

# SO120-15 Researching Society and Culture

**26/27**

**Department**

Sociology

**Level**

Undergraduate Level 1

**Module leader**

Gabriel Du Plessis

**Credit value**

15

**Module duration**

10 weeks

**Assessment**

100% coursework

**Study location**

University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

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## Description

### Introductory description

Sociology is the study of society. But how exactly do sociologists go about practising this – and, even more fundamentally, what is ‘society’? As you will discover in this module, these two questions are very closely related: what you think ‘society’ is will inevitably shape the way you go about investigating and trying to understand it.

Is society something external to individuals, something that shapes our existence and sets limits on the kind of things we can do and the kind of people we can become? Are there rules governing human behaviour in the same way as there are rules governing phenomena in the natural world? If so, should the detached, objective methods of the natural sciences be employed in the study of society?

However, humans not only react to their environment, they consciously act upon it, continually constructing and reconstructing their worlds in creative, intelligent and imaginative ways. Should, then, the purpose of sociology be to uncover the meanings and interpretations held by individuals? And if so, what about the sociologist’s own meanings and interpretations, their own opinions and biases – should these be excluded from the research process, or form an integral part of it? Is objectivity desirable – or even possible – in the social sciences?

These are the kinds of questions you will begin to grapple with in this introductory methods

module. You will also consider some of the main qualitative methods (e.g. interviews, ethnography, discourse analysis, visual methods, historical research) and, in groups, will work on designing a sociological research project of your own.

[Module web page](#)

## Module aims

The aim of this core foundation module is to introduce students to the nature of sociological research as a reflexive activity. It starts by introducing the varying philosophical starting points of research in the social sciences and goes on to provide foundation level critical analysis and practical training in the key qualitative methods that sociologists have deployed to understand and 'capture' the social world in a range of social contexts. The module will ensure that students become 'research minded' from the outset of their degree studies.

## Outline syllabus

This is an indicative module outline only to give an indication of the sort of topics that may be covered. Actual sessions held may differ.

Week 1: Methodology and Methods

Week 2: Interviews

Week 3: Ethnography and Participant Observation

Week 4: Visual Methods

Week 5: Research Ethics

Week 6: Reading Week

Week 7: Discourse Analysis and Representation

Week 8: Historical and Archival Research

Week 9: Positionality and Reflexivity

Week 10: Transferable Research Skills

## Learning outcomes

By the end of the module, students should be able to:

- (1) Understand the nature of sociological research as a reflexive activity, and the varying philosophical starting points that inform it. (Subject knowledge and understanding, Cognitive skills such as critical analysis).
- (2) Understand the principles behind research design using a range of qualitative research methods and the way that these have informed sociological studies. (Subject knowledge and understanding, Cognitive skills such as critical analysis).
- (3) Display competence in core academic and research skills in applying a range of qualitative research skills and presenting the results to peers (Cognitive skills such as ability to develop research designs and key skills such as competency in library use and database, and practice in a range of qualitative methods).

## Indicative reading list

[Reading lists can be found in Talis](#)

[Specific reading list for the module](#)

## **Research element**

As part of the summative assessment, students are assigned to groups (of between 4-6) and work together throughout the term to design and deliver a research design proposal. Here they have to identify, and present their approach to, each of the key stages of the research process, (e.g. research question, lit review, methodology, methods, ethics, practical issues, dissemination).

## **Interdisciplinary**

There is crossover with anthropology (particularly in the ethnography and representation lectures/seminars) and history (in one week disciplinary links between sociology and history are considered).

## **International**

Several core seminar readings are based on case studies drawn from around the world. Quite often students decide to situate their research design proposals within an international context.

## **Subject specific skills**

Knowledge of the underlying concepts and principles associated with qualitative research, and an ability to evaluate and interpret these.

Ability to present, evaluate and interpret qualitative data, in order to develop lines of argument and make sound judgements in accordance with basic theories and concepts.

## **Transferable skills**

Lectures: Listening and concentrating for extended periods (Communication, Attention to detail). Sorting, sifting and summarising information (Critical Thinking, Analysis). Recording and organising information efficiently (Information Literacy, Organising).

Seminars: Presenting points in a reasoned manner (Communication, Influencing, Critical Thinking). Considering differing viewpoints and responding appropriately (Adaptability, Flexibility, Critical Thinking, Analytical, Communication, Interpersonal).

Summative Presentation (group work): Understanding role within a team (Analytical, Self awareness, Team working, Interpersonal). Taking responsibility (Initiative, Team working, Leadership). Delegating (Analysing, Organising, Planning, Prioritising, Team working, Interpersonal, Leadership, Communication). Negotiating (Critical Thinking, Analytical, Interpersonal, Communication, Influencing, Flexibility, Adaptability). Creating and following a plan (Creativity, Initiative, Drive, Organising, Planning). Presenting (Communication, ICT Skills).

Formative Assessment: A wide range of transferable skills developed in researching and

identifying job/internship opportunities in social research (and showing how a training in research methods applies directly to these positions). Students also make a mock job application.

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## Study

### Study time

Type	Required	Optional
Lectures	9 sessions of 1 hour (50%)	1 session of 1 hour
Seminars	9 sessions of 1 hour (50%)	
Total	18 hours	

### Private study description

Reading for seminars  
Preparation for seminars  
Preparation and writing of formative work (in groups)  
Preparation and writing of summative work

### Costs

No further costs have been identified for this module.

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## Assessment

You do not need to pass all assessment components to pass the module.

Students can register for this module without taking any assessment.

### Assessment group A1

	Weighting	Study time	Eligible for self-certification
<b>Assessment component</b>			
Research Proposal	100%		Yes (extension)
Research Design Proposal			

Reassessment component is the same

## Feedback on assessment

Written feedback to be provided for all formative and summative assessments.

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## Availability

### Courses

This module is Core for:

- Year 1 of ULAA-ML34 BA in Law and Sociology (Qualifying Degree)
- USOA-L301 BA in Sociology
  - Year 1 of L301 Sociology
  - Year 1 of L305 Sociology with Specialism in Cultural Studies
  - Year 1 of L303 Sociology with Specialism in Gender Studies
  - Year 1 of L304 Sociology with Specialism in Research Methods
  - Year 1 of L302 Sociology with Specialism in Social Policy
- Year 1 of UHIA-VL13 Undergraduate History and Sociology
- Year 1 of ULAA-M135 Undergraduate Law and Sociology
- Year 1 of UPOA-ML13 Undergraduate Politics and Sociology
- Year 1 of USOA-L314 Undergraduate Sociology and Criminology
- Year 1 of UIPA-L3L8 Undergraduate Sociology and Global Sustainable Development

This module is Core optional for:

- UPDA-LM49 Undergraduate Health and Social Policy
  - Year 1 of LM49 Health and Social Policy
  - Year 5 of LM49 Health and Social Policy
  - Year 6 of LM49 Health and Social Policy
  - Year 7 of LM49 Health and Social Policy
  - Year 8 of LM49 Health and Social Policy
  - Year 9 of LM49 Health and Social Policy

This module is Option list G for:

- Year 1 of UPHA-V7ML Undergraduate Philosophy, Politics and Economics