Faculty of Humanities

Human-IST Institute

University of Fribourg

Study plan

secondary programme (minor)
30 ECTS credit points

Digital Society

(English)

effective 9th of November 2022

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Ratified by the study commission on 9th of November 2022.

1. Legal basis

This study plan is based on the *Reglement vom 8. März 2018 zur Erlangung des Bachelors und des Masters an der Philosophischen Fakultät* (Regulations for obtaining Bachelors and Masters degrees at the Faculty of Humanities), University of Fribourg (Switzerland).

2. Description of the programme

2.1 General description

Digital transformation affects every domain of contemporary societies. Digital technologies have a major impact on private and institutional activities, including personal interactions, work environments and political processes. They are transforming a variety of fields, including education, health, trade and consumption, media, law enforcement, agriculture, and transportation. Digital technologies fundamentally alter the processes of communication, work, and economy and have a direct impact on social structures and hierarchies.

Digital technologies are also transforming the nature of political campaigns and enabling new ways of surveillance and censorship. Aspects of daily life, such as communication between family, friends, and work colleagues, as well as the cultural sphere and religion, are evolving under the influence of digital technologies.

At the same time, we can observe the emergence of new, digitally-driven professional groups (e.g., software engineers, digital influencers) and social milieus (e.g., hackers, gamers), but also new social and political movements that position themselves against these digital technologies (e.g. "digital detox"). We are only now beginning to realize and anticipate the role of artificial intelligence on such spheres.

The Master's programme on *Digital Society* is focused on the social dimensions and impacts of digital technologies in contemporary societies. From a social sciences perspective, research on digital society appears to be highly interdisciplinary, involving sociology, anthropology, economics, communication sciences, contemporary history, computer sciences and cultural studies.

These disciplines aim to explore the role of digital technologies in shaping social processes and structures as a whole. At the same time, individual actors as well as social groups and practices are subject to the changing conditions of the digital society.

The *Digital Society* Master's programme will advance the study of theoretical competences and development of analytical methods needed to understand these transformations. The course will examine the emergence, as well as the uses and impacts of digital technologies on societies from diverse social science perspectives and expand the students' understanding of computer sciences and digital skills.

2.2 General structure

The Master's *Digital Society* programme with 30 ECTS credits is designed as a continuation of the Bachelor study programmes in social sciences and cultural studies as well as in media and communication sciences, economics and computer science. It complements major (specialisation) programmes of 90 ECTS credits. The study programme is part of social sciences programme and is offered in cooperation with the Department of Social Sciences, the Department of Social Work, Social Policy and Global Development, and the interfaculty Human-IST Institute of the University of Fribourg.

2.3 Admission requirements

The *Digital Society* Master's programme with 30 ECTS credits is open to the following graduates holding a Bachelor's degree completed at a university, an education or teacher training college (*Pädagogische Hochschule / Haute école pédagogique*) or a university of applied sciences in the following disciplines:

- Law

- Philosophy, history, political science, art history, musicology, all languages and literature (English, German studies etc.), sociology, social policy and social work, social and cultural anthropology / ethnology, cultural studies, religious studies, theology, educational sciences

- Computer science, business informatics, software systems

- Human medicine, sports science, psychology

- Business administration, economics

- Communication and Media Sciences, Communication Systems

- Geography, Environmental Sciences

Applicants with degrees from the University of Fribourg in the following study programmes are also admitted to the programme:

- European Studies, Eastern European Studies, Software Systems, Biomedical Sciences, Economic and Legal Studies, Business Communication, Environmental Humanities

Other Bachelor graduates will be considered upon application.

3. Objectives

Students will gain digital skills that will enable them to satisfy the needs and requirements of their future employers. Moreover, students will be trained to critically "read" digital technologies in society from the perspective of social theory and relevant core questions. Students will also be equipped to use empirical research to inform and support stakeholders in relation to the social impact and opportunities created by digital technologies in our networked societies.

The Master's programme advances students' skills to conduct academic research in social sciences, information systems design, development and application of digital technologies, employment in the public administration sector, management and human resources, consumer protection and regulation of technologies.

Areas of prospective employment for future graduates of the programme include technology policy advising and legal regulation, human factors and user experience research, interaction design, technology journalism, project management in technology assessment, consumer protection and advocacy and ICT consultancy.

4. Start date

Students can start the *Digital Society* Master's programme in the autumn or spring semester.

5. Language

In principle, the courses are held in English. Exams and written work are also to be conducted and prepared in English. It is recommended that students have good written and oral English skills and can express themselves and communicate orally and in writing in this language. In exceptional cases, supplementary courses in German or French will be integrated into the course programme.

6. General course outline

Master' minor programme *Digital Society* 30 ECTS credits		
2 modules with 30 ECTS credits		
DSS 1	**Interdisciplinary perspectives on the digital transformation of society**	15 ECTS credits
DSS 2	**Theories and case studies**	15 ECTS credits

7. Description of the modules

Module 1 (DSS 1) with 15 ECTS credits
Interdisciplinary perspectives on the digital transformation of society

All lectures in Module 1 are mandatory and are offered every academic year.

Description:
The main objective of this module is to provide a conceptual and practical introduction to the digital society from an interdisciplinary perspective. It combines social sciences, history, and computer sciences so that students can understand the foundations of the digital society and its transformations. In addition, the module introduces digital research methods.

Lecture 1   Social History of Computing and the Internet (3 ECTS credits)
General outline of technical innovations and their social impact.

Lecture 2   Foundations of Informatics (3 ECTS credits)
Introduction to the fundamentals of informatics that enables students from diverse backgrounds to have a general understanding of programming, the function of algorithms and their application.

Lecture 3   Perspectives in the Social Studies of Technology (3 ECTS credits)
Introduction to the main theoretical and analytical perspectives and approaches in social studies of technology with special emphasis on their inter-

disciplinary dimensions. What are the main research programmes and domains of study? How have they evolved?

Lecture 4   Digital Transformation in Society and Culture (3 ECTS credits)
Using a lecture series format, interdisciplinary introduction to diverse issues and areas of research with an emphasis on longitudinal and comparative perspectives. What are the major contemporary challenges in terms of changes in the economy, work, politics, culture, sports, religion, and society as a whole? Who are the major players and their roles, what are the stakes? The lecture series is based on diverse contributors from Fribourg University and external experts.

Seminar 1   Methods in studies of the digital ociety (3ECTS credits)
This seminar provides the students with an introduction to the methodological skills required to successfully engage with the programme and be adequately prepared for specific case studies in the module. This includes digital ethnography, network analysis, video analysis, and communication analysis of social media in relation to established social science methods.

Module 2 (DSS 2) with 15 ECTS credits
Theories and Case Studies

Module 2 offers a series of courses that allow students to explore specific topics, case studies and theories that correspond to current trends and public debates. These courses follow a flexible structure that is common in the social sciences and humanities. The courses offer a wide range of study topics to appeal to different student groups and interests. More importantly, given the rapid development of digital technologies, the aim is to keep the courses open and flexible. For this reason, the courses in Module 1 are fixed and offered every year while the courses in Module 2 alternate to always allow room for new study topics.

Description:
The objective of Module 2 is to allow the students to deepen their knowledge of certain theories, case studies and issues related to the digital society using empirical research methods. The module focuses on the macro level (society), the meso level (institutions) and how these influence the micro level of digital practices. Some courses focus on the transformation of the society from a longitudinal perspective and how this affects and is driven by different social groups and institutions. Further courses consider how individual practices are embedded in higher level contexts. Students are required to prepare a research paper on a specific issue that has been covered in one of the courses.

✦ 3 lectures or seminars focused on specific transformations/social groups or on specific theoretical approaches (3 x 3 ECTS credits).
These lectures and seminars may deal specifically with digital law; the ethics of robotics and artificial intelligence; hacking and cybersecurity; digital infrastructures; democracy and digital media; digital religion; the digital divide and social participation; digital communication; surveillance, control, and censorship; computer games; ethnography of software engineers and hackers; education and digital inequality and so on.
✦ 1 research paper related to a seminar (6 ECTS credits)

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8. Exams

The course exams correspond to the modalities set by the faculty hosting the course.

8.1 General conditions

The awarding of credits - according to the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) - is based on the students' academic performance within the framework of teaching units. One ECTS credit point corresponds to a work performance of approx. 30 hours. ECTS credits are only validated if the student's performance record in the teaching unit has been evaluated and judged to have been sufficient as per the course requirements.

Credits for teaching units:

- *lectures* of 2 hours per week per semester correspond to 3 ECTS credits. They aim to provide general knowledge. The form of learning is mainly passive.

- *seminars* of 2 hours per week per semester correspond to 3 ECTS credits. They enable specific topics to be studied in depth and practical skills to be acquired. The teaching and learning format is interactive.

- *research papers* correspond to 6 ECTS credits. They are linked to the attendance of a seminar, as specified above.

8.2 Evaluation of academic performance

The examination modalities are set by the faculty that hosts the course. The general principles for the evaluation of academic performance are stipulated in the following documents:

- *Reglement vom 8. März 2018 zur Erlangung des Bachelors und des Masters an der Philosophischen Fakultät* of the University of Fribourg;

- *Reglement vom 27. September 2021 für den Erwerb der Master an der Wirtschafts- und Sozialwissenschaftlichen Fakultät* of the University of Fribourg;

- *Reglement vom 6. April 2020 für die Erlangung der Bachelor of Science und der Master of Science* of the Faculty of Science and Medicine of the University of Fribourg.

In this context, the provisions for examination fees must be observed, in accordance with the following regulations:

- *Richtlinien vom 24. September 2020 über Prüfungsgebühren und administrative Abgaben* of the Faculty of Humanities of the of the University of Fribourg;

- *Richtlinien vom 25. Mai 2020 betreffend Gebühren der Mathematisch- Naturwissenschaftlichen und Medizinischen Fakultät;*

- *Reglement vom 27. September 2021 über die Organisation des Studiums und der Examina an der Wirtschafts- und Sozialwissenschaftlichen Fakultät der Universität Freiburg*.

Students register on the university web portal by the stated deadline.

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Each teaching unit is evaluated separately. The evaluation modalities are communicated by the teaching staff and are mandatory. The evaluation methods are diverse: written examination, oral examination, written paper, oral presentation, group work, etc. Research papers are usually required as part of a seminar.

Graded examinations and written papers are graded on a scale of 1 to 6, with 6 being the highest grade. Scores from 6 to 4 indicate a successfully passed exam. Scores below 4 constitute a failed exam grade.

Evaluations that are not graded are assessed by means of "pass" / "fail" grades.

The courses within each module are developed at the beginning of the academic year. The information is made available to the students via the university web portal.

8.3 Repetitions and failing grades

All teaching units must be successfully completed (minimum grade 4). An insufficient or failed exam grade constitutes a failed course.

The examination modalities are set in the specific regulations by each faculty that hosts that the course (non-attendance, number of exam retakes, etc.). The dates of the exams are announced during the semester.

The same rules apply in principle to failing grades in written papers as well as oral presentations. The modalities for retakes or substitutions are set by the teaching staff on a case-by-case basis and communicated accordingly to the students.

For other courses, the options to repeat a course in case of a failing grade are set by the teaching staff and communicated to the students.

8.4 Definitive failure

Students who receive a definite failure in the 4 obligatory lectures of Module 1 cannot continue their studies in the minor programme (definitive failure of the minor programme *Digital Society* with 30 ECTS credits). All other courses can in principle be substituted by other courses in case of a definite failure.

8.5 Final grade

The final grade of the minor programme *Digital Society* with 30 ECTS credits is composed of the average of the module grades. The module grades are composed of the average of the individual course grades in that module.

9. Effective date

This study plan comes into effect at the beginning of the autumn semester 2023.

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10. Inter-university agreements and the BENEFRI network

Students enrolled in the Digital Society minor programme for 30 ECTS credits may attend external courses at the Universities of Bern, Neuchâtel or another university for a maximum of 6 ECTS credits.

To recognize these external courses and transfer the credits to the *Digital Society* minor programme students must submit an application to their study counsellors at the latest by the last day of the semester preceding the semester during which students wish to attended a course at the external university. Students are responsible for contacting the external university and for complying with the regulations of the course they have selected.

To transfer the credits earned at other universities, students must submit the relevant documents directly to the secretariat.

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