

PROGRAMME SPECIFICATION FOR MSC IN SOCIAL SCIENCE OF THE INTERNET

01.10.2011

1. Awarding Institution	University of Oxford
2. Teaching Institution	University of Oxford
3. Programme accredited by	N/A
4. Final Award	MSc
5. Programme	Social Science of the Internet
6. UCAS code	N/A
7. Relevant subject benchmark statement	
8. Date of programme specification	

Educational Aims of the Programme

The MSc programme is designed to contribute to the education of current and future researchers, policy makers, analysts and practitioners from both public and private sectors, providing them with the toolkit (concepts, theories, methods and principles) to carry out innovative, high quality research, analysis and policy formulation. The principal aims of the MSc programme are:

- To provide advanced training in four types of research skill: research methodologies; written and oral communication; critical theoretical and analytical skills; research project planning and completion.
- To provide students with good empirical and theoretical knowledge and understanding of the major topics and concepts in Internet research as well as a general understanding of the technological and social shaping of the Internet.
- To provide students with advanced empirical and theoretical knowledge and understanding of key topics and concepts in areas relating to the student's particular interest.
- To enable students to think strategically about the Internet and its evolving technologies and their implications for policy and practice.
- To assess students' progress through supervision and mechanisms of formal assessment.
- To provide appropriate pastoral support through the allocation of personal supervisors in conjunction with the system in place at College level.

Programme Outcomes

A Course objectives

The objectives of the MSc in Social Science of the Internet are that, on completion of the course, students will have:

- Acquired skills in both quantitative and qualitative research methods including leading-edge methods of particular relevance to on-line activity;
- Learnt how to apply approaches from one or more of the social sciences to consideration of the Internet and related technologies and their societal implications;
- Gained empirical and theoretical knowledge and understanding of the major topics and concepts in Internet research as well as a general understanding of the technological and social shaping of the Internet.
- Gained wide-ranging critical knowledge and understanding of the scholarly literature, key topics and concepts in areas relating to the student's particular research interests.
- Learnt to think strategically about the Internet and its evolving technologies and their implications for policy and practice.
- Participated in, and learnt from, the range of intellectual activities ongoing in the OII and the wider University.
- Achieved a high standard of written work through the preparation and presentation of essays and assessed coursework.

In summary, the course equips students with both theoretical tools and introduces them to the empirical evidence necessary for an in-depth understanding of the role of the Internet in society, including the changing nature of governance and the theoretical, practical and ethical questions surrounding internet use.

Related teaching and learning strategies and methods

Teaching methods will be a combination of lectures, classes, and one-to-one supervision meetings. Detailed reading lists will be available for each paper, and students will be expected to undertake whatever assignments are set by course providers in addition to work required for formal assessment. Regular essay writing will ensure that students practice and develop skills of analysis, explication and argumentation as well as ensuring that they have an in-depth understanding of the material covered. To ensure that students develop oral as well as written communication skills, they will be asked to give class presentations in addition to, or in place of written work, and reading lists will be adequate for both purposes. All written work will be marked and returned to students with comments so that students can determine their progress through the course.

B Skills and Attributes

Students will have the opportunity to develop the following skills over the course of the MSc:

Intellectual skills

1. The capacity to read and evaluate original research articles

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2. Theoretical knowledge and understanding of the major topics, approaches and research methods appropriate for study of the Internet.
3. Ability to think strategically about the Internet and its implications for policy & practice.
4. General critical and analytical skills.
5. The ability to plan, conduct and write up a programme of original research.

Related teaching and learning strategies and methods

1-4 are taught mainly through class teaching and supervision; 5 is taught through the completion of the thesis, during which time the student will have individual tutorials to discuss the research question and research design, monitor progress and review drafts. Research methods teaching will also contribute to the development of 2 & 5.

Assessment

These intellectual skills will be assessed through the completion of coursework, through the unseen examinations, and through the thesis.

Practical skills

1. Effective oral and written presentation and communication skills
2. Research methods skills
3. Use of ICTs for communication and collaborative working

Related teaching and learning strategies and methods

1 is taught mainly through class teaching and supervision as all students will have to write regular essays as well as making presentations to the class. 2 is taught through the 16 weeks of compulsory research methods training. 3 is taught mainly through class teaching and the regular use of blogs, wikis and other similar tools across the course.

Assessment

These practical skills will be assessed through satisfactory completion of all class assignments, the completion of coursework, through the unseen examinations, and through the thesis. 3 is formatively, not summatively assessed, through students' interaction with supervisors and class teachers.

Transferable skills

1. Critical analysis
2. Oral and written communication skills
3. Self-organisation, including time management
4. Research design and project planning
5. Use of ICTs for communication and collaborative working

Related teaching and learning strategies and methods

1-3 are taught mainly through class teaching and supervision and specifically in the work which students prepare for class essays and presentations, and in preparation

of coursework and the thesis. 4 is taught through the 16 weeks of compulsory research methods training and through engagement with supervisors in the preparation of the thesis. 5 is taught mainly through class teaching and the regular use of blogs, wikis and other similar tools across the course.

Assessment

These transferable skills will be assessed through satisfactory completion of all class assignments, the completion of coursework, through the unseen examinations, and through the thesis. 3 is formatively, not summatively assessed, through students' interaction with supervisors and class teachers.

Examination and Assessment

The degree will be examined by a combination of coursework and four three hour examinations. The research methods components of the degree will be examined partly through assessed written work and partly by means of an examination. The written work will consist of two 3000 word essays due by the 12:00pm on Friday of 8th week of Michaelmas and 12:00pm on Friday of 8th week of Hilary term respectively. One three hour unseen written examination is to be held in 9th week of Michaelmas term for Statistics. In Hilary Term students must either take Advanced Qualitative Analysis or Advanced Quantitative Analysis which are both part of the Social Research Methods and the Internet component. Students who take the Advanced Qualitative Analysis track in the research methods component will need to submit a 5000 word essay on Friday of 9th week of Hilary term by 12:00pm. Students who take the Advanced Quantitative Analysis track will have a three hour unseen written examination to be held in 9th week of Hilary term. The two compulsory papers (Social Dynamics of the Internet and Internet Technologies and Regulation) will be examined by unseen written exam to be held in 0th week of Hilary term. Students will be informed of the date, time and place of their examinations about 6 weeks beforehand. The two optional papers will be examined by formally assessed coursework due for each by the beginning of 1st Week in Trinity term. In addition, a dissertation of 10,000 words on a topic to be chosen by the student will be due by August 1st.

Following standard university practice, all material will be marked on a percentage rating with 50 per cent as the minimum pass mark and 70 per cent and above denoting excellence. Students with an average of 70 per cent and above for all four components will be awarded a distinction, with each of the four components of the course (see above section 2.2) weighted 25%. Students must achieve a mark of 50% for each of the four components and for each course within the components (Social Dynamics of the Internet, Internet Technologies and Regulation, Social Research Methods and the Internet, both option papers, and the thesis) in order to be awarded the degree of MSc. Students whose work is considered to be on the borderline of a pass, or of a distinction, may be called to a viva-voce if it is felt that they may present further evidence that would enable them to be upgraded.

A candidate who fails the degree on the basis of only one component will be permitted to resubmit the failed component of the degree. Examinations may be resat, and coursework resubmitted, in the following academic year at the usual examination times and submission deadlines. The thesis may also only be resubmitted in August of the following academic year at the usual thesis submission deadline. Note: might need to update this depending on what the exam board agree regarding resubmission.

Please see sections 2.9 and 2.10 for further information on resubmission and resits.

All students will be required to sign a statement asserting that the work submitted for assessment is their own.

All examination scripts and theses will be identified by number only and will be assessed by two markers internally and referred to the external examiner

Achievement of learning outcomes

In summary, to ensure that all OII MSc students achieve the learning outcomes identified in the previous section, they must:

1. Attend all classes, seminars, lectures or meetings as the OII Graduate Studies Committee deems necessary;
2. Complete all assignments (written or oral) as set by class teachers for the options taken.
3. Submit to the examiners the coursework essays required for formal assessment.
4. Sit and pass the three (or four if taking Advanced Quantitative track) unseen examinations to be taken at the end of Michaelmas and Hilary terms.
5. Submit to the examiners a thesis of up to 10,000 words.

1 & 2 will be assessed by the supervisor, class teacher and course provider. 3, 4 & 5 will be assessed and marked in accordance with Examiners' Guidelines. Supervisors will also provide guidance, informal advice and assessment during meetings with their student supervisees.

Examination Guidelines

Coursework progress will be monitored by the Graduate Studies committee and efforts will be made to identify students who require particular assistance. The coursework and the dissertation will be marked by one of the examiners and by a member of university staff with expertise in the relevant area.

The OII will follow the University's statement on plagiarism and communicate it to all students at their induction.

All examination scripts and theses will be identified by number only and will be assessed by two markers internally and referred to the external examiner. Following standard university practice, all material will be marked on a percentage rating with 50 per cent as the minimum pass mark and 70 per cent and above denoting excellence.

No candidate shall be permitted to take an examination unless he or she has been admitted as a candidate for the examination in question by the body responsible for the course and has satisfied any other conditions prescribed in the regulations for that course.

A candidate who fails the degree on the basis of either one or two components will be permitted to resubmit the failed components of the degree within six terms of their initial registration. The components of the degree are the research methods essays and examination; the examinations for the compulsory papers, the dissertation; and the essays for the two optional papers.

There will be at least three internal examiners available each year, one of whom will be chair of examiners. Internal marking of coursework and exams will be assessed by the relevant course providers and by one of the examiners. There will be one external examiner.

One Examiners' Meeting will be held in Hilary term in order to check papers. A second Examiners Meeting will be held after the Trinity term examinations are

completed. The final Examiners board meeting will be held in September to confirm final degree marks. Students whose work is considered to be on the borderline of a pass, or of a distinction, may be called to a viva-voce if it is felt that they may present further evidence that would enable them to be upgraded.

Programme Structure

The degree is planned as an Eleven-month course with the 10,000 word thesis to be handed in on August 1st (or the next working day when this falls at the weekend).

The compulsory Research Methods element of the course will provide students with the basic methods required in order to undertake, analyse or apply internet research. Students will be required to take 16 weeks of methods training classes over the first two terms. These classes will cover:

- Quantitative and Qualitative Research Methods
- Social Research and the Internet

Together, these will ensure that all students are well-equipped to examine issues concerning the use of traditional social research methods in the study of emerging ICTs as well as the use of new methods, enabled by the Internet and ICTs, in the study of an array of social research problems. A focus on research design and methods will also underlie all teaching on the MSc programme, recognising that only through such pervasive coverage, will students gain a sufficiently sophisticated understanding of such issues. A more in-depth understanding of particular research methods will be gained in the process of designing and implementing the thesis research.

In addition to the core methods training all students will be required to take two compulsory papers in Michaelmas Term. These are:

- *Social Dynamics of the Internet*, which will provide an overview of the major findings to date regarding the social implications of the Internet, drawing material from within several social science disciplines, including communication studies, sociology, and political science
- *Internet Technologies and Regulation*, which will provide students from across a range of disciplines with a basic understanding of the interplay between the social and technological shaping of the Internet, and the associated policy implications.

In the second term students will be required to take two optional papers which will enable them to develop their specialist skills and apply them to the Internet and its evolving technologies. Further details of these options are given below.

In addition to the taught courses, students will be required to complete a 10,000 word thesis on a topic of their choosing after discussion with their course tutor. The compulsory thesis provides students with the opportunity to apply the methods and approaches they have covered in the other parts of the course and carry out a substantive piece of academic research on a specialist topic of their choosing.

Course Structure & Weighting	Papers	Term
Methods Component (25%)	Social Research Methods parts I and II and Statistics, and either Advanced Quantitative Analysis OR Advanced Qualitative Analysis.	MT & HT
2 core papers (25%)	Social Dynamics of the Internet Internet Technologies & Regulation	MT
2 further options to be chosen from: (25%)	Digital Era Government and Politics Internet Economics Learning, Technology & Society Networks of Collaboration Law and the Internet Online Social Networks ICT and Development Digital Social Research Any option from a relevant paper from another SSD Masters programme, with the permission of the course convenor.	HT
Thesis (25%)	10,000 words	TT

Course Details

A overview of courses is provided on the OII website at <http://www.oii.ox.ac.uk/teaching/msc/overview.cfm>. Complete reading lists can be found on the internal department course information website called Plato.

Support for Students and Student Learning

1. One-week induction programme for orientation and introducing study skills.
2. Detailed student handbook and reading lists available on the departmental website.
3. A Graduate Studies Committee, responsible for directing and co-ordinating academic policy with the Director of Graduate Studies ultimately responsible for ensuring that course objectives are met and that students are well-supported at the departmental level. Termly feedback meetings will be held at which all students will have the opportunity to voice any concerns in addition to the use of more informal channels.
4. A course convenor, taking overall responsibility for the MSc degree programme, co-ordinating teaching including attendance of students' on courses outside the department and arranging specialist supervision for thesis preparation.

5. A departmental supervisor for each student, providing academic guidance and overseeing thesis progress.
6. Use of OII's specialist library and the extensive library resources available in Oxford.
7. A lively research community at the OII with a broad-ranging seminar and conference programme, as well as weekly internal research seminars at which work in progress is discussed and in which students are expected to participate.
8. The colleges will not have a formal role in teaching, but each student will have a college tutor responsible for their general welfare. In addition, the Colleges provide multiple sources of support in terms of facilities (such as access to networked computers, library provision and work space), guidance (including the Senior Tutor and Tutor for Graduates) and support (including the provision of bursaries, book grants and access to support services such as the College Doctor or Nurse or Harassment Advisors).

Admission Criteria

The criteria for admission will be as follows

1. Not less than a 2.1 (or its equivalent) at first degree level and, if applicable, high scores in the Graduate Record Examination (GRE). If candidates' institutions use the cumulative grade point average (GPA) system a GPA of at least 3.5 (out of 4) or above is required. In exceptional circumstances, applicants with a distinguished record of workplace achievement may be accepted with lower grades at first degree level.
2. Applicants whose first language is not English must meet the University's English language requirements at the higher level as required for all taught courses, namely: *either* an overall score of 7.5 in IELTS with at least 7.0 in each component *or* an overall score of 630 in TOEFL with a Test of Written English (TWE) score of 5 *or* an overall score of 267 in the computer-based TOEFL test in full with an essay-writing score of 5 *or* Cambridge Certificate of Proficiency in English (CPE) Grade B.

In addition to these formal qualifications the OII will look for:

3. Outstanding academic ability (as shown by official University transcripts and evidence from the confidential reports of at least three referees).
4. Interest and enthusiasm for study of the many social aspects of information, and communication technologies (as evidenced by a personal statement of not more than 500 words showing why the application is being made),
5. A research interest in an area of study covered by at least one member of the academic and research staff at the OII, or its associated faculty in departments and Colleges participating in this programme.

As we especially encourage students with a professional background and several years of work experience, the skills and expertise acquired in the work setting will be taken into account.

Assessing Candidates

All applicants will be required to complete the University's graduate admissions form, and to submit a 500-word personal statement, a work example and three confidential references.

This is an explicitly multi-disciplinary degree and we anticipate that students for the OII's MSc programme will be drawn from a wide range of disciplines at Bachelor level, and an equally wide range of professional careers. Students may be drawn from a wide variety of subject areas, including Economics, Politics, Sociology, Law, Management Studies, Development Studies, Computer Sciences, Geography, Anthropology, Linguistics, or other aspects of the Humanities. As such, we do not expect students to have undertaken prior academic work relating to the Internet, and the written work submitted need not be in this area.

In assessing applications, the OII will ensure that appropriate attention is given to relevant equal opportunities principles and legislation and, where a place is offered to a student with special needs, care will be taken to ensure that an effective support

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structure is in place, and full information is available about sources of guidance and support within the University before the student takes up their research studies.

Methods for Evaluating and Improving the Quality and Standards of Learning

As the OII is a department in the Social Sciences Division, the overall responsibility for maintaining educational quality and standards is borne by the Divisional Board, a responsibility which is, in practice, delegated to the Division's Teaching Audit Committee.

Within the OII, the Graduate Studies Committee will be responsible for maintaining academic standards, monitoring progress and dealing with any issues which arise as a result of student or tutor feedback. Informal student and tutor feedback will be welcomed at any point by either the Course Convenor or the Director of Graduate Studies, but in addition, the following formal mechanisms for evaluating and improving the quality of teaching provision will be available:

- Termly meetings with all graduate students to provide a formal opportunity for students to provide feedback on any issues relating to provision of teaching, facilities or support.
- Students will be asked to complete evaluation forms at the end of each completed paper, and the results of these will be discussed by the Graduate Studies Committee each term.
- Examiners reports, both internal and external, will be submitted to and discussed by the Graduate Studies Committee.
- Annual staff job reviews (for all but Professors) are held in which teaching responsibilities and performance will automatically be reviewed.

Regulation of Assessment

The assessed coursework, examinations and thesis will be under the supervision of the Social Sciences Divisional Board. The subjects of each examination will be determined by regulation by the OII, which shall have the power to arrange courses of instruction for the examination. The OII Graduate Studies Committee will appoint the Board of Examiners consisting of three internal examiners, one of whom will be chair each year. One external examiner will be nominated by a nominating committee and invited to serve by the Vice Chancellor. Internal marking of coursework and exams will be assessed by the relevant course providers and by one of the examiners. One examiners' meeting will be held in Hilary term in order to check papers and there will be one examiners meeting for each cohort held after the Trinity term examinations are completed. Internal and external examiners will be required to produce reports after the examinations for consideration by the Graduate Studies Committee, and the Social Sciences Board.

Examinations will be governed by the Regulations of the Proctors.

External examiners will verify that standards appropriate to the award, in part by comparison with standards of comparable institutions, are applied. They ensure that the assessment procedures and the regulations governing them are fair and appropriate, that the conduct of the examination and the determination of the awards have been fairly made and that individual student performance has been judged in accordance with the regulations and conventions of the examining board. The external examiners recommended by the Committee will have some experience in teaching and examining at a post-graduate level, and will be research active.

Examiners are expected to report to the Vice-Chancellor in each year in which they act, upon the above issues. This includes:

- the standards demonstrated by the students
- the extent to which the standards are appropriate to the award
- the design of assignments and internal marking
- access by externals to all of the necessary material for assessment
- students' performance in relation to their peers in this and comparable courses, and the basis for comparisons
- the policies and procedures relating to external examiners
- the strengths and weaknesses of the students as a cohort
- the quality of teaching and learning as indicated by student performance.

All examination scripts and theses will be identified by number only and will be assessed by two markers internally and referred to the external examiner. Following standard university practice, all material will be marked on a percentage rating with 50 per cent as the minimum pass mark and 70 per cent and above denoting excellence. Students with an average of 70 per cent and over will be awarded a distinction. Students whose work is considered to be on the borderline of a pass, or of a distinction, may be called to a viva-voce if it is felt that they may present further evidence that would enable them to be upgraded.

A candidate who fails the degree on the basis of either one or two components will be permitted to resubmit the failed components of the degree within six terms of their initial registration. The four components of the degree are the two research methods essays and two research methods unseen exams the two pieces of coursework for the option papers, the dissertation; and the two unseen written examinations for the compulsory courses.

Marking Scale		
70-100	Distinction	For exams: a very good answer that has a well-structured argument, is well written, shows strong familiarity with relevant literature or theory, and includes necessary command of empirical material. Dissertations should also display strong analytical power, and originality either in a fresh approach to texts and literature or in generating new evidence.
60-69	Strong Pass	Work of high standard that covers the major points and shows familiarity with relevant literature or theory. It will include some elements of distinction quality, but is either not sufficiently original, or less well-written, or has a less well-structured argument, or includes inaccuracies. The marks of 68 and 69 should indicate an examiner's preparedness to move up to a distinction if a co-assessor or panel of examiners so recommend.
50-59	Pass	Work of solid scholarly standard that shows some analytical capacity and a reasonable coverage of relevant empirical material. It may include a well-structured argument, but be marred by omissions and/or some inaccuracies.
49 and below	Fail	An examination answer or dissertation that fails to display the criteria necessary for a pass. It may have some or all of the following weaknesses: the standard of writing is too poor; it is without sufficiently clear structure and argument; it does not cover the literature and empirical material adequately; it does not focus on the topic; it contains serious omissions and inaccuracies. The marks of 58 and 59 should indicate an examiner's preparedness to move up to a pass if a co-assessor or panel of examiners so recommend.

Indicators of Quality and Standards

Standards are monitored by Internal and External Examiners' Reports, and by the comments submitted to examiners by coursework markers, supervisors and tutors. The OII, in turn, will monitor standards through the discussions of the Graduate Studies Committee on the basis of the Examiners' reports, evaluation forms and general feedback received. As this is a new degree, with few close competitors, the OII will be particularly receptive to feedback received from external examiners who are best-placed to compare performance with that in other institutions.

The course has been designed to meet the stringent criteria set out in the ESRC's Postgraduate Training Guidelines, and it is intended to seek ESRC recognition for the programme at the earliest opportunity, as a route to the OII's ESRC-recognised doctoral programme.

Some further indication of quality and standards may be gauged by following the success of OII MSc students in winning places for further study at prestigious universities or in presenting research in leading academic conferences.