanding issues!). There will be an opportunity to discuss these, both within small groups and within the whole class.

Appendix - Useful information

Assessment Criteria for Research Plan

The following are the basis on which marks are awarded:

0/15 Fail (Grades E/F)

A mark in this range is indicative that the research plan is far below the minimum standard expected.

This indicates an extremely weak research plan that is well below the minimum standard expected of M level work. This will be because either the research plan is far too brief, very poorly organised and incoherent in content, or completely fails to address the issue, topic or theme under discussion. The research plan will fail to identify objectives or a rationale for the proposed project, will not establish a framework for the research to be conducted, will exhibit minimal evidence of knowledge or understanding of relevant material, and may contain major factual errors.

35 – Borderline (Grade E plus)

A mark in this range is indicative that the research plan is below, but at the upper end of the range is approaching, the minimum standard expected.

This indicates a weak research plan that is below the minimum standard expected of M level work. This will be because either the research plan is too brief, poorly organised and incoherent in content, or largely fails to address the issue, topic or theme under discussion. The research plan may fail to identify objectives or a rationale for the proposed project, may not establish a framework for the research to be conducted, may exhibit minimal evidence of knowledge or understanding of relevant material, and may contain major factual errors.

40/45/50 – Pass (Grades D minus/D/D plus)

A mark in this range is indicative that the research plan meets the minimum standard expected.

This indicates a limited research plan at the minimum standard expected at M level. A research plan of this quality will identify a project, show some knowledge and understanding of relevant literature, and include some basic information on research design. However, the objectives and rationale for the proposed research, including any research questions, hypotheses or arguments, will lack clarity and coherence. The proposed research will not be adequately contextualised in relation to existing literatures, whether theoretical or empirical. Research design, method and sources, and the proposed chapter structure for the dissertation, will lack coherence or precision. There may also be significant factual errors.

55/60/65 – Satisfactory (Grades C minus/C/C plus)

A mark in this range is indicative that the research plan is of a satisfactory to very satisfactory standard.

A research plan of this quality will identify a project, show a satisfactory level of knowledge and understanding of the material covered, and have a reasonably coherent research design. The objectives and rationale for the proposed research, including any research questions, hypotheses or arguments, will be clearly identified and coherent. The proposed research will be contextualised in relation to existing literatures, whether theoretical or empirical. Research design, method and sources, and the proposed chapter structure for the dissertation, should be established. There may, however, be a lack of critical engagement with relevant literatures, minor factual errors, weaknesses in research design, and/or some lack of clarity in the rationale and objectives of the proposed project.

70/75/80 – Good (Grades B minus/B/B plus)

A mark in this range is indicative of a good or very good research plan.

A research plan of this quality will identify a clear and well prepared project, show a good level of knowledge and understanding of the material covered, and have a practically and intellectually coherent research design. The objectives and rationale for the proposed research, including any research questions, hypotheses or arguments, will be clearly identified and intellectually coherent. The proposed research will be appropriately contextualised in relation to existing literatures, whether theoretical or empirical, and there will be evidence of critical engagement with existing literature. Research design, method and sources, and the proposed chapter structure for the dissertation, will all be clearly established, and will be appropriate to the proposed project.

85/90/95 – Excellent (A minus/A/Aplus)

Such marks are given for an excellent or outstanding research plan.

A research plan of this standard will exhibit excellent levels of knowledge, understanding and research design skills comprising all the qualities stated above, with additional elements of originality and flair. It will exhibit a critical engagement with the material presented and include independent argument regarding the project being proposed. It will be excellently presented in a fluent writing style.

Collusion and Plagiarism

Students are reminded that the following information appears in your MA Programme Handbook and the Global Studies MA Handbook.

Collusion is the preparation or production of work for assessment jointly with another person or persons unless explicitly permitted by the examiners. An act of collusion is understood to encompass those who actively assist others as well as those who derive benefit from others' work. **Plagiarism** is the use, without acknowledgement, of the intellectual work of other people, and the act of representing the ideas or discoveries of another as one's own in written work submitted for assessment. To copy sentences, phrases or even striking expressions without acknowledgement of the source (either by inadequate citation or failure to indicate verbatim quotations), is plagiarism; to paraphrase without acknowledgement is likewise plagiarism. Where such copying or paraphrase has occurred the mere mention of the source in the bibliography shall not be deemed sufficient acknowledgement; each such instance must be referred specifically to its source, Verbatim quotations must be either in inverted commas, or indented, and directly acknowledged.

(b) Maximum **word limits** include tables, footnotes/endnotes and quotations, but exclude the bibliography, appendices, abstract/summary, maps or illustrations. Most people find they write more than they thought they would, so it is very important to develop a sense of how many words you are producing per section of your paper, and check continually as you write a paper to ensure that you are not in danger of exceeding the maximum length. Most word processing packages will allow you to check for 'word count'.

There are two reasons for not exceeding the maximum length:

- The ability to write clearly and briefly is a valuable asset in almost any of the jobs you are likely to take up. Those who can write clearly, concisely and to the point are more likely to be read. Now is a good time to practice.
- You can be penalised for submitting papers that are too long. An over-long paper may also put examiners in a somewhat uncharitable mood. *

What about minimum length?

Sometimes there are good reasons for producing a below-length paper. You might be using a lot of quantitative data for example. However if most of your work is in prose, you should be concerned if you have written less than 2/3 of the maximum.

*The Examiners may consider that you have gained an unfair advantage by exceeding the given length. See section 3.1 of the PG Assessment Handbook for further information.

http://www.sussex.ac.uk/academicoffice/documents/pg_student_2008-09_final.pdf

Please note that the IR Research Proposal replaces a more general dissertation outline, and consequently the adaptations to the text are indicated in red below.

Notice to MA students in the Schools of Global Studies, MFM, English and HAHP, IDS and the Departments of SLI, Politics and Sociology and to MSc students in the Department of Economics completing in 2009/2010

This notice should be read in conjunction with the Examination and Assessment Handbook for Postgraduate Students 2009/2010 (hereafter called 'the handbook') which will be available online before the start of the summer term at:

http://www.sussex.ac.uk/academicoffice/d-cuments/pg_student_2009-10_final.pdf

1. **Submission of Dissertation Title and Outline**

Students completing MA/MSc programmes are expected to submit a dissertation at the end of the 2009/2010 academic year. You are now required to prepare an outline of your dissertation. The outline must include the following information: a description of the general topic; an outline of the research programme within the topic; provisional bibliography, including an indication of where the sources can be found.

You will be provided with a form for your supervisor to sign in order to indicate that they are happy with your proposal, in your dissertation pack available from C168. This should be submitted alongside the research proposal, via the Global Studies School Office (Danny will then arrange for the MA Convenor to give final approval and send the forms to the SPA office.) Remember that a key part of the exercise is a declaration that there should be no significant overlap of content with term papers already submitted.

A change of dissertation title will only be allowed in exceptional circumstances, for example, in order to produce a more precise definition of the subject. The permission of your Supervisor and your Programme Convenor must be obtained before any change can be made. On submission, the dissertation title must be the same as the one previously approved.

2. **Format of Dissertation**

Guidance on the presentation of dissertations is included as Appendix 2 of the handbook. Please read this carefully.

Your Programme Convenor will advise on the prescribed length for the dissertation. This is also included in the relevant MA/MSc programme information which can be viewed on your School/Department web pages at: <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/departments>

The word count for the dissertation includes footnotes, but excludes the bibliography and appendices.

The dissertation must be typewritten and bound using the tags and covers which are enclosed with this notice. (Plastic covers or folders should not be used). Good quality paper of A4 size should be used. Typing should be on one side of the paper only, with double or one-and-a-half line spacing for the main text and single-line spacing for the footnotes. The margin on the left-hand side should be one and a half inches and on the right-hand side should be half an inch.

3. **Submission of Dissertation**

The deadline for the submission of the dissertation is: **4.00 pm on Monday, 6 September 2010.**

Dissertations may be submitted by post (Recorded Delivery is recommended). Receipt will be acknowledged provided that a stamped, self-addressed envelope is included at the time of submission. Assessments submitted by post will be considered to be submitted on time as long as they are postmarked by no later than the day immediately preceding the deadline.

When you submit your dissertation you must also submit the enclosed 'Dissertation Declaration' which must be signed. Candidates are strongly advised to retain an additional copy of their work as copies used for the examination will not be returned.

4. **Late or Non-submission of Dissertation**
Please note that if you submit a dissertation after the due date of 6 September 2010 but before 30 September 2010 (this is the date when your registration will expire), the lateness penalties set out in the handbook will be applied (see section 3.9 of the handbook), unless you submit an explanation which is acceptable to the Mitigating Evidence Committee (see sections 3, 6 and 20 of the handbook).

If you do not submit a dissertation it will be formally recorded as non submitted and consequently you will receive a fail mark (F) which will cause failure of the degree.

If you find that you are unable to submit the dissertation you may submit evidence of your mitigating circumstances, including appropriate medical or other verifiable evidence, for consideration by the Mitigating Evidence Committee. Please see section 6.14 of the handbook for where to submit your evidence. You are also strongly advised to consult a Student Advisor.

The final date to submit evidence for late or non submission of any assessment is Friday, 15 October 2010 but you are strongly advised to submit any evidence as soon as possible after the missed deadline so that full consideration may be given to your explanation.

The Mitigating Evidence Committee will decide whether the evidence is acceptable or not. If you have not submitted a dissertation, and the evidence is **not acceptable**, you will receive a fail mark (F) for non-submission of the dissertation and consequently you will fail the degree (although you may be offered an option to retrieve that failure).

If the evidence is **acceptable**, you may be permitted an extended deadline by which to submit your dissertation (i.e. a 'Sit'). If you do not submit by the extended deadline you will receive a fail mark (F) for non-submission of the dissertation and consequently you will fail the degree.

Please note that if you are permitted a 'Sit', as your registration with the University will expire with effect from 30 September 2010, you will be required to re-register as a continuation student and pay the appropriate fee (currently £215).

Please note that medical or other personal information cannot be considered retrospectively once the Examination Board has ratified an award.

5. **Pass List**
The MA/MSc Examination Boards are scheduled to meet on in the first week of November 2010. Pass Lists will be published on the Student Progress and Assessment Office and School Notice Boards within 7 days following the individual Examination Board meetings.

Please note: The formal confirmation of the award of the degree is the pass list. The onus is on you, as the candidate, to consult the pass list to see if you have been awarded the degree. You will not be notified in writing by the University. If you are unable to attend the University to check the pass list in person, you may telephone your School Office or the Student Progress and Assessment Office for your result.

A formal transcript of your ratified marks will be sent to you before the end of the Autumn Term 2010. If you need a transcript urgently, you may request one from the Student Systems Office in Sussex House (email: transcripts@sussex.ac.uk).

6. **Graduation Ceremony**
The Winter Graduation Ceremony will take place in January 2011. Graduation material will be sent to you during the Autumn Term 2010. Please note that all debts to the University must be cleared, and all Library books returned, before the degree can be conferred.

7. **Withdrawal from a Degree Programme**
Please note that, if you wish to withdraw from an MA/MSc programme, you must do so **before 30 September 2010**. If you do not withdraw before that date, and do not submit all

the required assessments, including the dissertation, this will be reported to the Examination Board and you will be recorded as a **Fail** (through non-submission) rather than a withdrawal.

8. **Applications for Intermission**

Please note that applications for intermission must be made no later than two weeks before the deadline for the final piece of assessment i.e. the dissertation. **Therefore, no application for intermission will be accepted after Friday 20 August 2010.**

If you have any queries about the information contained in this notice, please contact Jane Burton in the Student Progress and Assessment Office at: j.burton@sussex.ac.uk or Tel: 01273 678410.