PS5013: Evolutionary and Comparative Research Project

Semester	Semester 1 & 2, 2021-2022
Meeting times	Personal tutorials at regular intervals (at least once a month), which will be arranged by you and your supervisor
Credits	60
Module summary	The aim of this module is to acquire intellectual and practical research skills associated with evolutionary, comparative and developmental approaches to the study of the mind. Most of the Master's programme has been designed around taught modules in which the emphasis is conveying information and learning by undertaking various research-related exercises. However, it is arguable that students learn as much about research by actually conducting a research project. Hence in this module, students will conduct and report an independent and original research project under the supervision of an academic advisor. Projects may comprise field and/or laboratory-based studies, the analysis (including meta-analysis) of extant data or the modelling of theoretical concepts. Under normal circumstances, the research will be planned during the first academic semester and then conducted during the second semester. The thesis can be in any area of Evolutionary, Comparative or Developmental Psychology agreed by the student's supervisor, course coordinator, and approved by ethical review. In some sense the module can be seen as the definitive demonstration of research competence imparted by the Master's programme.
Prerequisites & Anti-requisites	NA
Assessment	15,000 word (maximum) research report, 100% of course assessment
Staff	Dr Manon Schweinfurth, programme controller, office: E48, phone: +44 (0)1334 463460, e-mail: ms397@st-andrews.ac.uk

Timetable

There is **considerable flexibility in the scope of the** module to distribute the workload as the student and supervisor see fit. However, if the work is left too late, it causes stress and precludes adjusting plans if problems arise during data collection. Thus, a **suggested** schedule is given below. The schedule should be considered a rough guideline only, for some types of research require more time to set up than others, others are constrained with respect to when data can be collected, and some students take more time than others to decide on their project. Please note that during the summer the supervisor might be unavailable due to holidays or scientific conferences. The supervisor should arrange with the student in advance alternative supervision.

Date	Suggested milestones
Semester 1, week 2	Introductory meeting with supervisor
Semester 1, week 7	Delineation of the area of research topic (week after Independent Learning Week)
Semester 2, week 2	Delineation of the general research design
Semester 2, week 8	Ethical application and risk assessment submitted, where appropriate
Semester 2, week 16	Start of data collection (week following the end of examinations)
Mid of July	End of data collection
End of July	Final statistical analyses
2 weeks before deadline	Draft report sent to supervisor
1 week before deadline	Supervisor returns comments on draft
Deadline: 23 Aug 2022	Research report due in MMS by 5pm

Attendance

Attendance is a basic assessment requirement for credit award, and failure to attend meetings with academic staff may result in your losing the right to be assessed in that module. Please ensure that you are familiar with the 'Academic Alert' policy as found at this link. If you have missed timetabled classes/events or any other compulsory elements of the module due to illness or an unavoidable pre-arranged event or appointment, you must complete a Self Certificate of Absence form as soon as possible.

Periods of leave, e.g. due to illness or other adverse personal circumstances, of no more than two weeks' duration will be considered acceptable. Longer periods are not advisable for the student to be away from the University. Requests for longer periods of leave will require Leave of Absence.

Students are expected to be in residence at St Andrews during the module period (which includes the summer) unless they have permission for their study location to be outside St Andrews in accordance with the Location of Study policy, e.g. to conduct essential research like collecting data at another institute or in the field, or as part of programmes jointly run with another university. Please note that failure to follow this policy has implications not only for individual students, but could also entail a loss of the University's Tier 4 sponsor licence and seriously affect the ability to admit overseas students.

Assessment

The module is assessed by a research project report that has a maximum of 15,000 words (excluding bibliography and appendices). The maximum word limit is precisely that: an upper limit and not a target. The research project report is uploaded electronically in MMS and should include the provided title page. The margins may be no narrower than 30mm. University regulations regarding the project thesis, including the format and required student declaration, can be accessed here. There are penalties for reports that are submitted too late or that are too long. The penalty scheme can be found in the Taught MSc Handbook.

Typically, the first marker will be your project supervisor and the second marker will be assigned by the module coordinator. The markers will consider any adverse circumstances that might have place constraints on the scope of thesis, such as technical difficulties in performing the research that were beyond your control. However, the markers can only assign a mark appropriate for the submitted thesis. In a case where the first and second marker cannot agree on a grade, a third marker is employed. The third marker acts as an arbitrator. That is, they read the piece of assessment along with the comments and feedback provided by the first and second markers and determine a final grade. All marks assigned are preliminary until scrutinised by the external examiner, officially submitted by the examinations board and approved by the University. Note that there is no right to reassessment for grades of 6.9 or less (cf. Calculation protocols of the Postgraduate taught Masters classification).

Learning objectives

By the end of the module, students will be able to demonstrate knowledge of the:
- existing literature on the topic of their research thesis
- justification for the particular data acquisition and data analysis approach used in the study
- practical processes involved in conducting research
- legal and ethical issues that arise from the research project
- limits to the research that has been undertaken and possible avenues of further research

Transferrable skills

The module will provide you experience in the following practical skills:
- integrating individual research reports into a coherent structure on which future research can be built
- evaluating the feasibility and utility of alternative research approaches to a given scientific problem
- engaging in problem-solving as it relates to performing research
- performing data analysis to answer a given research question
- presenting technical information in a structured document
- keeping accurate and clear records
- communicating technical information verbally with colleagues (e.g., with the supervisor)

Module-specific requirements

The module will consist of a series of meetings with your supervisor that usually begins informally in the first semester so that the groundwork for the research is fully prepared by the end of the second semester. These meetings can cover any topic relevant to your research proposal, such as the selection of the research topics, the design of research, discussions of the background literature, data analysis and presentation of research findings. Your supervisor has the authority to select the topics of these meetings, but it is your responsibility to provide your supervisor with possible topics that you believe would be helpful.

The Master's thesis should follow the general format required by the University (see below) and should conform to standard scientific structure for research reports. Thus, each project should include a title page and the following sections: abstract, introduction, methods, results, discussion, references, acknowledgments and appendices.

Note that it is a requirement that any **relevant letters of ethical approval be attached as appendices** to your Master's thesis. In addition, all data and supporting documents (SPSS or other data analysis files and output, spreadsheets, video or photographic files, interview transcripts, records associated with the research, etc.) should be handed into the School office (with Matriculation information and Course code), or given directly to the Project Supervisor. In the latter case, you should attach as an appendix a letter from your supervisor that they have received and stored the relevant files.

Students are required to conform to the University's policy prohibiting plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct such as data fabrication. Your supervisor is allowed to comment on **one draft only** of the Abstract, Introduction, Methods, Results and Appendices sections of the project thesis, but is not allowed to comment on the *Discussion* section. This is to allow you a chance to demonstrate in the *Discussion* the degree to which you have developed independence as a researcher.

Assessment regulations

Extensions

To apply for an extension on continuous assessment due to adverse personal circumstances, please fill out the form found here.

Late work & late penalties

Academic alerts will be issued for late submissions that are not excused (see here). Late penalties will be applied at the rate of one grade point per day or part thereof that an assignment is late (Policy A of the Penalties for Late Work; see here.

Over-length penalties

Over-length penalties will be applied at the rate of 1 mark for work that is over-length to any extent, then a further 1 mark per additional 5% over (Policy C of the Penalties for work of incorrect length). Words will be counted electronically and all aspects including text boxes will be counted unless otherwise stated, as outlined here.

Grade descriptors

For details regarding the 'Common reporting scale for module grades' please see here. For details regarding the reporting scale and grade descriptors for coursework, please see individual assessment descriptions that will be provided during the semester.

Support contacts

The primary support for this module will be your supervisor, but all members of staff endeavour to support postgraduate students in their research. If the supervisor is not available in St. Andrews (e.g., due to research leave), then a local member of staff will be nominated to help the students with practical issues in St. Andrews. However, the primary responsibility for the student remains with the supervisor. Please contact your module controller if you have any questions about the structure or the administration of the module.

For information regarding the Ethical Review process or Health and Safety please refer to the Taught MSc Handbook. Please note that the School is required to assess all risks associated with work activities. This includes field and lab work - your supervisor will be able to direct you in these matters. Many other queries can be addressed to the module controller Dr Manon Schweinfurth. Dr Schweinfurth

does not have office hours as such but can be reached easily by email (ms397). Please find below other helpful sources of support.

The School is committed to making its teaching and learning fully inclusive, so that all students are given the opportunity to reach their potential, all students feel like they belong and are not made to feel excluded, and students have the opportunity to contribute to curriculum development. If you have any comments or feedback on this module in terms of the inclusivity of the content, delivery or assessments/feedback, please contact the Module Co-ordinator or, if you would rather provide anonymous feedback, please use the Module Evaluation Questionnaire (MEQ). Alternatively, you can contact your School President or Class Representative, who can raise ideas or issues via the relevant staff-student meetings and consultative committees. If you want to report any instances of bullying, harassment or discrimination that have occurred in teaching and learning environments, you can use the University's [Report & Support](#) tool.'

For further information regarding advice, support, policies and procedures, please see the University [Student Handbook](#).

Support	*Contact*
School administrative office for general teaching matters	psyneurog@st-andrews.ac.uk
Director of Teaching	Paula Miles psydot@st-andrews.ac.uk
Director of Taught Postgraduates	Eric Bowman psyneurodopgt@st-andrews.ac.uk
Psychology & Neuroscience Student Wellbeing Officer	Maggie Ellis psyneuro_wellbeing@st-andrews.ac.uk
Advice & Support Centre (ASC) welfare and support services	theasc@st-andrews.ac.uk
Centre for Educational Enhancement & Development (CEED) learning and development support for students	ceed@st-andrews.ac.uk
International Education Institute English language support	ie@st-andrews.ac.uk