



Social Work PhD programme

Open seminars
Fall Semester 2025-2026

Hes·so
Haute Ecole Spécialisée
de Suisse occidentale

n|w Fachhochschule Nordwestschweiz
Hochschule für Soziale Arbeit
swissuniversities



General information

Audience

The ITTS *seminars* and *workshops* are each open to specific publics. If nothing else is mentioned, they are open to:

- Scientific collaborators in UAS/ HES/ FH Social work with a MA
- Registered PhD students (in Switzerland and abroad)
- Notified future PhD student of the ITTS

Registration procedure and fees

You may inform our administration service messagerie.itts@unine.ch which seminar or workshop you would like to attend. Please respect the deadlines of the chosen seminar or workshop.

For *seminars*, additional steps are required (except from UniNE students):

- PhD students & students from universities in French-speaking Switzerland (UniGE, UniL, UniFR, UniBE) need to register via the mobility program of their home institution (BENEFRI, Triangle Azur). Their participation is free of charge. Please note that the registration deadlines via those programs may differ.
- PhD students & students from HES-SO & FHNW will need to fill in a document provided by messagerie.itts@unine.ch, and provide the required documents. Their participation is free of charge.
- All other participants and PhD students may enroll as auditor at the University of Neuchâtel. Fees will apply. More information on this page: <https://www.unine.ch/admission/auditrices-et-auditeurs/>

The *workshops* are free of charge.

ECTS and validation

UniNE, BENEFRI, Triangle Azur, HES-SO, and FHNW participants can earn ECTS upon validation of the seminars.

Auditor students will receive a certificate of attendance. They may choose to participate in the examinations and receive a certificate for a successful examination, but no ECTS.

For future PhD students at the ITTS, the successfully passed seminars can be validated as equivalences (up to 6 ECTS) once they have officially enrolled.

Practical information

Seminars and workshops are held in Neuchâtel and taught in English. Attendance is *in person* only.

For all other questions you may contact ophelie.bidet@unine.ch



Program of Fall Semester 2025-2026

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<i>Current Issues in Social Work</i> Law & Social Work: (In)visible Boundaries, Tensions, and Advocacy	Tuesday January 20 to Friday January 23 2026 (full days, 9h15-17h15)	12

FULLY BOOKED

Possibility of a second date if there are enough requests!
Please announce your interest to
messagerie.itts@unine.ch

*Workshop opened to all PhD & MA students
from UniNE, HES-SO & FHNW*

Using AI Tools in Academic Writing

by **Sara Cotelli Kureth**

Titular professor, Language Centre/ILCF, UniNE

Thursday September 18th, 14h30-17h00

Room D59, Ave. 1er mars 26, University of Neuchâtel
in person only

Registration

By e-mail to messagerie.itts@unine.ch
until Monday September 15th

Using AI Tools in Academic Writing

by **Sara Cotelli Kureth**

Titular professor, Language Centre/ILCF, UniNE

Thursday **September 18th, 14h30-17h00**

Room D59, Ave. 1er mars 26, University of Neuchâtel

Among other AI tools, this workshop will help you understand how ChatGPT and other Generative AI tools work and how these can help you for your academic writing. If not used critically, these tools can be detrimental to the writing process. In order to enhance critical thinking and analytical skills, it is crucial to be transparent about the strengths, purpose and limitations of AI. It does not replace human thinking, but can help for some precise tasks and thus should not be banned. A discussion will allow students and users to develop a culture of trust and academic integrity.

At the end of this workshop, you will:

- Understand how ChatGPT and other tools for writing work, know their strengths and their pitfalls
- Know which tool to use to help with your academic writing

Transferable skills:

- Develop a critical understanding of AI tools
- Develop standards of ethics in academic integrity

Audience:

This workshop is opened to all PhD and MA students from UniNE, HES-SO & FHNW. Attendance is *in person only*.

Registration:

Registration by e-mail to messagerie.itts@unine.ch until Monday September 15th. This workshop is free of charge.



*Workshop opened to all PhD students
from UniNE, HES-SO & FHNW*

Why am I doing a PhD? **Impact of Motivations, Expectations and Career Goals on Doctoral Journeys**

by **Isabelle Skakni**
Head of Researcher Career Development, HES-SO

Friday October 31st, 14h00-17h00
Room D59, Ave. 1er mars 26, University of Neuchâtel
in person only

Registration
By e-mail to messagerie.itts@unine.ch
until Wednesday October 15th

Why am I doing a PhD? **Impact of Motivations, Expectations and Career Goals on Doctoral Journeys**

by **Isabelle Skakni**
Head of Researcher Career Development, HES-SO

Friday October 31st, 14h00-17h00
Room D59, Ave. 1er mars 26, University of Neuchâtel

This research-based workshop aims to provide a rare opportunity to take stock of your doctoral journey and share your experience with peers with similar interests and concerns. Through group discussions and brief written and visual exercises, I will guide you to reflect upon your motivations for undertaking doctoral studies, your expectations for the journey, and the tricky exercise of projecting yourself into the post PhD stage.

At the end of this workshop, you will:

- be more aware of the influence that your goals and expectations have on your overall doctoral journey
- take a realistic look at your career path and opportunities after the PhD
- create a sense of community with other doctoral students experiencing situations like yours

Transferable skills:

- discuss complex issues
- generate new ideas
- develop a contact network
- plan career objectives

Audience and registration:

This workshop is opened to all PhD students from UniNE, HES-SO & FHNW. Attendance is in person only.
Registration by e-mail to messagerie.itts@unine.ch until October 15th.
This workshop is free of charge.

Research design for social work research

Teaching Team

Swetha Rao Dhananka (HETS-FR)

Teaching Periods

Friday, 3 October, 13:45-17h15

Friday, 14 November, 13:45-17h15

Venue

Room B29, Main building, Ave. du 1er mars, 26 University of Neuchâtel.

Content

The aim of this workshop is to equip the students with methodological knowledge, patterns of thought and concrete application to elaborate their own research design for their PhD study.

Research design is the “glue” that holds the theoretical and empirical parts of the research together. It structures the research, builds its coherence and presents a roadmap for its execution. It is an arrangement of conditions that allows to control variance and to conceive data collection and analysis in a manner that presents a logical basis for countless decisions with adequate feasibility and procedure.

In this workshop students will learn to appreciate the inherent logic behind each research design that will be collectively derived from concrete examples and consolidated in class. They will acquaint themselves with different types of research designs along with their related control pathways and will discuss the adequateness of each, to certain types of research questions, while considering social science research quality criteria. The “research onion” as a tool for building coherence will be discussed and will represent a roadmap to situate ones research.

In particular we will delve into the case study research design widely used in social work research and discuss the central notion of comparison.

Forms of evaluation

Based on a research question, submit 1-3 A4 pages until the 15.12.2025:

- graphically representing the (potential) research design
- situating the research question in a possible theoretical framework, or at least in a body of literature
- indicating the constants, the variables / the cases
- discussing the type of control and the comparative axis
- arguing the pertinence of the research design for the research question, based on the quality criteria
- discussing potential biases
- indicating potential data-gathering methods

Documentation

Brady H., Collier B. (2004). Rethinking Social Inquiry. Diverse Tools, Shared Standards. Rowman & Littlefield

Campbell A., Taylor B.J, McGlade A. (2016). Research Design in Social Work: Qualitative and Quantitative Methods. Sage Publications

Stinchcombe A.L. (2005). The Logic of Social Research. The University of Chicago Press

Yin R.K. (2009). Case Study Research. Design and Method. Sage Publications

Prerequisites

Some coursework in research methodology or research experience is of advantage.

Teaching modality

This seminar is conducted as a workshop and includes moments of collective reflection moderated by the faculty and consolidated in class with support of concrete case studies and theoretical inputs. The discussed thinking patterns and designs are directly applied to students' research projects. On the second day time is reserved to discuss 1-2 student projects.

Learning objectives

- Understand the purpose of elaborating a research design
- Be familiar with the “research onion” to build coherence
- Be familiar with different types of research design and know to argue the adequateness of each in relation to particular types of research questions
- Understand the centrality of comparison to grasp co-variation and causality
- Distinguish variables, constants and different types of case constellations
- Consider social science research quality criteria when elaborating a research design

Audience and registration

This workshop is open to PhD students in social work and social sciences. Maximum 12 participants.

Registration by e-mail to messagerie.itts@unine.ch until September 24th.

Social Work Theories: epistemologies, classics and current issues (3 ECTS)

Teaching periods

Thursday 6 November & Friday 7 November (9h15-17h15)

Wednesday 3 December & Thursday 4 December (9h15-17h15)

Teaching team

Barbara Waldis, Professor ITTS, UniNE

& according to each day's program

Venue

University of Neuchâtel, Main building, Avenue du 1er mars 26

Thursday 6 November & Thursday 4 December: Room C43

Friday 7 November & Wednesday 3 December: Room B29

Content of the seminar

Social Work can be considered an action-oriented discipline. Yet the meaning and the implementation of this affirmation needs to be questioned as they depend on traditions of specific, language and approach based scientific communities and on historical as well as socio- and geopolitical positions. The scope of the seminar is to look at this affirmation about social work as from different disciplinary perspectives.

Starting with the anthropological lens on social work as an action-oriented discipline, based on the concept of situated knowledge, the participants will receive inputs by experts, read, present and discuss key texts on current, innovative social work theory; compare epistemological positions of social work founder texts (Canada, France, Germany, Switzerland, UK and USA), on some major disciplinary traditions (community studies, social pedagogy, social welfare, social work) and current innovative orientations (critical social work, global social work, ecological social work).

For academic and professional reasons, it is crucial be able to argue how social action is entangled with professional practice of intervention and of research in social work. Based on major works of social work theories, the least we can affirm is that knowledge is situated, entangled in a power structured field. For the constitution of a scientific community we need to stipulate that understanding different positions is a possible endeavour.

- How do current positions of social work as a scientific discipline conceive of social work as an action science, be it in Anglo-Saxon, French or German scientific communities?
- How do they differ and what historical, disciplinary reasons can be given for it?
- How do the different scholars and social work practitioners create the link between research field and object, social work interventions, user, scientific knowledge and discovery?
- Where do different social work perspectives set the focus: on social problems, on concepts, on methods, on political or scientific contexts?

Form of evaluation

Internal evaluation. Read, summarize and critically assess at least six theoretical key texts, present your results at least on three occasions during the seminar. Organize, chair an event and a discussion with invited experts.

Learning outcomes

At the end of this seminar, the participants will be able to:

- Critically evaluate foundational texts in social work theory;
- Explain the development of specific social work theories from a comparative perspective;
- Describe the societal context of social work theory development in Switzerland;
- Distinguish schools of thought in social work in relation with social work as action science;
- Identify the relevance of theoretical approaches and concepts to professional practice.

Transferable skills

At the end of this seminar, the participants will be able to:

- Apply the concept of situated knowledge when dealing with theories;
- Include the societal context in theory development;
- Identify the relevance of a theoretical approach for a specific research question.

Pre-condition and registration

Registration as a PhD student at the ITTS, a Swiss university or as auditor in the perspective of being a future PhD student of the ITTS.

Registration at messagerie.itts@unine.ch until October 12.

Documentation & literature

All the documentation will be available on Moodle.

Making Sense of Data: An Introduction to Quantitative Reasoning in Social Sciences (3 ECTS)

Teaching periods

Fridays 17.10.2025 (am), 31.10.2025 (am), 14.11.2025 (am), 28.11.2025 (fd), 12.12.2025 (fd)
(am = half-day 09:15–12:45; fd = full-day 09:15–17:15)

Venue

Main Building, University of Neuchâtel, Avenue du 1er Mars 26
17.10.2025 + 14.11.2025 + 28.11.2025 + 12.12.2025: Room B29; 31.10.2025: Room D59

Teaching team

Michaela Slotwinski, Assistant Professor, ITTS, UniNE, & Teaching Assistant

Content of the lecture

In a data-driven world, the ability to think clearly and critically about quantitative information is essential. Quantitative reasoning and the capacity to assess quantitative claims are crucial not only in traditionally data-focused fields but also in broader social, political, and economic contexts.

This course is explicitly designed as an introductory course for students without prior experience in quantitative methods. It is not suitable for students with more advanced backgrounds in the subject.

The course introduces students to key tools of quantitative data analysis in the social sciences. It aims to build intuitive understanding first, using formal or technical concepts only where absolutely necessary. It also serves as a foundation for students who may wish to pursue more advanced methods courses later.

The course has three primary goals: To lower the barrier to reading and understanding quantitative studies and encourage students to consider conducting their own quantitative analyses. To introduce basic statistical models used by researchers and policymakers to answer social, political, and economic questions. To equip students with the foundation needed to apply one or more of the discussed techniques in their thesis or dissertation.

By the end of the course, students will be able to:

- Understand some core quantitative tools used in social science research (descriptive analysis, hypothesis testing, regression, experimental methods)
- Read and interpret quantitative studies
- Conduct basic data analysis using the statistical software Stata
- Apply introductory quantitative methods in their academic and professional work

Form of evaluation

The examination takes place during the lecture (Examen Intermédiaire).

- 15%: Homework assignments and participation throughout the semester.
- 75%: Final in-person written examination during the last lecture.

Transferable skills

- Critical evaluation of research methodology
- Use of appropriate technical language in reading, analyzing, and presenting quantitative research
- Basic quantitative analysis of social phenomena
- Introductory coding skills

Pre-condition and registration

No prior knowledge is required. Open to: Registered PhD students (ITTS and others); Registered Master's students; Notified future PhD students of the ITTS

Registration at messagerie.itts@unine.ch until **September 15 2025**.

Documentation & literature

All course materials will be made available on Moodle.

Current Issues in social work seminar (3ECTS)

Law & Social Work: (In)visible Boundaries, Tensions, and Advocacy

Dates

Tuesday January 20th to Friday January 23rd 2026 (full days, 9h15 – 17h15)

Organizing team

Stefanie Kurt, Prof. PhD in Law, HES-SO Valais-Wallis, Institute for Social Work, Sierre/Siders, stefanie.kurt@hevs.ch

Venue

Room D59, Main building, University of Neuchâtel, Avenue du 1er mars 26

Content

The relationship between law and social work is inherently complex, shaped by overlapping mandates, ethical dilemmas, and power dynamics. Whether conceptualized as collaborative, conflicting, or complementary, legal frameworks inevitably influence the everyday realities of social work practice and sometimes social work research. These frameworks may be explicit - as in child protection, migration, or social welfare law - or more subtly embedded in institutional procedures, organizational cultures, and bureaucratic decision-making.

This four-day seminar critically examines how legal norms intersect with social work, also as a site of social struggle. It draws attention to the often (in)visible ways in which law operates in practice and invites participants to explore how social work research positions within, against, and beyond legal frameworks.

Researchers from different disciplines will intervene and discuss the following broader questions:

- What is the law? How and by whom is law created? How can social work take a stand in this process?
- How does International, European, Regional, National legal framework intersect? What does this entail for social work?
- How and to what extent is the law visible or invisible in social work contexts and research?
- How do social workers engage with the law - as implementers, interpreters, negotiators, or challengers?
- How do legal frameworks reproduce, reinforce, or mitigate structural inequalities in social work practice?
- How do social workers defend or challenge policies and laws? What legal tensions arise when professional values clash with statutory duties or state imperatives?

The seminar invites PhD students to reflect critically on how law shapes professional discretion, client relationships, and strategies of advocacy and resistance. Through presentations, law and case-law analysis, group work and discussions, participants will develop a deeper understanding of the (in)visible legal dimensions of their own research in social work.



Assessment:

Active participation during the seminar.

Submission of a 3-page written reflection on how law is embedded in your PhD project and how you intend to approach (possible) legal questions critically. The 3-page work can be improved once.

Deadline: 06.02.2026 Grade: Pass/Fail