MSc/Diploma Research Methods in Psychology

Awarding Institution: The University of Reading
Teaching Institution: The University of Reading
Faculty of Life Sciences Programme length: 12 months (24 part-time)
For students entering in 2004 Date of specification: 17 Aug 2004
Programme Director: Dr G Schafer
Board of Studies: Dr Schafer (chair), Ellis, Gaffan, McCloy

Summary of programme aims
The purpose of the course is to prepare graduates in Psychology and allied disciplines for research-related careers in academic, clinical, educational or health psychology, or for careers in which familiarity with data-analytic principles and techniques are of relevance. The course provides both the theoretical background, and the practical experience, for students to realise their potential as independent researchers in various fields of psychological enquiry.

The expected outcomes are that students should acquire and demonstrate, in the context of social science in general and psychological research in particular:

- Appreciation of the theoretical and philosophical context in which research is designed, conducted, and interpreted, both within a designated research area more generally in research in psychology.
- Understanding of the essential principles of research design in psychology and appreciation of alternative research strategies.
- Competence in a range of research methods for data collection and detailed expertise in a subset relevant to the student's own research interests.
- Expertise in data management and analysis, and awareness of issues affecting data interpretation.
- Understanding of ethical and legal issues in the conduct and dissemination of a research programme.
- Competence in research management and in written and oral skills for communicating research output.
- Awareness of issues relevant to the pursuit of a research career.
- Acquisition of a broad range of transferable employment-related skills.

Transferable skills
By the end of the course, students will have developed the following transferable skills:

- Ability to use computers for statistics, data analysis, and communication.
- Ability to use database/library resources.
- Writing skills: writing of papers, abstraction of others' work from written and oral material, reviewing of work of peers.
- Ability to make oral presentations.

Programme content

Compulsory Modules		*Credits*	*Level*
PYM0RM	*Research Methods and Transferable Skills for Psychology*	30	M
PYM0TI	*Theoretical Issues for Psychologists*	10	M
PYM0S1	*Data Collection & Analysis 1*	10	M
PYM0S2	*Data Collection & Analysis 2*	10	M

PYM0QQ	*Qualitative and Quantitative Data*		10	M
PYM0RD	*Research Design and Data Management*		10	M
PYM0EP	*Empirical Project (MSc only)*		60	M

Optional Modules: Methods

Modules totalling at least 30 credits must be selected from the following:			*Credits*	*Level*
	PYM0S3	*Data Collection & Analysis 3*	10	M
at least three of	PYM0CP	*Methods in Clinical Psychology*	10	M
	PYM0CC	*Methods in Cognitive Psychology*	10	M
	PYM0SP	*Methods in the Study of Perception*	10	M
	PYM0DP	*Methods in Developmental Psychology*	10	M

Optional Module: Content

One module may be selected from a list such as the following:		*Credits*	*Level*
PYM1C1	*Cognitive Development*	10	M
PYM1C2	*Developmental Aspects of Cognition*	10	M
PYM2CM	*Cognitive Neuropsychology of Memory*	10	M
PYM2PA	*Psychology of Ageing*	10	M
PYM3P1	*Development of Psychopathology 1*	10	M
PYM3P2	*Development of Psychopathology 2*	10	M

Part-time/Modular arrangements

The course may be undertaken over two years on a part-time basis. Selection of modules between the two years will be agreed between the student and the Board of Studies, at the commencement of the course. It is anticipated that students will normally complete at least 80 credits' worth of modules in Year 1. Modules be assessed in the year that they are studied. The Empirical Project (PYM0EP) must be undertaken in Year 2.

Progression requirements

Acceptance onto any module is conditional on the student having attempted all assessments set in previous modules. The Empirical Project will normally be the last piece of work to be submitted for assessment (by Dissertation).

Summary of teaching and assessment

Teaching is by a variety of methods, including lectures, small group seminars, web-based work-throughs, self-paced workshops, individual feedback on written work, and one-on-one supervision. Assessment mirrors this diversity of methods, with methods including written assignments and other coursework, portfolio, unseen essay- and short notes examinations, open-book test, submission of practical reports, oral presentations, and submission of project dissertation.

The University's taught postgraduate marks classification is as follows:

Mark	Interpretation
70 – 100%	Distinction
60 – 69%	Merit
50 – 59%	Good standard (Pass)
Failing categories:	
40 – 49%	Work below threshold standard
0 – 39%	Unsatisfactory Work

For Masters Degrees

To pass the MSc students must gain an average mark of 50 or more overall including a mark of 50 or more for the dissertation (PYM0EP). In addition the total credit value of all modules

marked below 40 must not exceed 30 credits and for all modules marked below 50 must be less than 60 credits.*

Students who gain an average mark of 70 or more overall including a mark of 70 or more for the dissertation and have no mark below 40 will be eligible for a Distinction. Those gaining an average mark of 60 or more overall including a mark of 60 or more for the dissertation and have no mark below 40 will be awarded eligible for a Merit.

For PG Diplomas
To pass the Postgraduate Diploma students must gain an average mark of 50 or more. In addition the total credit value of all modules marked below 40 must not exceed 30 credits and for all modules marked below 50 must be less than 60 credits.*

Students who gain an average mark of 70 or more and have no mark below 40 will be eligible for the award of a Distinction. Those gaining an average mark of 60 or more and have no mark below 40 will be awarded eligible for a Merit.

***NOTE** The provision to permit a candidate to be passed overall with a profile containing marks below 40 is made subject to the condition that there is evidence that the candidate applied his or herself to the work of those modules with reasonable diligence and has not been absent from the examination without reasonable cause.

Admission requirements
Entrants to this programme are normally required to have obtained an Honours degree in psychology or related discipline (e.g., cognitive science, linguistics, philosophy). Applicants should have gained, or expect to gain, a class mark of 2(1) or better (i.e., 60%+ [or international equivalent, e.g. B+ US letter grade]). Applicants holding 2(2) degrees may apply and each case will be considered on its own merits. Applicants whose academic qualifications do not meet these formal standards may in the first instance be admitted to the Diploma course; they may then transfer to MSc status subject to satisfactory performance in their first two terms. We discourage applications from holders of Third Class degrees. The Admissions Tutor for this course is Dr. Schafer.

Support for students and their learning
University support for students and their learning falls into two categories. (1) Learning support includes IT Services, which has several hundred computers and the University Library, which across its three sites holds over a million volumes, subscribes to around 4,000 current periodicals, has a range of electronic sources of information and houses the Student Access to Independent Learning (S@IL) computer-based teaching and learning facilities. There are language laboratory facilities both for those students studying on a language degree and for those taking modules offered by the Institution-wide Language Programme. (2) Student guidance and welfare support is provided by Programme Directors, the Careers Advisory Service, the University's Special Needs Advisor, Study Advisors, Hall Wardens and the Students' Union.

Support for graduate students in the Department of Psychology is similarly aimed at both learning and pastoral support. Learning support includes use of workrooms dedicated to MSc students with networked PCs and printer, access to the departmental library, a specially selected and maintained reprint collection, provision of photocopying cards, and ready access to members of staff who are all respected scholars in the fields taught. Pastoral support augments the University's care systems, with each student being allocated a Personal Tutor from the Board of Studies.

New students undergo an induction programme in the week before they start the course. A comprehensive handbook is available for the course; this is available on-line, as are a wealth of other resources via the department's intranet. Teaching is usually in small groups with much opportunity for students to discuss matters and support one another. There is an active Student-Staff Committee with postgraduate representation.

Career prospects

Graduates will have good prospects in careers which involve the understanding of research methodology as it applies to the social sciences and to psychology in particular. Career prospects in research-related academic, clinical, educational, and health fields are good. It is anticipated that approximately half of graduates will to into careers involving research (interpreted broadly). The remainder will be able to use skills gained on the course in the many career areas requiring a principled approach to qualitative and quantitative data.

Educational aims of the programme

Students are required to operate at a more advanced level than in an Honours degree, with emphasis on the psychological issues which arise with particular prominence in this field of enquiry.

Programme Outcomes

Knowledge and Understanding

A. Knowledge and understanding of:	**Teaching/learning methods and strategies**
1. Understanding of a broad variety of methods in, and approaches to, empirical enquiry in the social sciences, especially psychology. 2. Advanced understanding of the principal qualitative and quantitative research methods used in psychological research. 3. The use of computer programs to perform qualitative and quantitative analysis of data (specific analytic techniques are listed under C. below). 4. The components of a research plan. 5. Ethical issues as they relate to research in psychology. 6. Theoretical issues as they apply to psychological research.	1 and 5 are introduced to students using a web-based, self-paced workthrough. 1-5 are covered in lectures and seminars, and are further supported by practical experience, most notably in the completion of an empirical project. 1 and 2 are supported by the requirement to attend a number of departmental seminars given by visiting speakers, who are generally leaders in their field. 3 is covered by a comprehensive lecture programme followed up by supported workshops and self-paced exercises. 4, 5 and 6 are supported in small group seminars. *Assessment* 1, 3, 4 and 6 are assessed by practical coursework, essays, and the requirement to complete an original piece of psychological research. 2 is assessed directly through coursework, and an in-class test, as well as indirectly in the empirical project (through the rationale for the methods actually deployed by the student). 5 and 6 assessed as part of the requirement to complete two project proposals during the course (one of which will be taken to fruition by the student).

Skills and other attributes

B. Intellectual skills – able to:

1. Understand the theoretical framework(s) in which psychological research is conducted.
2. Give an account of the basics of research design, data capture, and analysis, as they apply to the social sciences.
3. Understand the basis on which evidence-based reasoning may be articulated or evaluated in the context of psychological research.
4. Select from a number of possible methods, the one most appropriate to a particular data set and a given research question or questions.
5. Critically evaluate the design and conduct of psychological research.
6. Write well-structured and well-argued essays.
7. Abstract complex orally presented material.

Teaching/learning methods and strategies

1-5 are explicated in seminars.
2 is supported in small group seminars, as well as by self-paced study using web-based teaching.
Coursework essays give opportunity for formative feedback in support of 2, 5 and 6.
Feedback to students on coursework in 'Methods' modules (at least three of which must be offered) assists students in the deployment of their intellectual understanding to practical research related issues, supporting 1-5, and particularly 3.

Assessment

1-6 are assessed in coursework.
7 is assessed by students handing in a number of abstracts of departmental seminars.

C. Practical skills – able to:

1. Perform advanced searches for information relevant to specific topics.
2. Choose and apply appropriate data analytic techniques, from a list including analysis of variance and covariance, regression, loglinear modelling, factor analysis and other multivariate techniques.
3. Plan and carry out, with supervision, psychological research.
4. Collect and manage data.
5. Write up empirical psychological research.
6. Make an application for ethical approval.

Teaching/learning methods and strategies

Dedicated seminars, practical classes, and exercises deliver 1 and 2.
A dedicated library and resources session supports 1.
3 and 4 are initially explicated as part of the Methods modules (i.e., PYM0CC, PYM0CP, PYM0DP, PYM0SP); they are then consolidated by direct supervision of a research project and associated dissertation.
Students have the opportunity to undertake practical, directed work, before starting their project, as part of the Research Design and Data Management module, PYM0RD.
Support for 6 is delivered by special seminar.

Assessment

1, 3 and 6 are assessed by the requirement to undertake a project planning assignment.
2 is assessed by coursework assignments and an in-class test.
3-6 are assessed in the main by the student undertaking an empirical research project, and then writing this up as a dissertation.

D. Transferable skills – able to perform the following at graduate level:

1. Communicate concisely or at length in writing.
2. Give oral presentations.
3. Work with a group.
4. Plan and implement a project.
5. Solve practical problems.
6. Use IT to write, to present information visually, to manage and analyse numeric data, to communicate, and to find information.
7. Manage time.
8. Condense complex orally delivered information.

Teaching/learning methods and strategies

Transferable skills are integrated in subject-based teaching. 1 is learned, with formative feedback, through essays and other written assignments.
2 is included in seminars.
3 forms a natural part of the compulsory modules PYM0S1 and PYM0QQ, and is additionally a major component of the Methods courses PYM0CC and PYM0SP.
4 and 5 are explicated in the compulsory module PYM0RD, and further consolidated by the supervised empirical project.
6 and 7 pervade all aspects of the course.
8 is supported by formative feedback on research seminars written up by the student.

Assessment

1, 2, 4, 6, and 8 are formally assessed as coursework.
An adequate standard in 3, 5, and 7 is required to pass the course.

Please note: This specification provides a concise summary of the main features of the programme and the learning outcomes that a typical student might reasonably expect to achieve and demonstrate if he/she takes full advantage of the learning opportunities that are provided. More detailed information on the learning outcomes, content and teaching, learning and assessment methods of each module can be found in module and programme handbooks.