

## **PhD Theory and Methods Course**

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During this term, we will mainly be focused on practical guidance for writing a PhD. We will also be exploring your research topics in the light of this guidance, to see how it can help you advance your particular project. This will allow you to engage with the research of the wider PhD community at Warwick Law School. During the course, I will ask you to present to each other on the topic of your thesis to engage with the topic at hand. Presentations will begin in Week 3.

### **Week 2: What is a PhD?**

This session will provide an introductory overview of the aims and ambitions of a PhD thesis. What is a good question? How might you answer it? What scope should a PhD have? And how might you make an original contribution to your field of study?

### **Week 3: Structure and Argument**

A good PhD thesis is well argued and well structured. And a good PhD thesis is structured in a way that is appropriate to its central argument. We will explore what it means to develop good arguments, and what techniques you can use to clarify and defend your conclusions.

In order to facilitate discussion, I will take you through the development and argumentative strategy of one of my own pieces, and it would be helpful for you to read it in advance and to think about how the argument is developed:

V Tadros 'The Rights and Wrongs of No Platforming' (2022) 85 Modern Law Review 968.

You can find a copy here:

<https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1468-2230.12729>

### **Week 4: Working**

This session is about how to structure your time and good working methods. Few doctoral students have experience of working on a large long term project of the size and scale of a PhD. Most are used to working towards shorter term targets and goals. And most are not used to the freedom and independence involved in writing a PhD. Many students, as a result, need to develop their working methods and learn how to manage their time effectively, as well as to structure their progress. We will discuss these issues in this session.

### **Week 5: Using the Literature**

Doctoral theses make a contribution to knowledge, and in order to do that you should engage with the literature that engages with the subject matter of your thesis. What is crucial is not

only which literature you engage with, though, but how you do so. The literature on your direct topic may either be vast or non-existent, and it may be hard to identify which literature is relevant. We will discuss how to handle the literature in the course of developing your thesis.

### **Week 7: Working Methods: Using Empirical work and findings**

Some PhDs involve conducting empirical research, but many others rely on empirical work to substantiate their arguments. This session is concerned with the way in which empirical research and findings can contribute to a doctoral thesis, the extent to which empirical research can be relied on, and how to assess empirical work critically in the course of the doctoral thesis.

### **Week 8: Originality**

A PhD must provide an original contribution to scholarship. In this session, we will explore what the originality contribution amounts to, and different ways in which an original contribution might be made.

### **Week 9: Publishing and the Academic Profession**

For many students, the PhD is intended as a step towards an academic career. Publishing work from your doctoral research is crucial to making this step, and students should have publication plans in mind from relatively early in the process. This session explores different avenues for publication, and how to go about publishing scholarship that arises from the doctoral thesis.

### **Week 10: Writing**

Almost all students starting the doctoral programme have a great deal to learn about careful and precise academic writing, and the development of one's writing techniques and style is a crucial part of academic development. In this session, we will discuss how to improve your writing style.