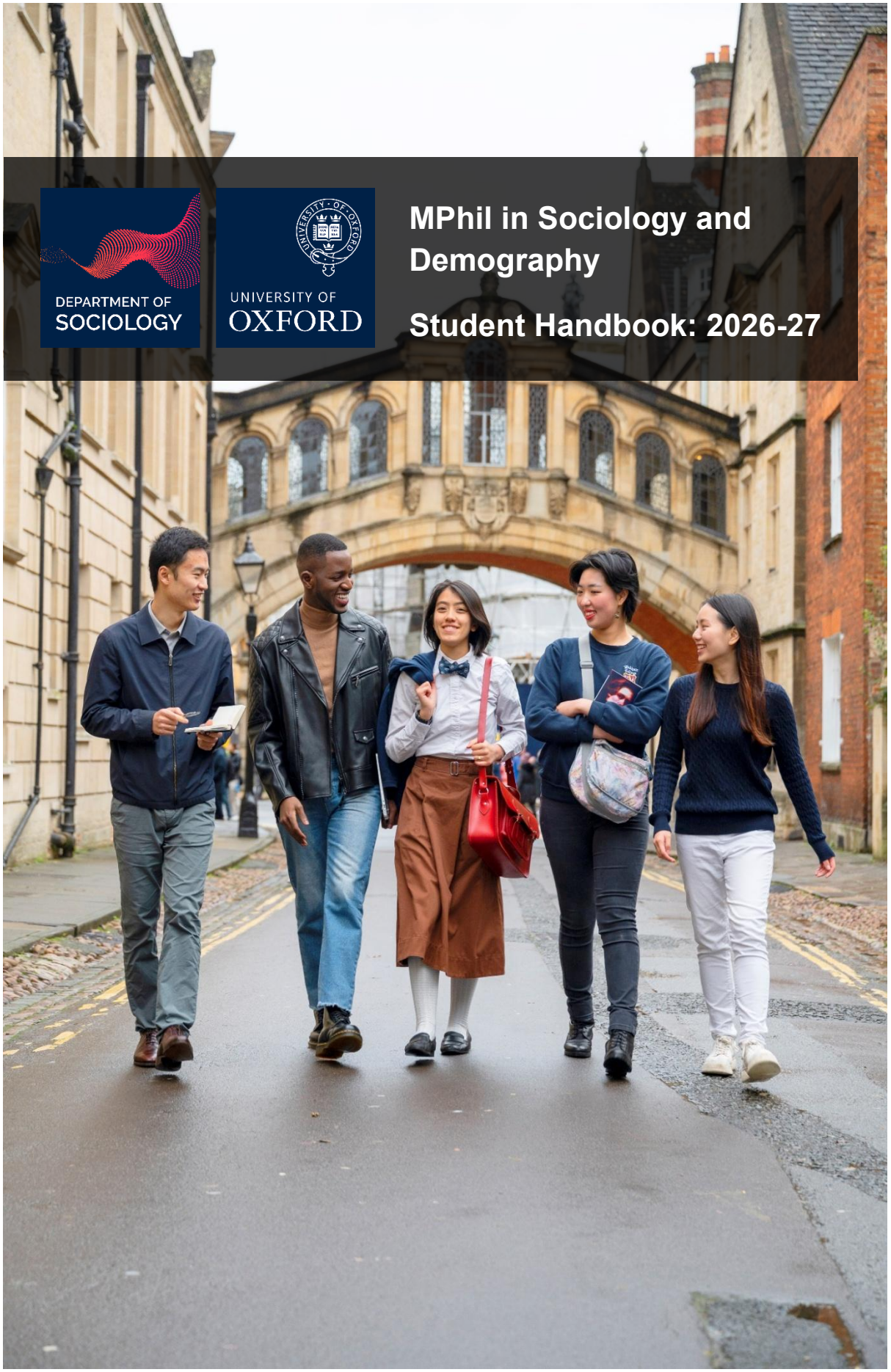

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIOLOGY

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

MPhil in Sociology and Demography

Student Handbook: 2026-27

1. Foreword

1.1 Statement of coverage

This handbook applies to students starting the MPhil in Sociology and Demography starting Michaelmas 2026. The information in this handbook may be different for students starting in other years.

1.2 Version

Version	Publication date	Summary of changes
1.0	07 October 2026	Initial publication

1.3 Disclaimer

The Examination Regulations relating to this course are available at Master of Philosophy in Sociology and Demography Examination Regulations. If there is a conflict between information in this handbook and the Examination Regulations then students should follow the Examination Regulations. If students have any concerns please contact the Graduate Studies Office: graduate-studies@sociology.ox.ac.uk.

The information in this handbook is accurate as of 07 October 2026, however it may be necessary for changes to be made in certain circumstances, as explained at www.graduate.ox.ac.uk/coursechanges. If such changes are made the Department will publish a new version of this handbook together with a list of the changes and students will be informed.

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1.4 Welcome from the Course Director

As Director of Taught Courses, I would like to extend a warm welcome to all of you embarking on your postgraduate studies with us. During your time as an MSc or MPhil student, you are part of our community, and we hope you will take full advantage of the intellectual and social life of the Department.

Alongside your classes and seminars, you will attend our Monday departmental seminars with faculty and research students, and we hope you will also join us for a sandwich beforehand. Our regular newsletter will keep you informed about talks, events and other opportunities both within and beyond the Department, and there will be social occasions throughout the year, including our start- and end-of-term drinks. All the faculty and staff here want to make your time in Oxford as productive and rewarding as possible. We look forward to getting to know you, hearing your ideas, and seeing the contributions you make to the life of the Department.

Your time with us will be busy. In this handbook, you will find information about the components of your course and the option papers available to you, as well as key information about examinations and assessments. It also sets out important dates and deadlines, including those for coursework and ethics applications, and details of the workshops that will help you prepare for your thesis. Please familiarise yourself with its contents and use it as a reference throughout the year.

Oxford terms are notoriously short but immersive! We wish you all the best as you embark on your first term with us. We hope you will enjoy your time as a sociologist at Oxford, participate fully in the life of the Department, and find time to enjoy the city and the wider University.

Lindsay Richards
Director of Taught Courses

1.5 Helpful links

Canvas

The main source of current departmental information, including course materials, assessment information and announcements. Access requires University single sign-on. Most pertinently, Canvas incorporates information on examination conventions and the course timetable, the latter of which is also circulated by email before the start of each term.

Inspera

The University's platform for submitting summative assessments and, where applicable, taking online examinations. Students should also consult the University's guidance on coursework submissions and examinations in Inspera.

Oxford Students website

University-wide information and guidance for current students, including information about examinations, fees, welfare and academic procedures.

University Student Handbook

An overview of the University's principal policies, procedures and services for students. Colleges also often provide a handbook relevant to the student's college.

1.6 Useful Department contacts

Academic matters	**Director of Taught Courses** Dr Lindsay Richards, lindsay.richards@sociology.ox.ac.uk **Director of Graduate Studies** Professor Ridhi Kashyap ridhi.kashyap@nuffield.ox.ac.uk **Head of Department** Professor Heather Hamill heather.hamill@sociology.ox.ac.uk
Business of the Graduate Studies Committee (GSC)	**Graduate Studies Officer** Adrian Wilson graduate-studies@sociology.ox.ac.uk
Research matters (incl. ethical approval)	**Research Facilitator** Natalie Hargrave research@sociology.ox.ac.uk / DREC@sociology.ox.ac.uk
Departmental facilities (incl. room bookings)	**Senior Facilities Support Assistant** Scott Matthews reception@sociology.ox.ac.uk
Computing and IT	**Sociology IT** itsg-support@sociology.ox.ac.uk
Change of supervisor	**Graduate Studies Officer** Adrian Wilson or **Graduate Studies Assistant** Roanne Hyde graduate-studies@sociology.ox.ac.uk **Director of Taught Courses** Dr Lindsay Richards, lindsay.richards@sociology.ox.ac.uk
Communications (including website) and Events	**Communications and Events Manager** Laurel Millen-Quinn comms@sociology.ox.ac.uk
Course student representatives	*To be confirmed*
Room bookings	**Senior Facilities Support Assistant** Scott Matthews reception@sociology.ox.ac.uk

	Graduate Studies Assistant Roanne Hyde graduate-studies@sociology.ox.ac.uk
Disability support	**Disability Lead** Professor Ridhi Kashyap ridhi.kashyap@nuffield.ox.ac.uk **Disability Coordinator** Adrian Wilson graduate-studies@sociology.ox.ac.uk

Every college has their own system of support for students. Please refer to the relevant college handbook or website for more information on who to contact and what support is available.

Details of support available more widely within the University are available from the Oxford Students website, including in relation to mental and physical health and disability.

1.7 Location

The Department of Sociology is based at 42–43 Park End Street, Oxford, OX1 1JD. The building has step-free access via the main entrance, with a powered secure door and intercom to reception. A platform lift provides access between the two floors, and wheelchair-accessible toilets are available on both floors. Hearing support systems are also available in a number of departmental spaces.

Further information about accessibility, including entrance arrangements, parking and facilities within the building, is available through the University of Oxford Access Guide for 42–43 Park End Street. Students with particular access requirements are encouraged to contact the Department if they have any questions or require additional arrangements.

1.8 Term dates

Oxford term dates for the 2026-27 academic year:

- **Michaelmas term:** Sunday 11 October to Saturday 5 December
- **Hilary term:** Sunday 17 January to Saturday 13 March
- **Trinity term:** Sunday 25 April to Saturday 19 June

1.9 Feedback on this handbook

We welcome any feedback, corrections and suggestions for improving this handbook. Please send any feedback to the Graduate Studies Office at graduate-studies@sociology.ox.ac.uk.

2 The course content and structure

2.1 Overview

The MPhil in Sociology and Demography is a 21-month full-time course at FHEQ Level 7. It introduces students to contemporary theories and methods at the intersection of sociology and demography, integrating micro- and macro-level perspectives to the study of social and population change and its consequences

These approaches explicitly join the macro approach of traditional demography with the multilevel, actor-oriented life course approach. The macro approach of traditional demography is epitomised by the decomposition of population dynamics into fertility, mortality, and migration trends and by the measurement of such dynamics and trends. The multilevel, actor-oriented life course approach sees individual trajectories and key life course events (including births, deaths and migrations) as embedded in a multilevel factorial model which emphasises the role of the historical and geographical context; the role of kinship and network ties; and the role of human development, therefore generalising the traditional demographic emphasis on period, cohort and age.

This idea of bridging the gap between the macro-oriented and actor-oriented approaches in the study of demography is consistent with the direction that Oxford's Department of Sociology has followed since its inception. Therefore, the curriculum emphasises:

- population-level analysis and demographic measures;
- the life course approach;
- sociological analysis as the key approach to explanation;
- advanced quantitative methods.

2.2 Course aims and intended learning outcomes

The MPhil in Sociology and Demography is a research-intensive taught course at the intersection of sociology and demography that provides training for careers in social and population research and prepares students for doctoral work in Sociology and Demography. To achieve this, it aims to give students high-quality graduate-level research training, including:

- Knowledge of the key theoretical approaches from sociology, demography and life course research that are relevant to empirical investigations
- An understanding of their application to substantive problems
- Skills in the use of major quantitative and demographic analysis techniques

By the end of the course, students should be able to understand, and to evaluate critically, research monographs and papers at the forefront of academic development within sociology and demography, enabling them to apply these ideas and techniques to their own research work. The emphasis is not only on the findings of sociological and demographic research but more importantly on the ways in which these findings were

reached, the formulation of the research questions, the research methods used, and the interpretation of the research results.

Graduates of the MPhil in Sociology and Demography go on to careers in:

- Research and policy organisations
- Government departments and public sector bodies
- NGOs and international organisations
- Academia and doctoral study
- Consulting, market research and think tanks

The programme provides rigorous training in sociological, demographic and life course theories theory and research methods, equipping students to critically evaluate complex social issues and conduct high-quality research. Graduates develop advanced analytical and methodological skills that prepare them for research-intensive careers and further academic study across a wide range of sectors.

2.3 Course structure

Teaching for the MPhil Sociology and Demography is delivered in-person. The course consists of the following components, which are described in more detail in the Core Papers and Option Papers sections of this handbook:

- **Sociological Analysis** – a compulsory core paper assessed by an examination at the end of Trinity Term.
- **Methods of Social Research** – a compulsory paper comprising two equally weighted components:
    i. Statistical Methods, assessed by an assignment and an unseen examination;
    ii. Research Design, assessed by a take-home essay.
- **Demographic Analysis** – a compulsory paper assessed by two assignments
- **Life Course Research** – a compulsory paper assessed by an assignment at the end of Hilary Term and examination at the beginning of Trinity
- **Two optional papers** – assessed either by an examination at the end of Trinity term, or by coursework, depending on the paper. The options available may vary from year to year, and timetable constraints may limit which combinations can be taken.
- **Replication Project** – whereby students are assessed by a paper detailing their attempt to replicate published research findings.
- **MPhil thesis** – a 30,000-word piece of original research at the intersection of sociology and demography. The thesis must be the student's own work and must address a research problem agreed with their supervisor.

Weighting

The course components are weighted as follows:

Component	Weight
Methods of Social Research	11%
Sociological Analysis	11%
Demographic Analysis	11%
Life Course Research	11%
MPhil thesis	28%
Option Paper 1	11%
Option Paper 2	11%
Replication Project	6%

Teaching schedule and term dates

Year 1

Michaelmas term	Hilary term	Trinity term
Sociological Analysis	Research Design	Examinations
Statistical Methods	Option Paper 1	Departmental seminars
Demographic Analysis	Departmental seminars	
Departmental seminars	Life Course Research	

Year 2

Michaelmas term	Hilary term	Trinity term
Replication Project	Option Paper 2	Examinations (if applicable)
MPhil thesis workshop	MPhil thesis write-up	MPhil thesis write-up
MPhil thesis write-up	Departmental seminars	Departmental seminars
Departmental seminars		

2.4 Core Papers

2.4.1 Sociological Analysis

Course Convenor: Dr Lindsay Richards

Aims

This course develops intellectual skills in explaining social phenomena: identifying puzzles, developing theoretical explanations, and evaluating empirical evidence.

Teaching arrangement

One lecture (90 minutes) and one seminar (one hour) per week in Michaelmas term.

Content and structure

Each week the lecture introduces one type of explanation for social phenomena, while the seminar discusses empirical research on a related topic. The seminar topic illustrates the explanation in practice, revealing its strengths and weaknesses. Lectures and seminars are complementary but distinct.

Topics covered

- Week 1 – Instrumental rationality
- Week 2 – Signalling
- Week 3 – Values and norms
- Week 4 – Social networks
- Week 5 – Contextual effects and social integration
- Week 6 – Diffusion
- Week 7 – Social change
- Week 8 – Review

Seminar topics

- Week 1 – Educational inequalities
- Week 2 – Interpersonal violence
- Week 3 – Political preferences
- Week 4 – Getting ahead in the labour market
- Week 5 – Recidivism and neighbourhoods
- Week 6 – Protest movements
- Week 7 – Attitudes to same-sex relationships
- Week 8 – Explanations in practice

Learning outcomes

On completing the course, students will understand some of the main theoretical tools used to explain social phenomena. They will also be familiar with current debates in various substantive areas of sociology.

Formative assessment

- One short essay (1,000–1,200 words each) on the seminar readings.
- One longer essay (2,500 words) at the end of term.

Summative assessment

One 3-hour examination in Trinity term.

Key readings

The key readings for each week will be provided at the start of term. A general text that provides a complementary perspective is:

- Elster, J. (2015) *Explaining Social Behavior: More Nuts and Bolts for the Social Sciences*, 2nd ed., Cambridge University Press.

Useful introductory texts:

- Van Tubergen, F. (2020) *Introduction to Sociology*, Routledge.
- Collins, R. (1994) *Four Sociological Traditions*, Oxford University Press.

2.4.2 Methods of Social Research

Methods of Social Research consists of two equally weighted components:

- Statistical Methods
- Research Design

2.4.2.1 Statistical Methods

Course convenor: Professor Ozan Aksoy

Aims

The course aims to develop the foundations of statistical thinking and to introduce the most important basic statistical models used in social science research. The problem classes will give feedback on the weekly problem sets.

Teaching arrangement

Eight two-hour lectures, plus eight problem classes in Michaelmas term.

Content and structure

This course is taught through a series of lectures and classes. It is vertically structured: later lectures assume knowledge of the foundational material covered earlier in the course. Topics covered include ideas of sampling and probability models, basic methods for inference about a population from a sample, and the use and interpretation of some common types of statistical models, including linear regression.

Topics covered

Ideas of sampling and probability models; basic methods for inference about a population from a sample; use and interpretation of common statistical models, including linear regression.

Learning outcomes

On successfully completing this course, students should:

- Understand the basic principles of statistical thinking
- Be familiar with the most used elementary statistical models
- Be able to implement simple statistical procedures using R

Formative assessment

Students will complete weekly problem sets consisting of a mixture of pen-and-paper exercises and short data-analysis tasks using R. These problem sets are formative and ungraded, but completion is necessary to benefit fully from the course. Answers will be discussed in the problem classes.

Summative assessment

A take-home practical data-analysis assignment due at the end of Michaelmas term and a formal two-hour examination in Week 0 of Hilary term. Each assessment is worth 50%. The

data-analysis assignment will be released on Monday of Week 9 of Michaelmas term and must be submitted no later than 12pm on Monday of Week 10 of Michaelmas term.

Key text

Agresti, A. (2017) *Statistical Methods for the Social Sciences*, 5th edition, Pearson.

2.4.2.2 Research Design

Course convenor: Dr Jonathan Lusthaus

Aims

The course is concerned with the nature of empirical investigation in the social sciences. It deals with the question of how we establish systematic knowledge about the social world. The course will consider in turn the various stages of the research process, the different types of research strategies that are in use, and some general methodological problems about the conduct of inquiry.

Teaching arrangement

Eight classes in Hilary term.

Topics covered

- The research process
- Aims of enquiry
- Research ethics
- Principles of open science and reproducibility
- Measurement
- Sampling
- Causality and experiments
- Survey design
- Field research

Learning outcomes

By the end of this course, students should:

- appreciate the strength and limits of different research strategies,
- understand how research design considerations should be linked to substantive sociological concerns

Summative assessment

A formal three-hour in-person examination held in Week 9 of Hilary term.

Key texts

- King, G., R. Keohane, and S. Verba. 1994. *Designing Social Inquiry*. Princeton University Press.

- Straits, B.C. and R. A. Singleton, Jr. 2017. *Social Research: Approaches and Fundamentals*. Oxford University Press.

2.4.3 Demographic Analysis

Course Convenor: Professor Ridhi Kashyap

Aims

- To introduce students to current scientific debates on different components of population dynamics, including mortality, family change and fertility, migration, and population policies at macro level.
- To provide technical skills for computing demographic measures and models.

Teaching arrangement

The course is taught in a mixture of lectures, seminar discussions and labs. Each week there is a lecture and then either a seminar style discussion section or a lab session.

Topics covered

- **Population dynamics and the demographic transition.** Introduction and definitions. Fundamental measures of population dynamics (growth rates, crude rates, discrete and continuous time). The demographic transition as a model of demographic development. Demographic transition, age structure, and demographic dividends.
- **Periods and cohorts, demographic rates, and micro- and macro-approaches to demography**. The meaning of the three key temporal dimensions in demography: age, period, cohort. Lexis diagrams. Discovery and explanation, micro-foundations of demographic change. Sources of population data.
- **Mortality and the life table.** The life table and its functions. Cohort and period life tables. Decomposition approaches. Life expectancy in the long run.
- **Fertility and its measurement**. Measuring the quantum and tempo of fertility. Period and cohort analysis. Proximate determinants of fertility.
- **Exploring heterogeneity in fertility regimes.** The idea of the fertility transition. Theories of fertility change. Low fertility and theoretical perspectives on it.
- **Migration**. Measuring migration and its effect on population change. Theories of migration. Replacement migration and homeostasis. Digital demography and migration.
- **Population projections**. Methods for Population Projections. Uncertainty in population projections and other measures. Population policy and projections.

Learning outcomes

On successfully completing the course, students should:

- have the skills that allow the comprehension of contemporary research in the multidisciplinary area of demography and be familiar with key contributions;
- be familiar with the most important demographic methods and techniques;
- be familiar with the most important demographic developments and challenges concerning demographic change;
- be prepared to do doctoral work in the areas of demography and life course research;
- have familiarity with applied demographic analysis using R.

Summative assessment

Composed of two assignments:

- **Assignment 1**. Essay on a demographic topic from a choice of essay questions (maximum 3,000 words). To be delivered by 12pm/noon, Friday of 0th Week, Hilary term
- **Assignment 2**. Applied demographic analysis assignment (using R and population-level data). To be delivered by 12pm/noon, Friday of 8th Week, Hilary term

Formative assessment

All participants will present a paper and lead discussion about the paper in the context of the week's topics in the seminar sessions. Course participants can expect to present 2-3 times over the term. Participants will be expected to work on short extensions of the code and applications introduced in the labs.

Key texts

- Livi Bacci, M. (2012) *A Concise History of World Population*, Wiley-Blackwell.
- Wachter, K.W. (2014) *Essential Demographic Methods*, Harvard University Press.
- Preston, S.H, Heuveline, P., and Guillot, M., (2001) *Demography: Measuring and Modelling Population Processes*, Blackwell Publishers

2.4.4 Life Course Research

Course Convenor: Dr Pablo Geraldo Bastias

Aims

The course will introduce students to life course research, with a threefold focus. First, we aim to understand the interdisciplinary conceptual foundations of life course research, drawing on sociology, demography, economics, psychology, and other disciplines. Second, we will present the approach through substantive examples in three domains: health, family, and socioeconomic outcomes. Finally, the course will have a strong methodological emphasis, covering both classical techniques (Age–Period–Cohort models, Event History/Survival Analysis) and recent developments in the modelling of life trajectories and time-dependent processes using machine learning and causal inference approaches.

Teaching arrangement

The course consists of lectures, discussion sessions, and computer labs (in R). In the lectures, key topics will be introduced and discussed. In the

discussion sessions, students will take turns critically appraising recent and high-profile papers in areas relevant to the course. In the computer labs, we will explore the application of empirical methods to life course research.

Content and structure

A tentative schedule for the term is as follows:

- Introduction: Why life course research? (W1)
- Describing life courses: Patterns, trends, and associations (W2–W3)
- Predicting life courses: What will happen, when, and to whom? (W4–W5)
- Causes and consequences: How trajectories shape and are shaped by life outcomes (W6–W7)
- Conclusion: Old and new directions in life course research (W8)

Learning outcomes

On successfully completing the course, students should:

- Understand the conceptual foundations of life course research
- Be familiar with recent empirical research in the field
- Be able to critically assess the research design, theoretical approach, and methodology of empirical research in the field
- Be aware of classical and recent methodological advances in the field
- Be prepared to design and undertake empirical research using a life course perspective

Formative assessment

Students will receive formative feedback (and a mark that does not contribute to the final course grade) for a short presentation (5–7 minutes) on a published paper. The presentation will take place during a discussion session, on a date to be assigned in Week 1.

Summative assessment

Assessment consists of one essay (50%) and an in-person, closed-book examination (50%). The essay will be due by noon on Friday of Week 10 of Hilary term, and the examination will take place in Week 0 of Trinity term.

Key texts

- Elder, G. and Giele, J. (2009). *The Craft of Life Course Research*. Guilford Press, 1st edition.
- Mortimer, J. T. & Shanahan, M. J. (eds.) (2004). *Handbook of the Life Course*. Springer.
- Shanahan, M. J., Mortimer, J. T. & Kirkpatrick-Johnson, M. (eds.) (2017). *Handbook of the Life Course*, Volume II. Springer.
- Mayer, K. (2009). New directions in life course research. *Annual Reviews in Sociology*, 35: 413–433.
- Price, S., McKenry, P. and Murphey, M. (2000). *Families Across Time: A Life Course Perspective*. Oxford University Press.

2.4.5 Replication Project

Course Convenor: Dr Pablo Geraldo Bastias

Aims

Should we believe published scientific results? The so-called “replication crisis” has cast doubt on the credibility of the (social) sciences, with repercussions extending well beyond the walls of academia. Although considerable attention has been drawn to the most egregious examples of fraud and research malpractice, results that fail to replicate neither imply nor require ill intent on the part of researchers: many of us have simply not been trained in the principles and practices of “open science”, and these practices are costly and rarely rewarded. In this course, we aim to lower the barriers to developing a workflow for reproducible research that can become second nature, through an applied replication project in which we dissect and reanalyse a published piece of sociological research**.**

Teaching arrangement

- Eight group meetings (1hr, Weeks 1-8) in Michaelmas term
- Two to three individual project meetings (~0.5 hours, Weeks 2-6) in Michaelmas term
- One individual meeting before submission of a final draft in Hilary term

Content and structure

After an introductory session, the course will focus on developing a toolkit for reproducible research, both in terms of “computational reproducibility” (“Reproducible workflow”) and “conceptual/analytic reproducibility” (“Identification, robustness and sensitivity”). At the end of term, students will present the final results of their individual replication projects. The session plan is as follows:

- Introduction: What is replication and why do we need it? (W1)
- Reproducible workflow 1: Quarto and R (W2)
- Reproducible workflow 2: Git and GitHub (W3)
- Identification, robustness and sensitivity 1: Causal graphs (W4)
- Identification, robustness and sensitivity 2: Dealing with specifications (W5)
- Identification, robustness and sensitivity 3: Dealing with assumptions (W6)
- Reproducible workflow 3: AI, agents, or what are we even doing? (W7)
- Individual project presentations (W8)

Learning outcomes

Students will appreciate the importance of computational and conceptual reproducibility for the credibility of the social sciences. They will also develop a workflow for reproducible research that can be applied to their future work in the programme and beyond.

Formative assessment

Students will receive formative feedback (and a mark that does not contribute to the final course grade) for: (1) a short presentation (5–7 minutes) on the paper they aim to replicate, on a date to be assigned (W3–4); and (2) the final presentation of their individual replication project (W8).

Summative assessment

Assessment is conducted through a replication project consisting of three parts. The paper should be between 6,000 and 8,000 words and of a standard appropriate for submission to an academic journal (Part 1). This is complemented by a research diary (Part 2) and replication code written in any statistical software (Part 3). The submission deadline is noon on Monday of Week 5 of Hilary term.

Key texts

- Bleier, A., Kiesel, J., Viehmann, C., Münch, F. V., Chan, C., Silva, R. C. da, Kathirgamalingam, A., Chang, P.-C., Khan, M. T., Linzbach, S., Momeni, F., Yu, R., Dietze, S., & Wagner, C. (2026). Improving Reproducibility in Computational Social Science with the Methods Hub. Proceedings of the International AAAI Conference on Web and Social Media, 20(1), 3038–3041. https://doi.org/10.1609/icwsm.v20i1.42804
- Breznau, N. (2026). Investigating the reproducibility of the social and behavioral sciences + a deep dive into implications for sociology. https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19956336
- Breznau, N., & Nguyen, H. H. V. (2026, September 1). Metatheoretical multiverse analysis: Improving the reliability of research with theories-as-data. arXiv.Org. https://arxiv.org/abs/2609.09190v1
- Dubova, M., Moskvichev, A., & Zollman, K. (2026). Against theory-motivated experimentation: Can random experimental choice lead to better theories? Collective Intelligence, 5(1), 26339137261421577. https://doi.org/10.1177/26339137261421577
- Garret Christensen, Jeremy Freese, Edward Miguel (2019), Transparent and Reproducible Social Science Research, 1ST Edition, University of California Press, ISBN: 9780520296954.
- Kulal, A. (2026). Reproducibility and credibility in computational social science: Testing the fidelity of GenAI-generated data. Journal of Open Innovation: Technology, Market, and Complexity, 12(2), 100792. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.joitmc.2026.100792
- Liu, J., Pei, J., Huang, J., Si, C., Qu, A., Tang, X., Lu, R., Chen, L., Bai, X., Zheng, H., Chen, C., Chen, Z., Ye, H., Fu, Y., He, Z., Jin, Z., Zhang, Z., Sun, S., Harmon, M., … Zhang, Z. (2026). The Last Human-Written Paper: Agent-Native Research Artifacts (arXiv:2604.24658). arXiv. https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2604.24658
- Lundberg, I., Johnson, R., & Stewart, B. M. (2021). What Is Your Estimand? Defining the Target Quantity Connects Statistical Evidence to Theory. American Sociological Review, 86(3), 532–565. https://doi.org/10.1177/00031224211004187
- Marcoci, A., Wilkinson, D. P., Vercammen, A., Wintle, B. C., Abatayo, A. L., Baskin, E., Berkman, H., Buchanan, E. M., Capitán, S., Capitán, T., Chan, G., Cheng, K. J. G., Coupé, T., Dryhurst, S., Duan, J., Edlund, J. E., Errington, T. M., Fedor, A., Fidler, F., … van der Linden, S. (2025). Predicting the replicability of social and behavioural science claims in COVID-19 preprints. Nature Human Behaviour, 9(2), 287–304. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-024-01961-1

- Momeni, F., Khan, M. T., Kiesel, J., & Ross-Hellauer, T. (2025). Checklists for Computational Reproducibility in Social Sciences: Insights from Literature and Survey Evaluation. Proceedings of the 3rd ACM Conference on Reproducibility and Replicability, ACM REP '25, 179–191. https://doi.org/10.1145/3736731.3746161
- Reiss, M. V., Adler, S. J., Barrie, C., Berkessel, J. B., Breuer, J., Brodeur, A., Christensen, G., Dienlin, T., Freese, J., Greiner, B., Haim, M., Hardwicke, T. E., Johannesson, M., King, G., Kreuter, F., Lucas, C., Martinovici, A., Pérignon, C., Sarstedt, M., Roggenhamp, H. (2026). Improving computational reproducibility in the social sciences. Nature Human Behaviour, 1–5. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-026-02570-w
- Schoch, D., Chan, C., Wagner, C., & Bleier, A. (2024). Computational reproducibility in computational social science. EPJ Data Science, 13(1), 75. https://doi.org/10.1140/epjds/s13688-024-00514-w
- Young C, Cumberworth E. Multiverse Analysis: Computational Methods for Robust Results. Cambridge University Press; 2025.

2.5 Option Papers

Option papers will be introduced during Induction Week at the start of Michaelmas term. Course Convenors will outline their papers in detail and answer questions. Students will then have until the end of Week 4 of Michaelmas term to choose their options. The Graduate Studies Officer will email instructions for submitting option choices. A paper will run only if at least three students choose it for credit, and individual Course convenors may also place a cap on enrolment.

2.5.1 Advanced Quantitative Methods (AQM)

Course convenor: Professor Christiaan Monden

Aims

The application of advanced statistical models to social science data and their interpretation.

Teaching arrangement

Eight two-hour lectures (weeks 1–8), weekly assignments, and three lab classes in which students gain hands-on experience in estimating and interpreting the statistical models introduced in the lectures.

Content and structure

This course follows Statistical Methods in Michaelmas term and aims to develop a number of more advanced techniques that are particularly relevant to sociologists. It is primarily an “applied” course and emphasises the application of statistical models to typical social science data. Interpretation of parameter estimates, rather than the derivation of the models themselves, is central to the course.

Topics covered

The precise topics covered will vary from year to year depending on the expertise and interests of the lecturers. In 2026/2027, the following will be covered: logistic regression, fixed-effects models for panel data, multilevel models, instrumental variable estimation, and models for regression discontinuity designs.

Learning outcomes

On successfully completing this course, students should have an appreciation of the advantages and pitfalls of different methods and practical experience of applying the methods taught. Students need a strong understanding of the Statistical Methods course in Michaelmas Term to benefit from this course. Students who did poorly or only averagely in that course are probably not ready for this AQM.

Formative assessment

A formative assessment takes place in Week 5. It is a closed-book test completed on paper without devices. Students will be given R code and statistical output and asked to explain and comment on the analysis and to interpret the results.

Summative assessment

The course is assessed by a two-hour in-person examination in week 0 of Trinity term, and by one quantitative assignment submitted in week 9 of Hilary term. Candidates will analyse data using some of the methods covered and write a short report on their analyses. The assignment will be made available at 9am on Monday of week 9 of Hilary term, and the submission deadline will be noon on Friday of week 9 of Hilary term. Where AI has contributed to submitted work, students must disclose its use as specified in the assignment. Students remain responsible for every analysis, line of submitted code, statistical interpretation and substantive claim, regardless of whether and how AI helped produce them.

Software

AQM is taught exclusively in R. All lecture examples and lab exercises use R. Code for the assignment must also be written in R. This is a substantive course, not a coding course. Students are strongly encouraged to complete the Learn R sequence on Codecademy (https://www.codecademy.com/learn/learn-r; free course), or similar training before the start of Hillary Term. AI can be used to check, debug and improve code, but students must be able to understand and explain their own code independently.

Key texts

The following texts are indicative. Students will receive a reading list and suggestions for readings in the lectures.

- Firebaugh, G. (2008) *Seven Rules for Social Research*. Princeton University Press.
- Huntington-Klein, N (2022) *The Effect*. https://theeffectbook.net/
- Allison, P. (2009) *Fixed Effect Regression Models*. Sage [e-book, available from the Bodleian through SOLO]. [selected chapters]
- Snijders, T. & R. Bosker (2011) *Multilevel analysis: an introduction to basic and advanced multilevel modeling. 2nd edition.* Sage. [selected chapters]
- Cunningham, S (2022). *Causal Inference: The Mixtape*. https://mixtape.scunning.com/
- Mize, T. (2019). Best Practices for Estimating, Interpreting, and Presenting Nonlinear Interaction Effects. *Sociological Science* 6: 81–117.
- Breen, R., Karlson, K. & A. Holm (2018). Interpreting and Understanding Logits, Probits, and Other Nonlinear Probability Models. *Annual Review of Sociology* 2018 44:1, 39-54.
- Bryan, M. & S. Jenkins (2016). Multilevel Modelling of Country Effects: A Cautionary Tale. *European Sociological Review*, 32(1): 3–22
- Felton, C & B. Stewart (2022) *Handle with Care: A Sociologist's Guide to Causal Inference with Instrumental Variables*. Pre-print September 2002. https://osf.io/preprints/socarxiv/3ua7q/

2.5.2 Causality: Methods of Causal Inference in the Social Sciences

Course convenor: Dr Ozan Aksoy

Aims

The course introduces students to contemporary frameworks of "counterfactual" causal inference, emphasising the complementarities between potential outcomes (a.k.a., Neyman-Rubin causal model) and the structural causal model (a.k.a., Wright-Pearl graphical approach). The focus will be on identification and estimation of causal effects using observational data as encountered in social science applications.

Teaching arrangements

Weekly two-hour lectures throughout the term.

Content and structure

The course focuses on the identification and estimation of causal effects, including the use of formal languages to define the target quantity ("estimand"), the conditions that should be met for a causal interpretation to be valid ("identification assumptions"), and the evaluation of different algorithms that can be used to obtain answers from data ("estimators"). Basic knowledge of probability and statistics, up to generalised linear models, is a pre-requisite, but resources will be provided for those who need to refresh their statistics foundations. The practical material will be covered through analyses and replications included in the problem sets, to be performed in R. Students are expected to conduct data pre-processing steps, model estimation, and interpretation of results.

Topics covered

- Week 1 – Introduction to Potential Outcomes and the experimental ideal
- Week 2 – Introduction to the Structural Causal Model and Directed Acyclic Graphs (DAGs)
- Week 3 – Selection on observables I (matching, regression, weighting)
- Week 4 – Selection on observables II (machine learning approaches)
- Week 5 – As-if-random assignment (instrumental variables and regression discontinuity)
- Week 6 – Parallel trends and beyond (difference-in-differences and synthetic control)
- Week 7 – Partial identification and sensitivity analysis
- Week 8 – Credible causal inference beyond research templates

Learning outcomes

On successfully completing this course, students should understand the central role of causality in the social sciences, and they should be able to cast a critical eye on the causal claims that social scientists make. Students should also have acquired a thorough knowledge of the potential outcomes and graphical approaches to causality, the central role of assumptions in identifying causal effects, and they should be able to estimate a wide range of models for causal inference.

Formative assessment

Students will complete a formative assessment in Week 6, consisting of a series of problems and open-ended questions. Feedback will be provided before the end of term.

Summative assessment

The course is assessed by a problem set submitted in Week 11 of Hilary term, and a formal two-hour in-person examination in Week 1 of Trinity term. Both are worth 50% of the final mark.

Key texts

- Aronow, P. M., & Miller, B. T. (2019). *Foundations of Agnostic Statistics*. Cambridge University Press.
- Morgan, Stephen L. and Christopher Winship (2014). *Counterfactuals and Causal Inference: Methods and Principles for Social Research* (2nd edition), Cambridge University Press.
- Huntington-Klein, N. (2022). *The Effect: An Introduction to Research Design and Causality* (1st edition). Chapman and Hall/CRC.
- Angrist, Joshua and Jörn-Steffen Pischke (2009). *Mostly Harmless Econometrics*. Princeton University Press.
- Pearl, Judea, Madelyn Glymour and Nicholas P. Jewell. 2016. *Causal Inference in Statistics.* Wiley

2.5.2 Political and Civil Conflict

Course convenor: Dr Lynn Schneider

Aims

To introduce students to current social science debates on the causes and consequences of political and civil conflict.

Teaching arrangement

Eight seminars in Hilary term. Each student is expected to write three essays (1,500–2,000 words) and participate actively in seminars.

Content and structure

This course will begin by examining changes in violent political and civil conflict over time. It will then focus on civil wars and the role of ethnicity in violent conflict; recruitment into violent political organisations; how rebel groups are organised and the impact this has on their behaviour; the strategic use of violence against civilians including the use of suicide attacks; and the end of violence and its legacy.

Topics covered

This course is designed for students interested in aspects of political and civil conflict. The course introduces students to changes in the type and nature of conflict; the motivations of actors; the strategic use of violence; and the end of violence and its consequences.

Learning outcomes

On successfully completing this course, students should:

- have acquired knowledge of the key theoretical debates on the causes and consequences of political and civil conflict and the motivations of actors
- become familiar with a range of different case studies and issues arising from the comparative method of investigating this topic
- be prepared for advanced doctoral research on violent political conflict.

Formative assessment

Three essays (1,500–2,000 words) and active seminar participation.

Summative assessment

The course will be assessed by an examination in Trinity term.

Key texts

- Kalyvas (2006) *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*
- Kapuściński (2001) *Another Day of Life*
- Petersen (2002) *Understanding Ethnic Violence*
- Tilly (2003) *The Politics of Collective Violence*
- Weinstein (2006) *Inside Rebellion*

2.5.3 Political Sociology

Course convenor: Professor Stephen Fisher

Aims

To introduce students to advanced research in political sociology and to prepare students for doctoral research in this area. The course encourages students to become familiar with, and capable of engaging with, the current research issues and debates in the field.

Teaching arrangement

There will be eight classes in Hilary term. Students are expected to write either an essay or a short memo in advance of each class in response to questions set by the Course convenor. Essays and memos are shared between students and the Course convenor for collective consideration and discussion in class. Classes thus provide opportunities to receive feedback from the Course convenor and other students. Over the course of the term students are expected to write three essays and five short memos. Students have a free choice over which topics to write their three essays on. Students are expected to engage constructively in the discussions on all topics covered in classes. The course is only open to those doing the formal exam.

Content and structure

The paper covers research on the social bases of politics, such as the roles of class, religion, gender and ethnicity; the factors affecting political behaviour such as protest participation, electoral turnout and vote choice; how citizens relate to the political process; how social and political identities and attitudes are formed and how they change.

Topics covered

1. Social class
2. Ethnicity
3. Anti-immigrant sentiment and populist-right parties
4. Religion
5. Gender
6. Media
7. Political participation and turnout
8. Social attitudes and value change

Learning outcomes

By the end of this course, students should:

- be familiar with empirical research in political sociology, the technical tools used, and the empirical results obtained;
- be skilled in critiquing research in the area on both theoretical and empirical grounds;
- be prepared to undertake doctoral research in this area.

Formative assessment

Three essays and five short memos.

Summative assessment

The formal assessment is by an open-book examination for which students must answer three previously unseen questions.

Key texts

There are no core texts for the course. Readings overlap very little between topics. However, the following provide some helpful background reading.

- Crouch, Colin. (1999) *Social Change in Western Europe*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Dalton, Russell. (2018). *Citizen Politics: Public Opinion and Political Parties in Advanced Industrial Democracies* (7th edition). Washington, DC: Congressional Quarterly Press.
- Orum, Anthony, and John G. Dale. (2009) *Political sociology: Power and participation in the modern world.* 5th ed. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Norris, P. and Ronald Inglehart. (2019) *Cultural Backlash: Trump, Brexit, and Authoritarian Populism.* Cambridge University Press.

2.5.4 Social Stratification

Course convenor: Dr Lindsay Richards

Aims

The paper introduces students to contemporary research on social stratification, so that they can apply advanced concepts and techniques to their own research problems.

Teaching arrangement

Eight classes in Hilary term. Students are expected to write three formative essays.

Topics covered

The major forms of social stratification and their relation to economic and political institutions. The course will concentrate mainly on industrial societies; the structure of social inequality; prestige hierarchies and status structures; class formation; social mobility; processes of 'social selection' and status attainment; social stratification and sub-cultural variations. Social stratification in relation to social integration, conflict and change, with special reference to industry and politics.

Content and structure

This course examines the central debates about stratification and social mobility in contemporary societies. For example, what explains the sharp rise in income inequality in recent decades? Why has the gender gap in educational attainment disappeared? How much inequality is there between countries, and is global income inequality growing or shrinking? Are social classes becoming less relevant in modern societies? How do class advantages and disadvantages get passed from parents to children? In what sense can Britain be said to be a meritocracy? How does cultural inequality map onto social inequality? Students are introduced to the central concepts and theories, the key methodological issues in stratification research, and the main empirical results.

Learning outcomes

On completing this course satisfactorily, students should:

- have a thorough understanding of the empirical results in contemporary stratification research
- understand how methodological issues in stratification research are related to theoretical concepts and substantive questions

Formative assessment

Two short essays (in weeks 4 and 7), and one presentation of approximately 15-20 minutes.

Course assessment

A formal examination in Trinity term.

Key texts (choose one or two)

- Arrow, K., S. Bowles, and S. Darlauf, eds. (2000) *Meritocracy and Economic Inequality*, Princeton University Press.

- Bowles, S., H. Ginits and M. Osborne Groves, eds. (2005) *Unequal Chances: Family Background and Economic Success*, Princeton University Press.
- Wright, E.O. ed. (2005) *Approaches to Class Analysis*, Cambridge University Press.
- Devlin, B. et al. eds. (1997*) Intelligence, Genes and Success*, Copernicus.
- Grusky, D.B. ed. (2008) *Social Stratification*, 3rd ed, Westview Press.
- Goldthorpe, J.H. (1987) *Social Mobility and Class Structure in Modern Britain*, 2nd ed, Clarendon Press.
- Marshall, G., A. Swift and S. Roberts (1997) *Against the Odds?* Oxford University Press.
- Firebaugh, G. (2003) *The New Geography of Global Income Inequality*, Harvard University Press.

2.5.5 Sociology of China

Course convenor: Professor Rachel Murphy

Aims

Example questions with which we engage include:

- What is unique and what is universal about social relationships in mainland China?
- In China, which determines life chances more: residency, human capital, and/or political background?
- How are rural–urban migration and international return migrations shaped by and reshape Chinese society?
- How have the members of China's ethnic minorities been advantaged and disadvantaged by various state policies, and with what implications for identity and life chances?
- How do changes in the educational system and educational inequality mirror broader social and economic trends in China?
- Has women's status in society improved or declined since the Maoist era?
- In what ways have market reforms impacted the provision of healthcare in China?
- What does "inclusive development" mean in the Chinese context, and what challenges does it face?

Teaching arrangement

The course comprises eight sessions in Hilary term, each consisting of a 60-minute lecture followed by a 60-minute discussion class. Active participation is expected: students should engage critically with the readings and contribute thoughtfully to class discussions.

Content and structure

China's transition to a market society has produced dramatic changes in the lives of its citizens. In this course we will consider pressing social concerns that confront China as it continues its ongoing reforms and integration into the global community. The course is organised into eight sessions. In the first week we look at China's socialist legacy and the ways in which socialist institutions intertwine with other formal and informal institutional arrangements to affect associational life and the relationship between society and individuals in late/post-socialist China. We then examine social class, inequality and mobility in contemporary China. In successive weeks, we use selected topics to explore broader issues of social change and stratification across migration (both rural–urban and international/return), education, ethnicity and gender. In the final session, we critically engage with the scholarship on inclusive development in China and discuss gaps in theory, evidence, and practice.

Topics covered

- Week 1 – Networks and Associational Life in Chinese Society
- Week 2 – Social Class, Inequality and Mobility
- Week 3 – Rural-Urban Migration and Urbanisation
- Week 4 – Ethnic Minority Policy and Practice
- Week 5 – International Migrants and Returnees

- Week 6 – Education, Socialisation and Stratification
- Week 7 – Gender, Power and Family
- Week 8 – Inclusive Development

Learning outcomes

On successfully completing the course, students should:

- See how China – as a developing society, a late socialist society, and a rapidly industrialising society – can be studied through a sociological lens.
- Become familiar with academic research on social change in contemporary China.
- Be prepared for advanced research in the sociology of China

Formative assessment

Over the course of the term, each student will deliver one 15-minute presentation and write one 1,000-word essay on topics drawn from Weeks 1–8. The essay should be pre-circulated to the class by email before the relevant session, and feedback will be provided. Students taking on either role in a given week are expected to help steer the discussion. Note: for each student, the presentation and the essay must be on two separate topics.

Summative assessment

Assessment is by a three-hour open-book examination in Trinity term.

Key texts

- Friedman, E. (2022) *The Urbanization of People: The Politics of Development, Labor Markets, and Schooling in the Chinese City*, University of Chicago Press.
- Fincher, L.H. (2021) *Betraying Big Brother: The Feminist Awakening in China*, Verso
- Rozelle, S and N. Hell (2021) *Invisible China*, University of Chicago Press.
- Goodman, D (2014) *Class in Contemporary China*, Polity Press.
- Willis, Paul. *Being Modern in China: A Western Cultural Analysis of Modernity, Tradition and Schooling in China Today*. Wiley, 2019.
- Jacka, T, A. Kipnis and S. Sargeson (2013) *Contemporary China: Society and Social Change*, Cambridge University Press.

2.5.6 Sociology of Cybersecurity

Course convenor: Dr Jonathan Lusthaus

Aims

This option paper introduces students to key concepts in cybersecurity, from a sociological rather than technical perspective. This course is global and comparative in its approach, drawing on examples from a range of countries/areas.

Teaching arrangement

There will be eight classes in Hilary term. Students will choose one topic within Weeks 1-4, and another in Weeks 5-8. They will submit one 1,500-word essay at the end of Week 4, and another at the end of Week 8. Feedback will be provided one week later in each case. Each student will also give one in-class presentation.

Content and structure

This course will cover cybercrime, hacking and hacktivism, insiders, proxies, and nation state threats, along with cyber policing and the cybersecurity industry, and the users and organisations who fall victim to cyber-attacks.

Topics covered

Cybersecurity is often seen as a technical discipline, but it also contains a vital human component. People carry out cyber-attacks; people are victims of these attacks; people seek to defend against these attacks. The focus of this course is the social analysis of cybersecurity. While some broad technical terms will be covered, the emphasis will be on the nature, behaviour and organisation of attackers, defenders, and victims.

Learning outcomes

On completing the course, students will be able to:

- Understand the core concepts of cybersecurity.
- Understand the range of common attackers (cybercriminals, hackers, insiders, nation states), along with their behaviour and organisation.
- Understand the behaviour and organisation of victims, along with the cybersecurity industry and police.
- Be able to apply sociological approaches and theory to key aspects of cybersecurity.
- Determine the importance of local context in relation to cybersecurity issues.

Formative assessment

One 1,500-word essay at the end of Week 4, and one at the end of Week 8.

Summative assessment

One three-hour examination in Trinity term. Students will answer three essay questions from a list.

Key texts

There is not one textbook suited to this course. A range of readings will be assigned for each topic, including:

- Levi, M., and Williams, M., (2013) 'Multi-agency partnerships in cybercrime reduction: Mapping the UK information assurance network cooperation space,' *Information Management & Computer Security*, 21 (5) pp. 420-443.
- Levy, S. (2010) *Hackers: Heroes of the Computer Revolution*, Sebastopol, CA, O'Reilly Media.
- Lusthaus, J. (2018) *Industry of Anonymity: Inside the Business of Cybercrime*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press.
- Shapiro, S. (2023) *Fancy Bear Goes Phishing: The Dark History of the Information Age, in Five Extraordinary Hacks*, Allen Lane.
- Steinmetz, K. (2015) 'Craft(y)ness: An ethnographic study of hacking,' *British Journal of Criminology,* 55 (1) pp. 125-145.

2.5.7 Sociology of Education

Course convenor: Dr Said Hassan

Aims

Understand foundational theories and contemporary debates in the sociology of education.

Teaching arrangements

Eight one-hour lectures (Weeks 1–8) followed by one-hour discussion classes (Weeks 1–8).

Content and structure

This course introduces key themes in the sociology of education. We will read foundational theoretical perspectives and discuss recent debates, such as how schools and educational institutions reproduce and mitigate inequality, peer effects and social networks, meritocracy, the role of social policy, and other topics. The course draws on interdisciplinary work from sociology, economics, and education.

Topics covered

- Cultural reproduction
- Peer effects and social networks in education
- The role of race, ethnicity, and gender
- Returns to higher education
- Meritocracy
- Educational reforms

Learning outcomes

At the end of the course, students will be able to critically evaluate competing theories in the sociology of education and evaluate empirical evidence and apply them to contemporary educational issues.

Formative assessment

Two formative essays.

Summative assessment

One 3-hour closed book essay exam.

2.5.8 Sociology of Gender

Course convenor: Professor Man-Yee Kan

Aims

This option aims to introduce students to the sociological literature explaining the causes and consequences of gender inequalities. We focus on the state, the educational institution, the labour market, the domestic sphere, and women's representations and positions in post-industrialised societies as arenas of gender inequality.

Teaching arrangement

There are eight weekly classes in Hilary term. Students will write one 3,000-word essay or two 1,500-word essays on the tutorial topics and give one presentation of approximately 20-30 minutes summarising and critically discussing the literature.

Content and structure

The course focuses on contemporary gender inequalities in post-industrialised societies. Students will be familiarised with theories and literature about gender inequalities. The mechanisms and institutions through which gender inequalities are produced and reproduced will be discussed.

Topics covered

There will be eight classes, covering the following topics:

- Gender inequalities: perspectives and trends
- How gender works in the education system
- Occupational gender segregation
- The gender wage gap
- The domestic division of labour
- Gendered consequences of marriage and parenthood
- Welfare states and public policy regimes
- Incomplete revolution? How do we measure progresses in gender equality

Learning outcomes

On completing the course, students will be familiar with the contemporary situations and trends concerning gender inequalities in post-industrialised societies. They will understand the theories and mechanisms that explain the processes leading to gender inequality. They will be capable of embarking on a research project on the subject.

Formative assessment

One 3,000-word essay or two 1,500-word essays on the tutorial topics and one presentation of approximately 20–30 minutes.

Summative assessment

An examination in Trinity term.

Key texts

- Blau, F. D., Brinton, M. C. And Grusky, D. (2008) (eds). *The Declining Significance of Gender*? Russell Sage Foundation
- Crompton, R. Scott, J., and Lyonnette C. (2010) (eds) *Gender Inequalities in the 21st Century.* Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Esping-Andersen, Gösta. 2009. *The Incomplete Revolution.* Cambridge, UK: Polity.
- Scott, J., Dex. S. and Plagnol, A. (2012) (eds). *Gendered Lives*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Treas, J. and Drobnic, S. (eds) (2010) *Dividing the Domestic: Men, Women, and Household Work in Cross-National Perspective.* Stanford University Press.
- Risman, B. (2018) "Gender as a Social Structure" In Risman, B. J., Froyum, C. M, Scarborough, W. J. (eds) (2018). *Handbook of the Sociology of Gender.* 2nd Edition. Chapter 2.

2.5.9 Sociology of Mafias

Course convenor: Professor Federico Varese

Aims

There is a consensus that organised crime (OC) is harmful and its profits are immense. Yet the concept of OC itself lumps together people engaging in very different activities, from peasants in Colombia to professional enablers in London and mafias in Italy. This option paper aims to provide clarity and a solid analytical ground on which to base this field of study. Breaking traditional disciplinary boundaries between the social sciences and adopting a global outlook, the course is multidisciplinary and draws upon concepts from political theory, political economy, and social network analysis, as well as on the history and sociology of different countries both in the global South and North.

Teaching arrangement

Teaching will be through eight weekly seminars. Students are expected to study the required readings and engage in class discussion each week.

Content and structure

The course first discusses definitions of organised crime and mafias and the methodological challenges of researching organised crime and hidden populations. It then unpacks organised crime through Production, Trade and Governance, covering cybercrime, international drug trade, illegal money flows, piracy, gangs and mafias. The final class addresses how organised crime "ends", revises key content and discusses open questions.

Structure

- Week 1 – Organised Crime and Mafias Defined
- Week 2 – Researching Organised Crime (Methods and Data)
- Week 3 – Production
- Week 4 – Trade (Goods)
- Week 5 – Trade (Money)
- Week 6 – Governance (Mafias)
- Week 7 – Governance (Beyond Mafias)
- Week 8 – Death of Organised Crime and Revision

Learning outcomes

On successfully completing course, students should be familiar with:

- Key issues related to OC and how criminal organisations produce, trade, and govern in a variety of settings;
- Key theories and concepts discussed in the course, including from sociology, political theory and political economy;
- Key insights into comparative and analytical sociology applied to the study of OC as a hard-to-reach population.

Students should be able to apply key insights to cases not specifically covered in the course.

Formative assessment

One Reading Response during the term, submitted by 12pm/noon on Friday of Week 6 by email to the Course convenor. The response should not exceed three A4 pages (font 12) and is graded pass/fail.

Summative assessment

One assessed essay written unsupervised and unaided. Three examination questions will be published at 12pm/noon on Friday of Week 8 of Hilary term. Students answer one question and submit via Inspera by 12pm/noon on Friday of Week 11. The assignment must be no less than 3,500 and no more than 5,000 words, inclusive of footnotes but excluding bibliography and appendices.

Key texts

- Diego Gambetta. *The Sicilian Mafia*. Harvard University Press. 1993.
- Federico Varese. *Mafia Life*. Oxford University Press. 2018.
- Some key papers are collected in: Varese, F. (ed.) 2010. *Organized Crime. Critical Concepts in Criminology*, Routledge, 2010.

Hard-to-find papers and unpublished papers are stored on the Canvas page for Sociology of Mafias. Students should contact the Course convenor if they cannot locate a paper or book chapter.

Suggested viewings:

Mean Streets; The Godfather: Parts One and Two; Goodfellas; Casino; Donnie Brasco; Narcos TV Series; Cartel Land (documentary); The Irishman.

Pre-course reading (choose at least one):

- Pistone, J.D. and R. Woodley. *Donnie Brasco: My Undercover Life in the Mafia*, 1988.
- Arlacchi, P. *Men of Dishonor*. 1992.
- Maas, P. *Underboss. Sammy the Bull Gravano's Story of Life in the Mafia,* 1997.
- Escobar, R. *Escobar*. 2009.
- Leeson, *The Invisible Hook.* 2009.
- Poulsen, K. *Kingpin*. 2011.
- Glenny, M. *Nemesis*. 2015.

2.5.10 Sociologies of Sexualities and Gender Identities

Course convenor: Dr Morten Thomsen

Aims

This course examines the sociology of sexualities and gender identities, equipping students with the conceptual, methodological, and empirical foundations necessary for sociological analysis of sexualities and gender identities as dimensions of social stratification and of the minority populations that emerge when stratifying by them. While grounded in sociological theory and research, the course also draws on insights from the wider social and life sciences to examine how sex, sexuality, and gender identity are defined, developed, measured, and consequential for life outcomes.

Teaching arrangements

Eight two-hour lectures in Hilary term.

Content and structure

The course opens with the conceptual foundations of sex, sexuality, and gender identity and their social and legal regulation, before turning to the methodological challenges of operationalising these concepts in empirical research. Subsequent sessions examine substantive domains including labour markets, health, victimisation, and family formation. The substantive sessions primarily engage with quantitative evidence whilst drawing on qualitative research where it illuminates key concepts and lived experiences.

Topics covered

Indicative topics to be covered over the 8 weeks of Hilary term:

- Sex, sexuality, and gender identity: concepts and development
- Rights, recognition, and backlash
- Operationalising sexuality and gender identity in empirical research
- Minority stressors, discrimination, and victimisation
- Health and mortality beyond ‘male vs. female’
- Human resources: the gay penalty, the lesbian premium, and the trans crossover
- Intergenerational relationships and queer families
- Intersex: the silent I in LGBTQI+

Learning outcomes

At the end of this course, the student will be able to:

1. Understand concepts of sex, sexualities, and gender identities key to the sociological analysis of these dimensions and the minority populations that emerge when stratifying by them, drawing on sociological theory and empirical research and complemented by insights from the wider social and life sciences.
2. Understand how legislation, public opinion, and institutional practice structure the experiences and opportunities of sexual and gender minority populations.

3. Critically evaluate approaches to operationalising and measuring sex, sexuality, and gender identity in empirical research, including the distinctive challenges of studying marginalised populations and changing identity categories.
4. Engage with and understand key findings from the empirical literature on life outcomes and trajectories across sexual and gender minority populations, including labour markets, health, family formation, and victimisation.

Formative assessment

- Two essays of 1,500-2,000 words each, to be submitted in Hilary term, with written feedback provided.
- One 10–15-minute presentation, with oral feedback provided. Students will be expected to actively participate in seminars, including sharing and reflecting on insights from their own essays and the course reading list.

Summative assessment

One 3-hour unseen exam in Trinity term, where students will answer 3 questions out of 9 provided.

2.5.11 Sociology of the Family

Course convenor: Professor Christiaan Monden

Aims

The course introduces students to major theories and empirical research in the sociology of the family. It examines how family relationships, practices and institutions have changed over time, how they vary across societies and social groups, and how families both reflect and shape social inequalities. The course has a comparative perspective, with a particular empirical focus on the UK and Europe.

Teaching arrangements

Eight seminars in Hilary term where active participation and discussion are key (these are not lectures). Students prepare short presentations and discussion points, and write two essays.

Content and structure

We begin by examining long-term and contemporary changes in marriage and family life, considering how historical, economic and institutional changes have shaped family relationships. We then examine partnership formation, assortative mating and social inequality, before turning to contemporary changes in marriage, cohabitation and divorce, including their causes and consequences.

The course also considers relationships within families, focusing on gender, paid and unpaid work, care, and intergenerational solidarity. In the final part of the course, we examine increasing diversity in family lives, including family complexity, parenting and children's outcomes, single parenthood, and same-sex relationships and parenthood. Throughout, the course takes a comparative perspective, with particular emphasis on the UK and Europe, and considers how welfare states, labour markets, institutions and inequalities shape family lives.

Topics covered

- Historical and contemporary change in marriage and family life
- Partner selection and assortative mating
- Causes and consequences of relationship dissolution
- Gender relations, and the stalled gender revolution
- Intergenerational solidarity and exchange
- Children, parenting and family inequality
- Family complexity
- Same-sex relationships and parenthood
- Diversity in family forms

Learning outcomes

On successfully completing the course, students should:

- have acquired knowledge of major theoretical perspectives and debates in the sociology of the family;

- understand major historical and contemporary changes in marriage and family relationships;
- be familiar with recent empirical research in family sociology;
- be prepared to undertake independent research in a range of areas of family sociology.

Formative assessment

Students will write two essays during the course. The first essay will receive feedback and a broad indication of the mark range. The second essay will receive a numerical mark as the designated formative assessment for the paper.

Summative assessment

One three-hour examination in Trinity term.

Key texts

The following are indicative examples. An updated reading list will be provided at the start of term.

- Thomson, E. (2014). "Family Complexity in Europe." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 654: 245–258.
- McLanahan, S. (2004). "Diverging Destinies: How Children Are Faring under the Second Demographic Transition." *Demography*, 41: 607–627.
- Kalmijn, M. (1998). "Intermarriage and Homogamy: Causes, Patterns, Trends." *Annual Review of Sociology*, 24: 395–421.
- Stanfors, M. and Goldscheider, F. (2017). "The Forest and the Trees: Industrialization, Demographic Change, and the Ongoing Gender Revolution in Sweden and the United States, 1870–2010." *Demographic Research*, 36(6): 173–226.
- Kolk, M. and Andersson, G. (2020). "Two Decades of Same-Sex Marriage in Sweden: A Demographic Account of Developments in Marriage, Childbearing, and Divorce." *Demography*, 57: 147–169.
- Cohen, P. N. (2019). "The Coming Divorce Decline." *Socius*, 5: 1–6.

2.5.12 Topics in Computational Social Science

Course convenor: Professor Ridhi Kashyap

Aims

The course aims to:

- To introduce students to contemporary scientific debates within the area of computational social science, particularly as they relate to sociological and demographic questions
- Acquire knowledge of techniques of computational social science, including methods for processing and analysing digital and unstructured data, basic methods for machine learning and addressing bias in non-probability samples

Teaching arrangements

The teaching will be organised in a combination of lectures, discussion-based seminars and computer labs.

Content and structure

The growing availability of new streams of data, expansion of computational power and the digitalisation of our lives has created new questions and research opportunities for social and population scientists. The course will introduce students to a range of methodological and substantive topics in computational social science. We will cover topics such as digital trace and big data, machine learning, non-probability sampling, text as data, and agent-based modelling and microsimulation. The course will consist of seminar and lab sessions (taught in R), where students will engage with research in computational social science and learn to apply basic computational methods to research problems.

- Week 1 – Introduction to computational social science
- Week 2 – Social data in the digital age: opportunities and challenges
- Week 3 – Machine learning, prediction and explanation
- Week 4 – Machine learning lab
- Week 5 – Non-probability samples and selection
- Week 6 – Non-probability sampling lab
- Week 7 – Text as Data: measurement, classification and LLMs
- Week 8 – Agent-based and microsimulation modelling

Learning outcomes

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Critically evaluate and engage with contemporary scientific debates within the area of computational social science and identify key contributions;
- Apply computational social science perspectives to formulate and address relevant sociological and demographic questions;
- Demonstrate an understanding of techniques of computational social science, including methods for processing and analysing digital and unstructured data, basic methods for machine learning and addressing bias in non-probability samples;

- Critically evaluate the validity, representativeness, reproducibility and ethical implications of computational social science techniques, including emerging applications of generative AI and language models in social science research;
- Apply and engage with a computational social science perspective to address their own research problems and areas of interests.

Requirements

The course will be taught in R using RStudio. Students are expected to have R and RStudio installed and to be familiar with R. Students are recommended to complete a basic introductory course in R via Codecademy or equivalent before beginning the course.

An additional resource, available freely online, is:

- Wickham, Hadley, Mine Çetinkaya-Rundel, and Garrett Grolemund. 2023. *R for Data Science: Import, Tidy, Transform, Visualize, and Model Data*, 2nd ed. O'Reilly.

Formative assessment

Class presentations and short extensions to labs.

Summative assessment

The course will be examined by:

- An essay (max 3,000 words) in response to prompt provided by instructor, provided in week 8, due on Friday, noon, week 0 Trinity term;
- An applied problem set, involving code and markdown report, that applies computational techniques learned during the module, provided in Week 8, due on Friday, noon, week 0 Trinity term.

Key texts

- Salganik, Matthew J. 2019. *Bit by Bit: Social Research in the Digital Age*. Princeton University Press
- Kashyap, Ridhi, R. Gordon Rinderknecht, Aliakbar Akbaritabar, Diego Alburez-Gutierrez, Sofia Gil-Clavel, André Grow, Jisu Kim et al. "Digital and computational demography." *In Research Handbook on Digital Sociology*, pp. 48-86. Edward Elgar Publishing, 2023.
- Lundberg, Ian, Jennie E. Brand, and Nanum Jeon. 2022. 'Researcher Reasoning Meets Computational Capacity: Machine Learning for Social Science'. Social Science Research 108:102807. doi: 10.1016/j.ssresearch.2022.102807.
- Lazer, David M. J., Alex Pentland, Duncan J. Watts, Sinan Aral, Susan Athey, Noshir Contractor, Deen Freelon, Sandra Gonzalez-Bailon, Gary King, Helen Margetts, Alondra Nelson, Matthew J. Salganik, Markus Strohmaier, Alessandro Vespignani, and Claudia Wagner. 2020. 'Computational Social Science: Obstacles and Opportunities'. Science 369(6507):1060–62. doi: 10.1126/science.aaz8170.
- Bail, Christopher. 'Can Generative AI improve social science?' *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*121, no. 21 (2024): e2314021121.

2.6 Options outside Sociology

MPhil students may take one of their two option papers outside of the Department. Permission must be sought from the Director of Taught Courses and the department offering the alternative option. The student must complete an application form to be obtained from, and submitted to, the Graduate Studies Officer by the end of Week 4 of Michaelmas term. The application must be approved by the Director of Taught Courses and classes for the external option paper must not conflict with timetabled departmental teaching.

2.7 Research-informed teaching and the research environment

Teaching in the Department of Sociology is closely connected to its active research environment. Students are taught by academics and researchers engaged in current sociological research, and teaching reflects contemporary scholarship, methodological developments and debates within the discipline. Students develop their own research skills through research methods training and independent research, including dissertation or thesis work as appropriate to their programme.

Students are also encouraged to participate in the wider intellectual life of the Department, including research seminars, workshops and talks involving departmental and visiting researchers. These provide opportunities to engage with current research, encounter different approaches to sociological enquiry and participate in the Department's research community.

Teaching and learning are supported by digital resources, including **Canvas**, alongside relevant research data, resources and analytical tools. The Department is committed to an inclusive approach to teaching and to supporting students with different learning requirements.

Further information on the University's approach to inclusive teaching, the relationship between teaching and research, and digital education can be found in the Policy and Guidance on Undergraduate Learning and Teaching, particularly section 6.

3 Teaching and learning

3.1 Organisation of teaching and learning

Teaching on the MPhil in Sociology and Demography is organised by the Department of Sociology and is delivered through a combination of lectures, seminars, classes, practical/computer-based sessions and independent study. The precise teaching pattern varies between papers. Full details of the teaching arrangements, learning activities and formative work for each core and optional paper are provided in Section 2 of this handbook.

Teaching is delivered in person. Students are expected to attend and participate fully in the teaching associated with the papers for which they are registered, as well as completing the required reading, formative assignments and other independent study. Students are also required to attend the Departmental Sociology Seminars during term time.

The course timetable is made available through **Canvas** and is normally circulated by email before the beginning of each term. Students should check Canvas and their University email regularly for timetable information and any updates.

Each MPhil student is assigned a supervisor, who provides academic guidance and monitors the student's progress during the course. Supervisor assignments take place in week 6 of Michaelmas term. Further information about the role of the supervisor, supervision arrangements and Graduate Supervision Reporting (GSR) is provided in Section in 5.1.1 MPhil supervision.

Colleges provide students with academic and pastoral support alongside that provided by the Department. Students should consult their college handbook or website for information about the support available through their college.

If students have any issues with teaching or supervision please raise these as soon as possible so that they can be addressed promptly. Details of who to contact are provided in section 1.6 Useful Department contacts.

3.1.1 Recording of lectures and seminars

Departmental teaching is delivered in person at the Department of Sociology, and online or hybrid facilities are not offered. Access to lecture recordings is provided where this is explicitly required as a reasonable adjustment in a student's Support Profile through the Disability Advisory Service. Eligible students will be given access to the relevant recordings through view-only SharePoint links.

Seminars and workshops are not recorded. Where a student's Support Profile includes a recording-related adjustment that cannot be met through access to departmental lecture recordings, the Department will work with the student to determine how the adjustment can be appropriately implemented in seminars or workshops.

Students must not make their own audio or video recordings of lectures, seminars or workshops unless this is explicitly authorised as a reasonable adjustment in their Support Profile. Any recording made or provided as a reasonable adjustment is for the student's personal study only and must not be shared, reproduced, published or made available to others.

Dissemination of teaching or learning materials outside the Department

Students are prohibited from sharing teaching or learning materials, including seminar discussions and materials produced by other students or staff, with any third party, including through any social media or other online forums. Compliance with this requirement is mandatory for participation on this course. All students will be asked at Induction to sign a form confirming their acceptance.

3.1.2 Using generative AI in your studies

Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) tools can support your learning when used appropriately. The University provides access to supported tools including ChatGPT Edu, Google Gemini, NotebookLM and Microsoft Copilot Chat.

GenAI should support, rather than replace, the development of your own academic skills. These include critical reading, evaluating evidence, developing arguments, analysing data and communicating your ideas clearly. When deciding whether to use GenAI, consider whether it is helping you to learn and develop the skills that the activity is intended to teach.

You are responsible for critically evaluating information produced by GenAI. Outputs may contain errors, fabricated information or references, and biases. Information obtained through GenAI should therefore be checked against reliable academic sources. In particular, AI-generated summaries should not replace reading and critically engaging with the original academic literature.

Take particular care when entering information into GenAI tools. Confidential, sensitive, personal or unpublished information must not be uploaded to third-party AI tools. Students should use University-supported tools where appropriate and follow University guidance on information security, data protection and the safe and responsible use of GenAI.

You should follow any additional guidance provided by your Course Convenor, tutor or supervisor. Additional information can be found in Annexe A and the AI Declaration for all assessment submissions can be found in Annexe B.

3.2 Key deadlines, training and workshops

The main deadlines and workshops for core papers of the MPhil Sociology and Demography are listed below by year of study. Course Convenors may request additional coursework with deadlines not included in this list.

Required training and administrative actions

Year 1

Action	Where / how	Deadline
Complete Avoiding Plagiarism course	CoSy	12pm/noon, Friday, Week 2, MT (*completion certificate to be sent to graduate-studies@sociology.ox.ac.uk*)
Complete Harassment and Sexual Misconduct training	CoSy	12pm/noon, Friday, Week 2, MT (*completion certificate to be sent to graduate-studies@sociology.ox.ac.uk*)
Attend MSc thesis workshop 1: Developing research questions	Seminar Room, Department of Sociology	11:00-12:30, Thursday, Week 2, MT
Attend the Introduction to Research Ethics at Oxford session	Online	Wednesday, Week 4, MT
Submit Option paper choices	Email Graduate Studies Officer	12pm/noon, Friday, Week 4, MT
Attend MSc thesis workshop 2: Conducting a literature review	Seminar Room, Department of Sociology	11:00-12:30, Thursday, Week 5, MT
Submit provisional MPhil thesis 1-page proposal & title	Email Graduate Studies Officer	12pm/noon Tuesday, Week 6, MT
Complete examination entry	Student Self-Service	12pm/noon, Friday, Week 6, MT
Complete the Research Integrity: Introductory Core Course	CoSy	Friday, Week 0, HT (*completion certificate to be sent to graduate-studies@sociology.ox.ac.uk*)
Complete the Fieldwork and overseas travel risk assessment for fieldworks and travellers course	CoSy	Friday, Week 0, HT (*completion certificate to be sent to graduate-studies@sociology.ox.ac.uk*)

Year 2

Action	Where / how	Deadline
Submit updated MPhil thesis 1-page proposal & title	Email Graduate Studies Officer	Friday, Week 0, MT
Attend the Introduction to Research Ethics at Oxford session	Online	Wednesday, Week 4, MT (*if not complete in Year 1*)
Submit Option paper choices	Email Graduate Studies Officer	12pm/noon, Friday, Week 4, MT
Complete Examination Entry	Student Self-Service	12pm/noon, Friday, Week 6, MT **(Check deadline in advance)**
Submit an ethics application in Worktribe	Worktribe	12pm/noon, Wednesday, Week 8, MT

3.3 MPhil thesis

3.3.1 Purpose and requirements of the MPhil thesis

The MPhil thesis provides students with the opportunity to undertake a substantial piece of independent research at the intersection of sociology and demography. The thesis is a 30,000-word piece of original work addressing a research problem agreed between the student and their supervisor.

Students should aim to produce a paper of publishable quality. Extensive original data collection is discouraged, as this is not usually practicable within the timescale of the MPhil. Students using data that are not publicly available must ensure that examiners can access the data if required, and the thesis should explain how such access can be arranged.

Students who use materials in languages other than English must, if requested by the examiners, provide English translations of relevant materials, such as transcripts or codebooks, within the period specified by the examiners.

3.3.2 Thesis proposals and thesis workshops

There will be two compulsory workshops in weeks 2 and 5 of Michaelmas term on the following:

1. Developing a good research question
2. Reviewing the literature and identifying potential data sources

After attending these, students are required to submit a one-page proposal to the Graduate Studies Officer by Tuesday of Week 6. These will be used for allocating supervisors.

3.3.3 Choosing and developing a thesis topic

Students should develop their thesis topic and research question after attending two workshops in MT, and in consultation with their supervisor at the end of MT and throughout HT. The supervisor will provide feedback on the proposed topic and research question as they develop and may suggest alternative approaches or refinements. In some cases, the supervisor may propose a research topic or play a more substantial role in the formulation of the research question.

Students should ensure that the proposed project is achievable within the timescale and requirements of the MPhil and should discuss the feasibility of any proposed data collection with their supervisor at an early stage.

3.3.4 Thesis proposal and thesis workshop

There is a compulsory thesis workshop for MPhil students in Michaelmas term of the second year, where students are required to make a brief presentation on their research topic, specifying the research question they plan to address, the relevant theoretical ideas and the method they propose to use to answer their chosen question. Students should also engage in discussion and provide feedback on their fellow students' presentations.

Students working with data that is not publicly available must ensure that examiners will be able to access data if required. The thesis should contain details of how such access can be obtained. Students who make use of materials in languages other than English must, on request of the examiners, make available English translations (e.g. of transcriptions, code books, etc) within a time period specified by the examiners, not usually expected to be more than one month.

3.3.5 Ethical approval through Worktribe

To conduct research for an MPhil thesis, students need to seek ethical approval ahead of time.

There are deadlines for all MPhil students to adhere to relating to ethical approval. Those studying part-time should agree deadlines with their supervisor in lieu of the below.

Action	**Where / how**	**Deadline**
Attend the Introduction to Research Ethics at Oxford session	Online	Wednesday, Week 4, MT, Year 1
Complete the Research Integrity: Introductory Core Course	CoSy	Friday, Week 0, HT, Year 1
Submit an ethics application in Worktribe	WorkTribe	12pm/noon, Wednesday, Week 8, MT, Year 2

		(*it is encouraged that this is completed as early as possible*)

The Research Integrity course is mandatory ahead of conducting any research at the University of Oxford. This course has several sections, so students should ensure they have a few hours available to complete it, though it can be completed across multiple sessions. Students must pass with at least 80% and should send their certificate to the Graduate Studies Office.

The Introduction to Research Ethics at Oxford session will be hosted by the Research Governance, Ethics and Assurance team and is compulsory for all MPhil Sociology students to attend in Michaelmas term. See above for a link to the next training session.

Worktribe ethics

Students should create an application in Worktribe and work through the steps with their supervisor to submit their ethics application. If the student will only be using secondary data, or will not be involving human participants, it is likely that Worktribe will advise that further ethical approval is not required. If this is the case, students must confirm with their supervisor and submit evidence from Worktribe to the Ethics Officer at DREC@sociology.ox.ac.uk.

If you propose to use GenAI to process or analyse research data, you should consider this as part of your research ethics and data protection planning. Particular care is required where research involves personal, sensitive, confidential or unpublished data. Any use of GenAI must comply with the University's requirements for research ethics, information security and data protection, and with any conditions attached to third-party data.

Tips for using Worktribe:

- Project start dates should ideally be at least 30 days after the application submission date, as this tends to be how long the approval process takes
- Information Security training evidence is also required for approval, so ensuring this is completed will make this process quicker
- Reviewers need relevant documentation uploaded in the 'Documents' section. The Research Governance team have templates that are recommended for use here. A list of documents that might be relevant to research is below:
    - Participant information sheets
    - Written informed consent forms
    - Oral scripts
    - Recruitment materials
- The Ethics Applicant User guide is a helpful starting point for using Worktribe

Data Protection by Design

If students are working with data, they will need to engage in the University's Data Protection by Design process, and initially fill out a Data Protection Screening (DPS) form.

Depending on answers on this form, students will need to fill out either:

- a Data Protection Assessment (DPA) form – lower risk research
- a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) – higher risk research

The relevant forms should be sent to the Ethics Officer to seek formal signoff by the Head of Department or the Data Protection Officer. Signed forms must be uploaded to the 'Documents' section of the Worktribe application.

Risk levels

Once an ethics application is submitted, it will be sent to the student's supervisor to approve (as Principal Investigator of the research). Depending on the risk level assigned by Worktribe, the application will be reviewed by:

- Low risk (30 days) – the student's supervisor only
- Medium risk (30 days) – the student's supervisor and a member of the Sociology Departmental Research Ethics Committee (DREC)
- High risk (60 days) – the student's supervisor and a member of the Social Sciences and Humanities Inter-Divisional Research Ethics Committee (SSH IDREC)

Students may be required to provide additional information regarding their proposed project during the review stage.

3.3.6 Fieldwork and travel

Fieldwork is not inherently required for the MPhil but may arise from a student's thesis project. If a student flags that fieldwork is to be conducted during the research project, they should:

- Watch the Fieldwork & Overseas Risk Assessment for Travellers video.
- Complete a Travel and Fieldwork Risk Assessment form and log details of their fieldwork trip with risk assessment form attached (and apply for travel insurance if required) on the Travel Insurance Registration System (TIRS).

3.3.6 MPhil thesis supervision and feedback

During the summer of their second year, students and supervisors should meet regularly to discuss progress on the thesis; an informal guideline is three meetings during the summer vacation. Supervisors should provide timely responses to material submitted for comment and, in particular, comment on final drafts in sufficient time for students to respond before final submission. These arrangements depend on supervisors' availability and on students submitting work in a timely manner. Students are responsible for agreeing dates for the submission of work with their supervisor.

3.3.7 Format and submission

The thesis must:

- Use 12-point font, and preferably a serif font such as Times New Roman;
- Give the length of the text in number of words;
- Present the main text in double spacing with quotations and footnotes in single spacing;
- Place footnotes, where present, at the bottom of each page;
- Have numbered pages;
- Use referencing that corresponds to one of the established bibliographic conventions: preferably APA style and not Vancouver;
- Be submitted in English;
- Be presented on a white background with a margin of 3 to 3.5 centimetres on the left and right sides of the page;
- Have no mention of the supervisor's name, acknowledgements or any other identifying remarks;
- Be identified by student number and not by the student's name.

The thesis should be of no more 30,000 words, including abstract, footnotes, and tables, but excluding references and appendices. (Appendices should not usually be longer than 3,000 words). The abstract should not exceed 200 words.

The thesis must be submitted as a PDF via Inspera 12pm/noon, Friday, week 6 TT. The submission must include an AI Declaration (Annexe B), confirming that the thesis is the student's own work except where otherwise indicated.

The following must also be submitted electronically to the Graduate Studies Officer:

- any syntax files used for quantitative data analysis, where applicable;
- in cases where the student has collected their own data, a file or zip archive containing the raw data, anonymised in accordance with the terms of the participants' informed consent, together with any associated material such as interview transcripts, experimental data or other collected materials.

The data and syntax files remain the intellectual property of the student. The Department will not use the submitted materials for any other purpose and will destroy both the syntax files and any own-data collection after the final examination results have been released.

3.3.8 Use of generative AI in MPhil thesis research

Generative AI tools may be used to support aspects of MPhil thesis research, subject to the University's guidance on the use of GenAI in research and the requirements for the MPhil thesis.

Critical academic judgement must remain your own. GenAI should not be used to replace the intellectual work involved in making substantive research decisions, critically evaluating literature or evidence, interpreting findings, or developing the argument and conclusions of the thesis. You remain responsible for the accuracy, integrity and originality of your research and submitted work.

The University defines a number of uses of GenAI in research as substantive use. These include uses such as analysing or interpreting data or texts, undertaking a literature review, identifying research gaps, formulating research aims or hypotheses, generating code or synthetic data, and some uses for transcription. Substantive use of GenAI should be discussed with your supervisor and must be declared in accordance with University requirements.

Where GenAI forms part of the research method, its use should be transparent and sufficiently documented to allow the research process to be understood and, where possible, reproduced.

Particular care must be taken when using GenAI with research data. Use involving personal, sensitive or confidential research data must comply with the University's requirements for research ethics, data protection and information security. Proposed use of GenAI to process primary research data should be considered as part of the ethical review of the research.

Additional information can be found in Annexe A with the AI Declaration for all assessment submissions in Annexe B. If you are unsure whether a proposed use of GenAI is appropriate for your thesis research, discuss it with your supervisor before using it.

3.4 Expectations of study and student workload

Students are responsible for managing their own academic progress and are expected to engage fully with all aspects of the MPhil, including scheduled teaching, independent study, preparation for classes and seminars, formative and summative work, and research for the MPhil thesis.

The MPhil is an intensive programme and a substantial proportion of students' study time is spent on independent work. In addition to attending scheduled lectures, seminars, classes and other required activities, students are expected to undertake the reading, preparation and formative work associated with their papers and to manage their time effectively across the different components of the course. Deadlines are arranged to allow time for feedback and to distribute workload across the year. Wherever possible, submission dates are scheduled so that they do not coincide with other assessments, such as examinations. Meeting deadlines will help students to manage their workload effectively and maintain steady progress through the course

Study continues outside the University's full terms. During the vacations, students may be expected to undertake reading and preparation, complete assessments and, at the appropriate stage of the course, develop and undertake their MPhil thesis research. Students should plan their work in consultation with their supervisor and take account of the deadlines and requirements set out elsewhere in this handbook.

3.4.1 Planning and managing workload

Students are strongly encouraged to plan ahead throughout the course. In particular, students should:

- note all key deadlines at the start of the year and check when work will be set and when it is due;
- avoid taking on commitments that conflict with periods of intensive study or assessment;
- review the work required, the resources needed and the assessment criteria well in advance of deadlines;
- speak to their supervisor or relevant Course Convenor if requirements or expectations are unclear;
- break larger tasks into smaller stages with interim milestones; start writing early, rather than waiting until all reading and thinking is complete;
- recognise when work is sufficiently developed, rather than continuing to revise indefinitely.

Unexpected circumstances may occasionally disrupt progress. If this happens, students should speak to their supervisor or Course Convenor as soon as possible. They may be able to help with re-prioritising work and, where appropriate, adjusting formative deadlines so that summative deadlines can still be met.

In exceptional circumstances however, it may be possible to request an extension to a summative deadline. This should be treated as a last resort. Extensions to summative works must be requested through the student's college. Neither the Department nor course convenor are able to grant extensions.

Students should also be aware that extensions may have knock-on effects, including:

- Delayed feedback
- Less time to complete later work
  Delayed release of marks, particularly for the thesis
- Delayed completion of the course and, in some cases, graduation

If an extension may be necessary, students should discuss the position with both their supervisor and their college as soon as possible.

Students who are concerned that their workload is unusually heavy, or who are experiencing difficulty keeping up with the requirements of the course, should raise this at an early stage with their supervisor and/or the Director of Taught Courses so that appropriate advice and support can be provided. Students may also seek advice and support from their college.

3.4.2 Paid work

Graduate students considering paid work alongside their studies should consult the University's Paid Work Guidelines for Oxford Graduate Students.

Students' first commitment must be to their Oxford degree work, which is demanding and intensive. Any student wishing to undertake paid employment, whether inside or outside the University, must first obtain the approval of their college and supervisor. The College or the Department may offer occasional jobs, some of which can be combined with study. The

normal limit for paid employment undertaken for the Department is six hours per week for taught course students. Students may be permitted to work beyond this limit during vacations, subject to the explicit approval of their supervisor. Departmental teaching assistantships and research assistantships are advertised as and when they become available.

Students holding a Tier 4 visa should note that Home Office rules restrict the number of hours they may work each week during term time. Paid and unpaid work within the University, for colleges, and for external organisations all count towards the permitted weekly limit.

Students with external funding will need approval from their funding body before accepting employment as college lecturers, Junior Research Fellows or other similar posts. In such cases both student and supervisor must act in accordance with the rules of the funding body. Any ESRC-funded students must consult the ESRC Studentship Officer at the Social Sciences Division to check whether the proposed employment contradicts the terms of their ESRC studentship.

4 Assessment

4.1 Assessment structure

Summative assessments are the components that contribute to the final grade and classification of the MPhil in Sociology and Demography. All summative work must be submitted online via Inspera. Online submission is a two-stage process: uploading your work does not complete the submission; you must also complete the submission step in Inspera. When submitting assessed work through Inspera, students are required to complete the University's submission declaration, which includes confirmation that they have complied with the Department's instructions on the use of AI in that assessment. The University may use software to screen submitted work for matches to published sources or other submitted work. Any matches identified may be considered as part of the University's procedures relating to plagiarism, collusion or unauthorised use of AI.

Full information is provided on the relevant page of the Oxford students website. The University provides several processes to support students whose assessments are affected by illness, other personal circumstances, or technical difficulties with an online exam or submission. Full guidance is also available on the Oxford students website.

4.2 Feedback on learning and assessment

Feedback is an important element of all programmes at the University of Oxford and may be provided informally or formally. Formative assessment does not contribute to the final degree outcome and is intended to support learning and development. Summative assessment contributes to the final degree result and is used to assess the extent to which students have met the published assessment criteria.

Formative assessment provides an important indication of how students are progressing towards the standards expected in summative assessment. Students are therefore strongly encouraged to engage fully with formative work and to pay close attention to the marks and feedback they receive.

Feedback on formative work, such as course essays or assignments, should identify areas of strength and areas for development and help students understand the standards expected of them. Students will receive written feedback on formative work for core papers. For optional papers, Course convenors will provide feedback on formative work undertaken during Hilary term.

Where appropriate, courses will include at least one piece of formative assessment designed to give students a meaningful indication of their current progress and how they are likely to perform in summative assessment. Formative assessment does not contribute to the final degree result.

Students should note that, unlike formative work, summative assessment is formally examined. Course convenors and other teaching staff cannot provide feedback on or assistance with work being prepared for summative assessment, except where this is explicitly permitted as part of the assessment arrangements.

4.3 Examination Regulations

The MPhil Sociology and Demography Examination Regulations may be found here: Examination Regulations.

Examination conventions are the formal record of the specific assessment standards for the course or courses to which they apply. They set out how your examined work will be marked and how the resulting marks will be used to arrive at a final result and classification of your award. They include information on: marking scales, marking and classification criteria, scaling of marks, progression, resits, use of viva voce examinations, penalties for late submission, and penalties for over-length work.

4.4 Good academic practice and avoiding plagiarism

The most relevant rules are summarised below. In exceptional circumstances, it may be possible to seek dispensation from these rules. Students should consult the Examination Regulations for the full text and seek further advice from their supervisor.

4.4.1 What is plagiarism?

The University defines plagiarism as follows:

"*Presenting work or ideas from another source as your own, with or without consent of the original author, by incorporating it into your work without full acknowledgement. All published and unpublished material, whether in manuscript, printed or electronic form, is covered under this definition, as is the use of material generated wholly or in part through use of artificial intelligence (save when use of AI for assessment has received prior authorisation e.g. as a reasonable adjustment for a student's disability). Plagiarism can also include re-using your own work without citation. Under the regulations for examinations, intentional or reckless plagiarism is a disciplinary offence*."

As the University definition above makes clear, inappropriate use of generative AI may constitute plagiarism. Students must not present material generated wholly or in part by AI as their own work, except where such use is explicitly permitted. Students are responsible for ensuring that any use of generative AI complies with University and Departmental requirements and with the specific requirements of the assessment concerned.

Inappropriate or unauthorised use of generative AI in assessed work may constitute cheating and plagiarism. The rules governing the use of GenAI in summative assessment are explained in the section 4.5 Use of generative AI in summative assessment. You must also follow the specific AI instructions provided for each assessment.

The University-approved submission system, Inspera, is integrated with Turnitin. Turnitin may therefore be used to detect instances of poor academic practice and/or plagiarism in coursework submissions and online examination scripts. Where assessment includes open-book examinations, students will be required to sign up to the University's honour code.

Students may be found guilty of plagiarism if they:

- present or pass off another person's work as their own;
- import into their own work 'more than a single phrase from another person's work without the use of quotation marks and identification of the source';
- make 'extensive use of another person's work, either by summarising or paraphrasing it merely by changing a few words or altering the order of the presentation, without acknowledgement';
- use 'the ideas of another person without acknowledgement of the source' or 'submit or present work as their own' which is substantially the ideas or intellectual data of another;
- make 'a deliberate attempt at passing off the ideas or writings of another person as their own'; or
  take 'the words, ideas and labour of other people and give the impression that they are their own.'

4.4.2 Online course and associated resources

All students are required to complete the online Avoiding Plagiarism course and to email a copy of the certificate of completion to the Graduate Studies Officer by no later than the end of Week 2 of Michaelmas term.

Students should carefully read the Oxford Students website section regarding avoiding plagiarism, as well as refer to relevant study skills**.**

In addition, the resources below (available in various libraries across Oxford) will help identify and avoid plagiarism:

- Neville, Colin (2007) *The complete guide to referencing and avoiding plagiarism* Maidenhead; New York: Open University Press [SOLO link]

4.4.3 Raising concerns around plagiarism

Cases of plagiarism are taken extremely seriously and where examiners suspect that this has occurred, they bring the matter to the attention of the Proctors.

If a marker, or a Turnitin report generated during examination procedures, raises concerns about the proper attribution of a passage or piece of submitted work, the matter will be reported to the Chair of Examiners. The Chair will compile and retain any evidence and decide whether the case is one which may be dealt with by the Board (poor academic practice) or whether it is one that requires reference to the Proctors for investigation and possible disciplinary action.

Penalties for poor academic practice in submitted work and open-book online examinations are outlined in the MPhil Sociology and Demography Examination Conventions. Students should refer to the University Student Handbook for information about the Proctors, Disciplinary Procedures and outcomes in relation to plagiarism.

4.4.4 Third-party proofreaders

Students have authorial responsibility for the written work they produce. Proof-reading represents the final stage of producing a piece of academic writing. Students are strongly encouraged to proof-read their own work, as this is an essential skill in the academic writing process. However, for longer pieces of work it is considered acceptable for students to seek the help of a third party for proof-reading. Such third parties can be professional proofreaders, fellow students, friends, or family members. This policy does not apply to the supervisory relationship, nor in the case where proof-reading assistance is approved as a reasonable adjustment for disability.

The use of third-party proofreaders is not permitted for work where the *word limit is fewer than 10,000 words*. The guidance below applies to all assessed written work where the *word limit is 10,000 words or greater*.

What a proofreader may and may not do

Within the context of students' written work, to proofread is to check for, identify and suggest corrections for errors in text. In no cases should a proofreader make material changes to a student's writing (that is, check or amend ideas, arguments or structure), since to do so is to compromise the authorship of the work.

A proofreader may:

- Identify typographical, spelling and punctuation errors;
- Identify formatting and layout errors and inconsistencies (e.g. page numbers, font size, line spacing, headers and footers);
- Identify grammatical and syntactical errors and anomalies or ambiguities in phrasing;
- Identify minor formatting errors in referencing (for consistency and order);
- Identify errors in the labelling of diagrams, charts or figures;
- Identify lexical repetition or omissions.

A proofreader may not:

- Add to content in any way;
- Check or correct facts, data calculations, formulae or equations;
- Rewrite content where meaning is ambiguous;
- Alter argument or logic where faulty;
- Re-arrange or re-order paragraphs to enhance structure or argument;
- Implement or significantly alter a referencing system;
- Re-label diagrams, charts or figures;
- Reduce content to comply with a specified word limit;
- Translate any part of the work into English.

Authorial responsibility

Students have overall authorial responsibility for their work and should choose whether they wish to accept the proofreader's advice. A third-party proofreader should mark up the student's work with suggested changes which the student may then choose to accept or reject.

Failure to adhere to these guidelines could constitute a breach of academic integrity and contravene the Regulations for Examinations. It is therefore the student's responsibility to provide the proofreader with a copy of this policy statement.

4.5 Use of generative AI in summative assessment

The permitted use of generative AI may vary between assessments. For each summative assessment, you will be given written instructions explaining whether and how GenAI may be used. You must follow the instructions provided for the specific assessment you are completing. Further guidance is provided in Annexe A, which sets out the approved levels of AI use. The declaration that must be completed and signed for each assignment is provided in Annexe B. Students are responsible for familiarising themselves with both documents and ensuring that they comply with the requirements set out in them.

Permission to use GenAI for one assessment, or for formative work, does not mean that the same use is permitted for another assessment. Unless a particular use of GenAI is explicitly permitted in the assessment instructions, you should treat that use as unauthorised.

Where GenAI use is permitted, you must use it only in the ways specified in the assessment instructions and follow any requirements for acknowledging or declaring that use.

An AI declaration (Annexe B) must accompany each summative assessment. You must complete the Department's AI declaration form (Annexe B), stating whether you have used GenAI and, where applicable, providing the required information about how it was used. The completed declaration must be submitted as a separate Word document alongside your assessed work in Inspera.

You remain fully responsible for the accuracy, originality and quality of the work you submit. Unauthorised use of GenAI in assessed work constitutes cheating and may constitute plagiarism. Suspected cases will be considered under the University's academic disciplinary procedures.

4.6 Entering for University Examinations

Completion of University registration within the student registration window is required to complete examination entry. Registration status can be checked by logging in to Student Self-Service. A full guide to the examination process is available here, and students are strongly encouraged to read it carefully.

4.6.1 Problems completing assessment

There are a number of University processes in place to help if students find that illness or other personal circumstances are affecting assessments or if students experience technical difficulties with an online exam or submission. Full information is available on the Oxford Students website (www.ox.ac.uk/students/academic/exams/problems-completing-your-assessment).

4.6.1.1 Applying for exam adjustments

Students should apply for exam adjustments after Matriculation and no later than Friday of Week 4 of the term before the exam is due to take place. It is the responsibility of the student to request exam adjustments and provide any supporting evidence required. Requests may, for urgent reasons, be considered nearer to the date of the exam. Information about exam adjustments and instructions for the application process can be found on the Oxford Students Website.

4.6.1.2 Mitigating circumstances notices to examiners (MCEs)

If illness or other urgent and unavoidable circumstances have seriously affected a student's performance in an assessment, they may be able to submit a Mitigating Circumstances Notice to Examiners (MCE). Students should contact their college as soon as possible for advice and assistance with the process. Further guidance is available on the Oxford Students website.

The MCE process covers circumstances affecting performance in assessment. Issues relating to late submission, non-attendance at examinations, incorrect submissions or examination responses, and academic misconduct are dealt with under separate University procedures. Long-term conditions and disabilities should also normally be addressed through the University's processes for reasonable adjustments, although an MCE may be appropriate in certain circumstances, for example where there has been a significant exacerbation of a condition during the assessment period or where agreed adjustments were insufficient.

A Mitigating Circumstances Panel will consider the notice and record the circumstances raised, the assessment or assessments affected, the evidence considered, and its assessment of the impact on the student's performance, together with its reasoning.

The Board of Examiners will then consider whether any action should be taken in relation to the student's results, taking into account the Panel's consideration of the MCE alongside the student's submitted work and marks. The actions available to the Board are governed by the University's Examination and Assessment Framework and may include, where appropriate, taking the circumstances into account when finalising marks or the overall outcome, disregarding a paper, removing a cap on a resit mark, or recommending an exceptional resit. Not all actions are available in every case or at every stage of the examination process.

4.7 Examination and assessment dates

Year 1

Assessment / event	Submission / location	Deadline / timing
Statistical Methods assignment	Inspera	12pm/noon, Monday, Week 10, MT
Statistical Methods examination	Examination Schools	Week 0, HT
Demographic Analysis essay	Inspera	12pm/noon, Friday, Week 0, HT
Demographic Analysis assignment	Inspera	12pm/noon, Friday, week 8, HT
Life Course Research assignment	Inspera	12pm/noon, Friday, Week 10, HT
Research Design examination	Inspera	Week 9, HT
Life Course Research examination	Examination Schools	Week 0, TT
Sociological Analysis	Inspera/Examination Schools	The exams normally take place during Week 8 and/or 9, TT
Option Paper submissions	Inspera	
Option Paper examinations	Inspera/Examination Schools	The exams normally take place during Week 8 and/or 9, TT

Year 2

Assessment / event	Submission / location	Deadline / timing
MPhil thesis workshop	Seminar Room	2pm, Wednesday, Week 3, MT
Replication Project	Inspera	12pm/noon, Monday, Week 5, HT
MPhil thesis	Inspera	12pm/noon, Friday, Week 6, TT
Option Papers submissions	Inspera	See option on canvas
Option Paper examinations	Inspera/Examination Schools	The exams normally take place during Week 8 and/or 9, TT

4.8 Sitting your in-person examination

All MPhil Sociology and Demography examinations are held in-person in the University of Oxford Examination Schools. All examinations, with the exception of the Statistical Methods examination, are held in a typed format using specialist laptops with access to Inspera, which will be provided on the day to all students.

Practical information and support for sitting in-person exams is available on the Oxford students website.

Students must comply with the University's Honour Code and should read this in advance of any online examination.

4.9 Sitting your online examination

Online exams are taken in Inspera. Students must familiarise yourself with the system prior to taking an online exam. There are a wide range of resources to help on the Oxford Students website.

Online exams require adherence to the University's Honour Code and students should read this in advance of any online exams.

4.10 Examination criteria and marking scale

MPhil Sociology and Demography students are examined on the work they produce. This includes examination scripts, coursework and a thesis. The main criteria applied by the examiners in judging this material are analytical quality, ability to apply the theoretical and methodological approaches that have been taught, critical awareness of alternative approaches and sources of data, and knowledge of the substantive literature.

Students should refer to the MPhil Sociology and Demography Examination Conventions and where applicable, the Examination Regulations, for further information regarding the requirements, examination and penalisation of marks for the course.

The Examination Conventions for the course will be published on the Department of Sociology Student Information Canvas Page at the beginning of the first term.

Examination conventions are the formal record of the specific assessment standards for the course or courses to which they apply. They set out how examined work will be marked and how the resulting marks will be used to arrive at a result and classification of the award. They include information on marking scales, marking and classification criteria, scaling of marks, resits, penalties for late submission, and penalties for over-length work.

Coursework		
80-100	Distinction	**Superb work:** Work is of exceptional quality based on a comprehensive knowledge of the chosen topic, a sustained high level of critical analysis combined with a genuine originality of approach. Where relevant, the research design is rigorous and fully justified, the analysis of evidence or data is sophisticated and tightly integrated with the theoretical argument, and the work makes a clear contribution to sociological debate. The work is tightly argued, meticulously organised, extremely well documented and approaches publishable standard.
75-79	Distinction	**Excellent work:** Work displays many of the qualities for work in the 80+ range but falls short on one of the criteria listed above. Where relevant the research design and analysis are of a consistently high standard, and the work is clearly situated within sociological debates.
70-74	Distinction	**Fine work:** Work shows evidence of extensive relevant reading, a significant grasp of current major issues in the field and offers an original approach to the chosen topic. Where relevant, the research design is appropriate and well justified, and the analysis of evidence or data is rigorous and clearly linked to the research question. This knowledge is reviewed critically and with sufficient insight to challenge received ideas. The arguments are clearly and persuasively put.
65-69	Merit	**Strong pass:** Work shows consistency and fluency in discussing and evaluating evidence and theories from a wide range of sources. Work demonstrates the ability to relate this reading to their chosen topic and will clearly have understood and assimilated the relevant literature. The arguments are clear and well structured. The examples are pertinent and go well beyond standard or predictable cases. Where relevant, the research design is sound and its limitations are acknowledged; the analysis is competent and the conclusions follow from the evidence, although the analysis may not fully exploit the evidence or data collected. A mark at this level or above on a Masters thesis indicates evidence of sufficient competence to progress to doctoral research.

55-64	Pass	**Good pass:** Work shows clear evidence of knowledge and understanding but ideas, critical comments or methodology are underdeveloped or oversimplified. Where appropriate, the research design may have relatively minor limitations that are not fully acknowledged, and the analysis may be largely descriptive or may not do justice to the quality of the evidence or data collected. Work shows significant room for improvement in the clarity and structure of the argument and although there is appropriate reference to relevant reading, it is not sufficiently extensive. Minor irrelevancies may be present.
50-54	Pass	**Pass:** Work exhibits a sound, if limited, knowledge of the chosen topic and an adequate understanding of the relevant literature, although weaknesses of understanding and thoroughness remain. Arguments are coherently, if not always tightly, structured, and some important information and references may be lacking. To achieve a pass, the work must be free of major flaws in research design, be written in an appropriate sociological and academic style, and support its claims with evidence from the academic literature or data rather than relying on opinion. Work that substantially fails to address the question, or in which a considerable proportion of the content is irrelevant, should not receive a pass mark. Literature reviews of the kind that can be produced with generative-AI tools with superficial prompting will not be given any credit and will not be sufficient on their own to gain a pass mark. Work with sufficient merit in other areas may still achieve a pass mark even if the literature review is of a standard that might have been achieved by a GenAI tool.
45-49	Fail	**Marginal fail:** Work is seriously flawed, displaying a lack of awareness of essential texts and incoherent arguments. The research involved is poorly organised and inadequately discussed, offering a fundamentally inadequate response to the chosen topic or a seriously misleading conclusion. Large parts of the work may be irrelevant. Work in this range may also contain a major flaw in research design that undermines the validity of its conclusions, be written in a non-academic, polemic or journalistic style that does not engage with sociological concepts, or rely on opinion rather than evidence from the

		academic literature or data. Marks in this range are for work that comes close to meeting the pass criteria; work that falls clearly short of them should be marked below 45. Assessors will carefully consider whether or not to give a mark sufficiently high to permit the possibility that failure on one component may be compensated for by success on other components of the degree. Only after very careful consideration will assessors give marks that automatically imply failure for the whole degree because the work is so poor on just one component.
0-44	Fail	**Outright fail:** Inadequate coverage or analysis (for example, little or no engagement with the relevant sociological literature, or fundamental flaws in design or analysis that leave the conclusions unsupported), or work not submitted. Fluent or well-presented writing does not compensate for the absence of substantive argument, analysis or evidence. Marks at this level for a whole component mean failure for the whole degree and so represent seriously poor levels of competence.

Final Exams		
80-100	Distinction	**Superb work:** Answer to exam question is of exceptional quality based on a comprehensive knowledge of the chosen topic, a sustained high level of critical analysis and thorough evaluation of the literature, combined with a genuine originality of approach. The work is tightly argued and meticulously organized. It addresses the question set directly and precisely, and deploys sociological theory and empirical evidence with authority.
75-79	Distinction	**Excellent work:** Answer to exam question displays many of the qualities for work in the 80+ range but falls short on one of the criteria listed above. The answer addresses the question directly and is clearly grounded in sociological literature and evidence.
70-74	Distinction	**Fine work:** Answer to exam question shows evidence of extensive relevant reading, a significant grasp of current major issues in the field and offers an original approach to the chosen question. Claims are consistently supported

		by evidence from the academic literature or data. This knowledge is reviewed critically and with sufficient insight to challenge received ideas. The arguments are clearly and persuasively put.
65-69	Merit	**Strong pass:** Answer to exam question shows consistency and fluency in discussing and evaluating evidence and theories from various sources. Answer demonstrates the ability to relate this reading to their chosen topic. The arguments are clear and well structured. The examples are pertinent and go beyond standard or predictable cases. The answer engages with the specific question set rather than the topic in general, although the evaluation of evidence may not be fully developed.
55-64	Pass	**Good pass:** Answer to exam question shows clear evidence of knowledge and understanding but ideas and critical assessment are underdeveloped or oversimplified. The answer may address the general topic rather than the specific question set, or rely on description rather than analysis. Answer shows significant room for improvement in the clarity and structure of the argument and although there is some reference to relevant reading, it is not sufficiently extensive. Minor irrelevancies may be present.
50-54	Pass	**Pass:** Answer to exam question exhibits a sound, if limited, knowledge of the chosen topic and an adequate understanding of the relevant literature, although weaknesses of understanding and thoroughness remain. Arguments are coherently, if not always tightly, structured, and some important information and references may be lacking. To achieve a pass, the answer must be free of major flaws in the logic or structure of its argument, be written in an appropriate sociological and academic style, and support its claims with evidence from the academic literature or data rather than relying on personal opinion. Answers that substantially fail to address the question, or in which a considerable proportion of the content is irrelevant, should not receive a pass mark. Answers that rely heavily on recall of descriptive literature reviews of the kind that can be produced with generative-AI tools with superficial prompting will not be given little credit. Demonstration of the main findings from set readings will not be sufficient on its own to gain a pass mark. Work with sufficient merit in analysis, evaluation and other

		areas may still achieve a pass mark even if much of the answer reads like a literature review of a standard that might have been achieved by an LLM.
45-49	Fail	**Marginal fail:** Answer to exam question is seriously flawed, displaying a lack of awareness of essential texts and incoherent arguments. The discussion involved is poorly organized and offers a fundamentally inadequate response to the chosen question. Large parts of answer may be irrelevant. The answer may also rely on opinion rather than evidence from the academic literature or data, or be written in a non-academic style that does not engage with sociological concepts. Marks in this range are for answers that come close to meeting the pass criteria; answers that fall clearly short of them should be marked below 45. Assessors will carefully consider whether or not to give a mark sufficiently high to permit the possibility that failure on one component may be compensated for by success on other components of the degree. Only after very careful consideration will assessors give marks that automatically imply failure for the whole degree because the work is so poor on just one component.
0-44	Fail	**Outright fail:** Inadequate coverage and/or analysis (for example, little or no engagement with the relevant sociological literature, or claims that are unsupported by evidence), or no answer(s) at all. Fluent or well-presented writing does not compensate for the absence of substantive argument, analysis or evidence. Marks at this level for a whole component mean failure for the whole degree and so represent seriously poor levels of competence.

a. Thesis

Thesis		
80-100	Distinction	**Superb work:** Work is of exceptional quality based on a comprehensive knowledge of the chosen topic, a sustained high level of critical analysis combined with a genuine originality of approach. Where relevant, the research design is rigorous and fully justified, the analysis of evidence or data is sophisticated and tightly integrated

		with the theoretical argument, and the work makes a clear contribution to sociological debate. The work is tightly argued, meticulously organised, extremely well documented and approaches publishable standard.
75-79	Distinction	**Excellent work:** Work displays many of the qualities for work in the 80+ range but falls short on one of the criteria listed above. Where relevant the research design and analysis are of a consistently high standard, and the work is clearly situated within sociological debates.
70-74	Distinction	**Fine work:** Work shows evidence of extensive relevant reading, a significant grasp of current major issues in the field and offers an original approach to the chosen topic. Where relevant, the research design is appropriate and well justified, and the analysis of evidence or data is rigorous and clearly linked to the research question. This knowledge is reviewed critically and with sufficient insight to challenge received ideas. The arguments are clearly and persuasively put.
65-69	Merit	**Strong pass:** Work shows consistency and fluency in discussing and evaluating evidence and theories from a wide range of sources. Work demonstrates the ability to relate this reading to their chosen topic and will clearly have understood and assimilated the relevant literature. The arguments are clear and well structured. The examples are pertinent and go well beyond standard or predictable cases. Where relevant, the research design is sound and its limitations are acknowledged; the analysis is competent and the conclusions follow from the evidence, although the analysis may not fully exploit the evidence or data collected. A mark at this level or above on a Masters thesis indicates evidence of sufficient competence to progress to doctoral research.
55-64	Pass	**Good pass:** Work shows clear evidence of knowledge and understanding but ideas, critical comments or methodology are underdeveloped or oversimplified. Where appropriate, the research design may have relatively minor limitations that are not fully acknowledged, and the analysis may be largely descriptive or may not do justice to the quality of the evidence or data collected. Work shows significant room for improvement

		in the clarity and structure of the argument and although there is appropriate reference to relevant reading, it is not sufficiently extensive. Minor irrelevancies may be present.
50-54	Pass	**Pass:** Work exhibits a sound, if limited, knowledge of the chosen topic and an adequate understanding of the relevant literature, although weaknesses of understanding and thoroughness remain. Arguments are coherently, if not always tightly, structured, and some important information and references may be lacking. To achieve a pass, the work must be free of major flaws in research design, be written in an appropriate sociological and academic style, and support its claims with evidence from the academic literature or data rather than relying on opinion. Work that substantially fails to address the question, or in which a considerable proportion of the content is irrelevant, should not receive a pass mark. Literature reviews of the kind that can be produced with generative-AI tools with superficial prompting will not be given any credit and will not be sufficient on their own to gain a pass mark. Work with sufficient merit in other areas may still achieve a pass mark even if the literature review is of a standard that might have been achieved by a GenAI tool.
45-49	Fail	**Marginal fail:** Work is seriously flawed, displaying a lack of awareness of essential texts and incoherent arguments. The research involved is poorly organised and inadequately discussed, offering a fundamentally inadequate response to the chosen topic or a seriously misleading conclusion. Large parts of the work may be irrelevant. Work in this range may also contain a major flaw in research design that undermines the validity of its conclusions, be written in a non-academic, polemic or journalistic style that does not engage with sociological concepts, or rely on opinion rather than evidence from the academic literature or data. Marks in this range are for work that comes close to meeting the pass criteria; work that falls clearly short of them should be marked below 45. Assessors will carefully consider whether or not to give a mark sufficiently high to permit the possibility that failure on one component may be compensated for by success on other components of the degree. Only after very careful consideration will assessors give marks that

		automatically imply failure for the whole degree because the work is so poor on just one component.
0-44	Fail	**Outright fail:** Inadequate coverage or analysis (for example, little or no engagement with the relevant sociological literature, or fundamental flaws in design or analysis that leave the conclusions unsupported), or work not submitted. Fluent or well-presented writing does not compensate for the absence of substantive argument, analysis or evidence. Marks at this level for a whole component mean failure for the whole degree and so represent seriously poor levels of competence.

4.11 MPhil classifications

The Department of Sociology operates a rigorous assessment process which incorporates blind marking according to a system approved by the supervisory body. Moderation applies to all assessments for papers; the thesis is marked independently by two examiners. Students should consult the Examination Conventions for further information.

A candidate must pass all papers sat as part of the MPhil qualifying test before being allowed to proceed to the second year of the MPhil. Candidates who fail only one out of the five papers may, by permission of the Graduate Studies Committee, proceed to the second year of the course and re-sit the failed paper at the same time as the final examination. No candidate will be permitted to re-sit any of the compulsory papers more than once.

The final outcomes of the MPhil Sociology and Demography examination are outlined below:

Distinction	The Board of Examiners may award a distinction for excellence in the whole examination. To obtain a distinction, Students should obtain EITHER an overall average mark of 70 or above OR an overall average mark of 68 and above, with two assessed components at 70 or above. Students who have initially failed any element of the examination will not normally be eligible for the award of Distinction unless otherwise decided by the Board of Examiners.
Merit	The Board of Examiners may award a merit for strong work in the whole examination. To obtain a merit, Students should obtain an overall average mark of 65 or above. Students who have initially failed any element of the examination will not normally be eligible for the award of Merit unless otherwise decided by the Board of Examiners.

Pass	To pass the degree of MPhil, students must achieve 50 or more in all five components. If a student fails just one component of the MPhil and it is a marginal fail (i.e. not less than 48) they can still be awarded a degree without merit or distinction, unless otherwise decided by the Board of Examiners, if they achieve at least one mark of 64 or above in another component.
Fail	Students who receive a fail mark (0-49) in any component of the MPhil Examination are deemed to have failed the degree of MPhil in Sociology and Demography. A mark of 64 or above in one component may compensate for a fail mark of 48-49 on another component. Students should consult the Examination Conventions and the '*Failing the MPhil*' section of this handbook for information about resits/resubmissions.

4.12 Release of examination marks

All marks agreed at the full Examination Board in July will be released to MPhil students in the days after; this will typically be every assessment mark except for the thesis, which will be released following the final Examination Board in September. There will be no exceptions to this.

4.13 External examiner and Examiners' reports

The External Examiner for the MPhil in Sociology and Demography for the 2026-27 academic year is Dr Matteo Tiratelli (University College London). The internal examiners are stated within the Examination Conventions for the course.

Students are strictly prohibited from contacting the External Examiner directly. If students are unhappy with an aspect of their assessment, they may make a complaint or appeal (see the section titled Complaints and Academic Appeals).

The internal examiner's report for the previous academic year will be published on Canvas once approved.

4.14 Prizes

Two prizes are awarded for outstanding performance on the MPhil in Sociology and Demography: the A.H. Halsey Prize for Best Thesis, awarded for the strongest MPhil thesis, and the Prize for Best Overall Performance, recognising exceptional performance across the course. Prize winners are determined following the final examination process and are normally announced after completion of the MPhil.

4.15 Failing the MPhil

Candidates should refer to the Examination Conventions for the course for information on re-sits, resubmissions and implications of the failure of one or more components of the MPhil.

A candidate who has previously failed an element of the MPhil without extenuating circumstances cannot be awarded more than a pass degree unless otherwise decided by the Board of Examiners.

Where a component of the MPhil is failed, that component may normally be retaken or resubmitted on one further occasion, normally with the next cohort the following academic year, unless otherwise specified by the Board of Examiners. Any resubmission should normally be a new submission, except in the case of the thesis, unless otherwise specified by the Board of Examiners, which may be reworked and resubmitted following academic failure.

Students may retake or resubmit only those elements of a component that received a fail mark. Where a component includes more than one part, only the failed parts may be resubmitted or retaken. Parts that have already passed may not be resubmitted or retaken. Marks for any elements that are not retaken or resubmitted will not change.

Resits following non-attendance at an examination or non-submission of written work will be capped at the pass mark (50). Resits following academic failure will be marked on the merits of the work submitted.

If a student fails only one component of the MPhil and the failure is marginal, that is, not lower than 48, the degree may still be awarded without merit or distinction, unless otherwise decided by the Board of Examiners, provided that at least one other component has been awarded a mark of 64 or above.

Any resubmitted written work, including the thesis, will be examined afresh. Although substantial revision is not required, Students should note that a fail mark is not given lightly, and minor editing is unlikely to turn even a marginal fail into a pass.

Students who wish to retake an examination or resubmit an assessed component must re-enter and pay the relevant fee. Students should contact their college for assistance with this process, but it remains the student's responsibility to arrange re-entry and any resubmissions.

Where a thesis fails to achieve a pass mark, the Department may offer two supervisory sessions before resubmission: one at the start of the academic year and one when the student has a complete draft of the revised thesis. Where a component assessed by unseen examination is retaken, the Department may offer a single supervisory session to review the student's understanding of the subject and advise on further study and revision. Where coursework is retaken, the student may be able to discuss an appropriate course of action with the relevant Course convenor. Additional support may be available where failure or non-completion was due to illness or other circumstances beyond the student's control.

5 Skills and learning development

5.1 Academic progress

5.1.1 MPhil supervision

Every MPhil student is assigned a supervisor to guide them through their course of study. The assignment of supervisors will take place at the end of week 6 of Michaelmas term, after students have attended two workshops and submitted a proposal to the Graduate Studies office. In Michaelmas term, it is expected that students and supervisors will meet once, probably in week 7 or 8 of term.

The Department recommends that each graduate student has seven to 11 meetings with their thesis supervisor over the course of year. For part-time students, these meetings should be distributed across the two years of study.

The supervisor will report on the student's progress to the Taught Course Director and will also provide feedback directly to the student. The Graduate Studies Committee will always seek the advice of the supervisor before recommending any change in status, transfer between courses, or other similar action. Student are expected to keep in regular contact with their supervisor and to keep them informed of their progress.

The supervisor will provide feedback on the proposed thesis topic, suggest alternative approaches, and comment on the research question, including any refinements or modifications that may be needed. In some cases, the supervisor may propose the research topic, or play a significant role in the formulation of the research question.

Students and Supervisors are required to submit a termly progress report through Graduate Supervision Reporting.

5.1.1.1 Graduate Supervision Reporting (GSR)

GSR is used by supervisors each term to review, monitor and comment on their student's academic progress and performance and to assess skills and training needs. Students are given the opportunity to contribute to their termly supervision reports by reviewing and commenting on their own academic progress. All students are required to submit a GSR report each term.

Students will receive a report on their termly supervision from their Supervisor. Completion of supervision reports is an important means by which the Department, Division and Colleges monitor student progress.

The supervision reporting process is controlled by a structured timetable with automatic notifications and reminders. Once reports are submitted, they are immediately available to the student, supervisor and Director of Graduate Studies for review. Additionally, subject administrators, college advisors, college administrators, and scholarship and funding administrators can view reports.

Graduate students will also all have a College adviser. The role of the College adviser is to provide pastoral and general academic advice. They can be particularly helpful if the student has any academic or other difficulties that they do not feel able to discuss with their university supervisor.

5.1.1.2 Change of Supervisor

In some cases, it may be appropriate to change supervisor, for example if the direction of the student's work changes. The GSC and university supervisors recognise that there may occasionally be incompatibilities of temperament or approach between Supervisor and student. Because of the importance Oxford attaches to the Supervisor–student relationship, students are encouraged to discuss any concerns in confidence with the Taught Course Director. Alternatively, they may seek advice and support from their College Adviser or College Tutor for Graduates. Any change of Supervisor requires the approval of the Graduate Studies Committee.

5.1.1.3 Code of Practice for supervisors of Taught Course students

Supervisors responsible for the oversight of master's students on taught courses are expected to:

- Meet with students (once in MT, thereafter twice or more per term)
- Discuss progress, feed-back comments to Course convenors and the Director of Taught Courses
- Assist in choice of options papers
- Help in the development of thesis topic
- Write termly reports on the student on GSR

In relation to master's theses, supervisors are also expected to:

- Frequent meetings with students to discuss progress of thesis (an informal guideline is three meetings during summer vacation)
- Timely responses to materials submitted for comment
- Comment on final drafts in good time for students to respond before final submission
- Ask to see transcripts of interviews, or syntax files in data analysis to check that the thesis is indeed the student's own work

These expectations depend in part on the supervisor's availability in Oxford during the summer vacation and on the student's timely submission of drafts. Supervisors should make reasonable efforts to remain available during the summer, and students are responsible for arranging dates for submission of work. It would also be helpful if supervisors warned students in advance of any extended period of unavailability during the month before the thesis submission date.

5.2 Language learning and upskilling

The University of Oxford Language Centre provides a wide range of general and specialised courses in foreign languages and Academic English.

5.3 Opportunities to engage in the Department's research community

5.3.1 Departmental seminars

Departmental seminars are held during term time throughout the year at 12.45pm on Mondays. Further details are available on the Department's Events page and in weekly newsletters. Attendance is compulsory for all students enrolled on taught courses, including the MSc Sociology and the MPhil Sociology and Demography. Students are also strongly encouraged to attend the Nuffield College Sociology Seminars, details of which are available on the Nuffield College Events and Seminars page.

5.4 Employability and career information and advice

Students are encouraged to make use of the University's careers and employability support during their studies. The Oxford University Careers Service provides careers advice and a range of resources and opportunities, including one-to-one advice, careers events, support with applications and interviews, skills development, internships and access to vacancies through CareerConnect.

Further information about opportunities to develop skills and gain experience alongside study is available through the Oxford Students: Work, skills and experience pages.

6 Student representation, evaluation and feedback

6.1 Department representation

6.1.1 Graduate Joint Consultative Committee (GJCC)

The GJCC exists to provide a forum for graduate students to put forward suggestions, comments and grievances about the courses and facilities provided by the Department. It will usually meet once per term. Membership includes student representatives from each degree programme, the Director of Graduate Studies, the Taught Course Director and the Graduate Studies Officer. The Head of Department and Head of Administration and Finance may also attend, along with other departmental administrative staff.

All students are encouraged to submit items for discussion via their student representatives. Students are encouraged to put themselves forward for this Committee and if there are more volunteers than places, an election will be held.

6.1.2 Graduate Studies Committee (GSC)

The Graduate Studies Committee (GSC) oversees graduate teaching and academic matters within the Department. Its responsibilities include oversight of graduate programmes and teaching, the appointment of supervisors, consideration of relevant student applications and proposed changes to graduate courses and regulations.

The Committee is chaired by the Director of Graduate Studies and includes academic and administrative members of the Department. Student representatives also attend the unreserved business of the Committee, providing a direct link between the graduate student body and the Department's formal decision-making structures.

The GSC normally meets twice each term, in Weeks 2 and 7. Where an MSc student needs an application or other matter to be considered by the Committee, the relevant documentation should normally be submitted to the Graduate Studies Officer by Wednesday of Week 1 or Wednesday of Week 6, as appropriate. While some matters may be dealt with under the Chair’s action during the vacations, this is not the norm and will not always be appropriate. Enquiries about the work of the Graduate Studies Committee should be made to the Graduate Studies Officer.

The members of the GSC for 2026-27 are:

- Professor Ridhi Kashyap, Director of Graduate Studies (Chair)
- Dr Lindsay Richards, Director of Taught Courses
- *Academic representative, TBC*
- Laura O’Mahony, Head of Administration and Finance
- Adrian Wilson, Graduate Studies Officer (Secretary)
- Student representative or representatives (who attend only the unreserved business)

The Committee will:

- Consider applications for admission,
- Appoint a supervisor for each student,
- Consider applications from students during their programme (e.g. change of course; Transfer of Status; Confirmation of Status; Extensions of time etc.)
- Review the programme of teaching and consider changes in regulations etc.

6.2 Divisional and University representation

Student representatives sitting on the Divisional Board are selected through a process organised by the Oxford University Student Union (Oxford SU). Details can be found on the Oxford SU website along with information about student representation at the University level.

6.3 Opportunities to provide evaluation and feedback

Students will be asked to provide feedback on modules on a termly basis via short course evaluation questionnaires. Information from these questionnaires will be used to improve the modules in following years.

More widely at the University level, students on full-time and part-time matriculated courses will be surveyed once per year on all aspects of their course (learning, living, pastoral support, college) through the Student Barometer. Previous results can be viewed by students, staff and the general public at: www.ox.ac.uk/students/life/student-surveys.

Final year undergraduate students are surveyed instead through the National Student Survey. Results from previous NSS can be found at discoveruni.gov.uk/

7 Student life and support

7.1 Who to contact for help

Students experiencing academic, administrative or personal difficulties have several sources of support available to them through the Department, their college and the wider University.

For academic matters, students should normally speak to their supervisor in the first instance. Questions relating to a particular paper or class should normally be raised with the relevant Course convenor. The Graduate Studies Officer can advise on administrative matters and University processes and, where appropriate, students may also seek advice from the Taught Course Director or Director of Graduate Studies.

Colleges provide both academic and pastoral support. Students may seek advice from their College Adviser, Tutor for Graduates, Senior Tutor or other appropriate college contact. Each college has its own arrangements, and students should consult their college handbook or website for details.

Students who are ill or otherwise unable to attend scheduled teaching should notify the Course convenor/Graduate Studies Officer/supervisor as appropriate. Where illness or other circumstances are affecting a student's ability to study or complete assessments, students should seek advice promptly from their college and the Department. Information about University processes relating to problems completing assessment is provided in Section 4.5.1 of this handbook.

Students may also raise matters through the elected graduate student representatives in the Department. General concerns affecting the student body can be raised through the Graduate Joint Consultative Committee (GJCC); further information about student representation is provided in Section 6.

Further information and support is available through the Oxford Students welfare pages, including support relating to physical and mental health, disability, harassment and sexual misconduct. The University's Student Welfare and Support Services complement the support provided by departments and colleges.

7.1.1 Disability support

The Disability Advisory Service (DAS) provides information, advice and guidance on reasonable adjustments to teaching and assessment and can assist with arranging disability-related study support. Students may also contact the Department's Disability Coordinator for departmental queries relating to disability support.

7.1.2 Counselling and wellbeing

The University Counselling Service provides free and confidential support for students experiencing personal or emotional difficulties. A range of other University and student-led

support is available, including Nightline and peer-support services. Further information is available through the Oxford Students welfare pages.

7.2 Complaints and appeals

7.2.1 Complaints

If a student's concern or complaint relates to teaching or other provision made by the Department, it should be raised with the course director, Director of Graduate Studies or GJCC as appropriate. The officer concerned should attempt to resolve the concern/complaint informally. If the student is dissatisfied with the outcome, he or she may take the concern further by making a formal complaint to the Proctors. A complaint may cover aspects of teaching and learning (e.g. teaching facilities, supervision arrangements, etc.), and non-academic issues (e.g. support services, library services, university accommodation, university clubs and societies, etc.). A complaint to the Proctors should be made only if attempts at informal resolution have been unsuccessful.

7.2.2 Appeals

An appeal is defined as where a student wishes to challenge a decision relating to an academic matter which has been made by an academic committee or body. For postgraduate taught courses, a concern which might lead to an appeal should be raised with the college authorities and the individual responsible for overseeing the student's work. It must not be raised directly with examiners or assessors. If it is not possible to resolve the issue in this way, the student may put his/her concern in writing and submit it to the Proctors via the Senior Tutor or Tutor for Graduates of the college (or via the department, for non-matriculated students).

The Proctors are not empowered to challenge the academic judgement of examiners or academic bodies. The Proctors can consider whether the procedures for reaching an academic decision were properly followed; i.e. whether there was a significant procedural administrative error; whether there is evidence of bias or inadequate assessment; whether the examiners failed to take into account special factors affecting a candidate's performance.

Academic appeals must normally be submitted within 20 working days of the date on which you were notified of the relevant academic decision.

7.3 Policies and regulations

The University has a wide range of policies and regulations that apply to students. These are easily accessible through the A-Z of University regulations, codes of conduct and policies available on the Oxford Students website.

7.3.1 Student conduct

Students at Oxford are subject to two separate (but complementary) sets of disciplinary regulations: the rules and by-laws of their college provided in the college handbook or equivalent document, and the University's conduct regulations including the Code of Discipline.

Students should consult the Student Conduct page on the Oxford Students Website for information about the University conduct regulations and the Proctors' role in enforcing disciplinary regulations under statutes IX and XI.

Students are responsible for consulting and familiarising themselves with the Statutes and Regulations, which include rules on non-academic behaviour and academic conduct. Students who intentionally or recklessly breach regulations, or incite or conspire with others to do so, may face disciplinary action.

7.3.2 Freedom of speech

The Department is committed to upholding the University's principles and policies on freedom of speech. Students should familiarise themselves with the University's Code of Practice on Freedom of Speech, which sets out the University's approach to securing freedom of speech within the law.

7.3.3 Harassment and sexual misconduct support

The Department is committed to fostering an inclusive environment in which the rights and dignity of all students are respected. Harassment, sexual misconduct, bullying and victimisation are not tolerated, and all members of the University community are expected to treat one another with respect, courtesy and consideration.

All students starting a course from 1 September 2026 are required to complete the University's online Harassment and Sexual Misconduct training. Students are encouraged to complete the training after receiving their Single Sign-On (SSO) and before completing student registration.

New students should also read Understanding Harassment and Sexual Misconduct: What you need to know, which provides information about harassment and sexual misconduct and the University's approach to prevention and response.

Comprehensive information about University policies and procedures, sources of support, reporting options and other resources is available through Supporting Students at Oxford: Preventing and Responding to Harassment and Sexual Misconduct.

7.4 Fees

Course fees are published on the University website and are payable to the student's college at the start of the course. MSc students pay three terms of fees in total.

Fees are not charged if the student status is formally suspended by the Graduate Studies Committee.

7.5 Residency requirements

The University's residency requirements apply to all full-time students and the requirement for the MSc in Sociology is three terms. Students must normally reside within 25 miles of Carfax during the required period of statutory residence. Residence as a Recognised Student does not count towards residence required for Oxford degrees. Additional residence requirements may apply to scholarships or other forms of funding. Overseas students must familiarise themselves and comply with any UK visa rules and regulations.

7.6 Suspension of status

With the support of their supervisor and college, students may apply to the Graduate Studies Committee for suspension of status for a specified period. The Graduate Studies Committee may consider applications for suspension where the student is prevented from pursuing their course of study in circumstances which are outside their control though there are good grounds for believing that they will be able to resume work within a reasonable period (e.g. medical problems, mental health concerns, maternity leave, paternity leave and unexpected domestic crises).

Students are expected to endeavour to complete their studies within the normal time limits for the course in question and the Graduate Studies Committee is not prepared to consider applications for suspension merely on the ground that a student wishes to engage, for personal reasons, in some other activity and then return to their graduate work at some later date.

If an application for the suspension of status is granted, students will be suspended for the duration of three terms on the basis that the degree is a structured taught course. Please see the Changes of circumstances for postgraduate research students section of the website for application forms for Suspension of Status and Return from Suspension of Status.

A student whose illness is not serious enough or of too short duration to justify suspension of status may nevertheless feel that it is likely to have an adverse effect on their academic performance. In this case, they should seek advice from their college, the Mitigating Circumstances Notices to Examiners (MCEs) section of this handbook and the Oxford Students website.

7.7 Course transfer

Students that wish to apply to transfer between the MPhil Sociology and Demography and the MSc Sociology upon starting their course must apply for this transfer of programme by no later than the end of Week 3 of Michaelmas term of their first year of study. Applications should be made to the Graduate Studies Officer for the consideration of the Graduate Studies Committee. Students that wish to transfer must be able to complete the course in accordance with the structure outlined in the relevant student handbook. No applications for

dispensation for papers to be taken out of the usual order will be made unless the circumstances are exceptional.

Students applying to transfer between programmes should also consider the costs and practical constraints of applying for a new visa (if applicable) for a course of a different duration, particularly if visa re-application requires a return to their home country and resultant inability to fulfil the university residency requirements.

8 Facilities

8.1 Social spaces and facilities

The Department of Sociology is based at 42–43 Park End Street, Oxford, OX1 1JD. All Sociology students are welcome to use the Department building and have access using their University Card. The Department has a large social area and kitchen, as well as an outside seating area next to the river.

Further information about the location of the Department, building access and accessibility is provided in Section 1.7 of this handbook. Queries about departmental facilities can be directed to reception@sociology.ox.ac.uk.

8.2 Workspace

The Department provides a large student workspace, together with printer and copier facilities. Two meeting rooms are available for group work and can be booked by students, and two soundproof booths are available for video calls. Students may also make use of study and workspace provided by their college and across the wider University.

8.3 Libraries

Students have access to the University's extensive Bodleian Libraries network and to library facilities provided by their college. The Social Science Library (SSL), located in the Manor Road Building, is the principal Bodleian library supporting students and staff in the Social Sciences Division. It provides lending and reference collections, study spaces, printing and IT facilities, and research support.

Students will receive information about Oxford's library services during induction, including guidance on using SOLO, the University's search and discovery tool for library collections. For 2026–27, new MSc and MPhil Sociology students will have an Introduction to Library Services session in Manor Road Building Seminar Room A on Monday 5 October, 15:00–16:00, followed by a tour of the Social Science Library from 16:00–16:30.

Further information about the Social Science Library and other Bodleian Libraries is available through the Bodleian Libraries website.

8.4 IT

Students have access to the University's central IT services, including University email, Wi-Fi, Canvas and other systems and digital resources required for their studies. Access to many University services is through students' Oxford Single Sign-On (SSO), and eduroam provides wireless network access across the University.

Local IT support for the Department of Sociology is provided by the Social Sciences Division IT team. Students requiring assistance with departmental IT should contact itsg-support@sociology.ox.ac.uk. Further information about University-wide IT services, support and digital skills training is available through the University's IT webpages.

9 Sociology glossary

Please use in conjunction with the Oxford glossary.

Word or term	Description
CUREC, IDREC DREC	The Central University Research Ethics Committee has overall responsibility for the development of the University's policy on research involving human participants, human tissue and personal data, and for the University's ethics review process. The Social Sciences and Humanities Interdivisional Research Ethics Committee (SSH IDREC) is one of CUREC's three subcommittees. The Sociology Departmental Research Ethics Committee (DREC) sits within the SSH IDREC and manages ethics applications from staff and students based within the Department of Sociology.
DAS	Disability Advisory Service
DGS	Director of Graduate Studies
DPhil	Doctor of Philosophy
DTC	Director of Taught Courses
DTP	Doctoral Training Programme/Partnership. The University of Oxford is part of the Grand Union DTP along with Brunel University and the Open University. It is funded by ESRC and it is how several of our doctoral students receive financial support. It also facilitates various training activities open to all Oxford students.
EPC	Education Policy Committee
ESRC	The Economic and Social Research Council, based within UK Research and Innovation
GJCC	Graduate Joint Consultative Committee
Grey Book	The university's examination regulations
GSC	Graduate Studies Committee
GSO	Graduate Studies Office
GST	Graduate Supervision Reporting
NCRM	National Centre for Research Methods. Maintains a UK research training courses database and offers bursaries.
PGT	Postgraduate taught course (i.e. MSc and MPhil)
PGR	Postgraduate research (i.e. DPhil)
Proctors	The two Proctors (Senior and Junior) have responsibilities under the statutes and regulations for aspects of student discipline, for

	ensuring the proper conduct of examinations and for dealing with complaints.
PRS	Probationary research student (typically the first year of a DPhil course)
SSD	Social Sciences Division; the Division in which the Department of Sociology sits
SSP	Student support plan
TNA	Training Needs Analysis

Annexe A: Guidance on Generative Artificial Intelligence Use

Scope and background

This document sets out the principles of the use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (Gen AI) tools for taught courses within the Department of Sociology, including thesis work. The document is written to provide department-specific guidance in the context of typical courses and projects within the Sociology Department, and should be seen in conjunction with the University's guidance on the use of Gen AI[1], other relevant documents such as the University's Honour Code[2], and general information and guidance on academic conduct provided in the University's student handbook.[3]

We have defined different categories (A, B, C) of Gen AI use for courses in the Department of Sociology. Different courses will fall into one of these three categories, so please check with the course convenor what the policy for a given course is.

When permitted to use Gen AI tools to assist in learning and information-seeking in a course, it is encouraged to use these tools in a responsible and critical way. In general, ask whether using these tools is helping with learning or assisting the development of the skills that the course is intended to teach. There are well-known problems with AI tools, e.g. hallucination of papers and/or concepts, and it is students' responsibility to follow up on information provided by these tools and verify their credibility. When feeding in any data into AI, students should carefully consider if the data are sensitive or confidential in any way, and consider the information security[4], data protection[5] and copyright risks of feeding data into Gen AI tools[6].

For all formative and summative assessments, where AI use is permitted in a specific way (Category A/B below), students are required to submit an AI disclosure statement to outline how AI has been used in the work submitted, including the model and version. If AI was not used, this should be stated explicitly. By default, in timed, closed-book examinations no Gen AI use is permitted.

[1] https://academic.admin.ox.ac.uk/ai-use-in-summative-assessment and https://www.ox.ac.uk/research/support-researchers/research-practice/policy-generative-ai-research
[2] https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/academic/exams/open-book/honour-code
[3] https://www.ox.ac.uk/students/academic/student-handbook
[4] https://www.infosec.ox.ac.uk/guidance-policy
[5] https://compliance.admin.ox.ac.uk/data-protection-policy
[6] https://infosec.ox.ac.uk/use-generative-ai-services-such-as-chatgpt-safely

AI use categorisation for Taught Courses

Category A

No AI use is permitted in summative assessments, but is permitted in formative assessments

For formative assessments (e.g. essays, presentations and/or problem sets), you are permitted to use AI to do background research or in an assistive capacity (for example to find recent articles or to help understand a concept). You must not use AI to summarize readings, as this will not provide sufficient knowledge or analytical ability to understand the nuances of the argument. You are also welcome to use AI after you have written the essay to correct grammar, spelling and/or academic tone. The use of Gen AI for editing is to provide suggestions for corrections and improvements, but you should ensure you make these changes yourself. For any text generation, do not under any circumstances copy text generated by a Gen AI tool into any piece of work or read out such text in a presentation. You are not permitted to use AI to write, produce or co-author an essay.

Unauthorised uses of AI such as those outlined above constitute plagiarism as per university policy and these will be referred to the proctors (as noted in departmental exam regulations). You are also cheating yourself of the opportunity to learn. Also, remember that in a closed-book exam you will have no recourse to AI.

All formative assessments should include an AI disclosure statement, e.g. at the end of your essay (after the references), include a few sentences saying how you used AI, and noting which model and version. If you did not use AI, state this explicitly.

Category B

AI use for formative and summative assessment permitted, but in an assistive capacity (e.g. assignments) – also applies to theses

You are permitted to use AI tools in a limited but assistive capacity to support your learning and to support you in completing formative and summative assessments. In courses with multiple summative assessments, it could be that AI use is permitted for one assessment but not another – please refer to your course convenor for specific guidelines. By default, no AI use is permitted in closed-book unseen examination. When AI use is permitted for a summative assessment, AI cannot be used to complete the assessment (entirely or in part) such that AI would be considered an author or co-author of the assessment.

Examples of assistive capacity include: (1) for background literature search, assistance in finding references, understanding or engaging with an idea or concept; (2) proof-reading and editing text for grammar, spelling and/or academic tone, but only in a suggestive capacity and not to write new text; (3) for data entry or extraction tasks (e.g. from a PDF or a .CSV) or for data labelling tasks; (4) for improving code efficiency and testing/troubleshooting code and its execution, but not for setting up the fundamentals of the quantitative analysis, or delegating the quantitative analysis to AI around central decisions, such as choosing of the

statistical or computational model, estimation procedures, variables etc.[7] In most cases it is not advisable to feed in your data into an AI model (see above also issues around data licences, information security, and data protection that are relevant when sharing any data with Gen AI tools). Consider also issues of Intellectual Property or Copyright when feeding in information into Gen AI tools. For quantitative assessments, while it may be tempting to use AI to solve the problems it will limit your opportunity to learn key concepts and build essential skills.

If there is reason to suspect AI was used extensively to author an assignment or for improper academic practice, this will be referred to the proctors. For all assessments in this category and the thesis, an AI disclosure statement that outlines how AI was used in the production of the work is required, including the model and version. If AI was not used, please also note this explicitly.

Category C

No AI use permitted entirely for formative or summative assessments

In these cases, no AI tools are permitted for use in either formative or summative assessments. If there is suspected reason to believe AI is used in these courses, it will be referred to the proctors.

[7] Unless a course convenor specifies otherwise, this is the default position for Gen AI use in quantitative and/or coding applications.

Annexe B: AI Declaration

Department of Sociology – Declaration on the Use of Generative AI

Version 2.0 (Published 2nd October 2026)

If you have not used any generative AI tools in preparing this work, please complete Section A.
If you have used generative AI in an authorised assistive capacity, please complete Section B and ensure that you answer all questions.

Guidance Notes

- Always include tool name and version, and verify all AI-produced material for accuracy and originality.
- Include this declaration before the title page of your submission.

Section A – No AI Use

Student declaration

I confirm that I have not used any Generative Artificial Intelligence (Gen AI) tools or technologies in preparing this assessment.

I further confirm that I have read and understood the Department of Sociology Generative AI Policy and the University's Policy on the Use of AI in Summative Assessment, and that I understand the potential academic and disciplinary consequences of breaching these regulations.

I confirm that by adding my candidate number and the date below I am signing to state that I understand that unauthorised or undisclosed use of AI tools in the preparation of assessed work constitutes a breach of the University's regulations on academic integrity and may be treated as a case of plagiarism or cheating, to be referred to the Proctors under the relevant disciplinary procedures.

Candidate Number:
Assessment Code:
Assessment Name:
Date:

Section B – Authorised AI Use (Assistive Capacity Only)

PLEASE ANSWER ALL QUESTIONS BELOW

By filling in Section B and signing the bottom of this form, I confirm the following:

- Any use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (Gen AI) tools in preparing this assessment complies with the Department of Sociology Generative AI Policy (Category A / B / C).
- AI tools were used only in an assistive capacity to support my learning and were not used to generate, rewrite, or co-author substantive content of this work.
- I understand that using AI tools beyond the authorised limits, failing to disclose their use, or misrepresenting AI-generated content as my own constitutes academic misconduct, which may result in disciplinary action under University regulations, including referral to the Proctors.
- I have read and understood the Department of Sociology Generative AI Policy and the University's AI in Summative Assessment Policy, and I understand the potential academic and disciplinary consequences of breaching these policies.

1. Which permitted use of AI are you acknowledging? Write in sentences giving context-specific detail for transparency, e.g. "AI was used to find background literature references related to the strength of weak ties. AI was used to troubleshoot code related to cleaning the dataset. AI was used to assist in the writing process by improving spelling and grammar."

ANSWER:

2. Which tool(s) did you use (name + version)? If different tools were used for different tasks, specify which ones and for which tasks.

ANSWER:

3. How did you use or change the AI output before including it in your work? (e.g. "Sources suggested by AI were cross-checked. Code changes suggested by AI were implemented and tested to assess if they were implemented correctly.").)

ANSWER:

4. How did you ensure compliance with academic integrity and data-protection standards? (e.g. "I did not enter any sensitive data into AI tools. I assessed specific page numbers and references provided by AI. I did not copy and paste any text directly from AI tools.".)

ANSWER:

Student declaration

I confirm that by adding my candidate number and the date below I am signing to state that the information above is accurate. I understand that unauthorised or undisclosed use of AI tools may constitute academic misconduct and be referred to the Proctors under University Regulations.

Candidate Number:
Assessment Code:
Assessment Name:
Date: