



Social Work PhD programme

Seminars Fall Semester 2025-2026

Hes·so
Haute Ecole Spécialisée
de Suisse occidentale

n|w Fachhochschule Nordwestschweiz
Hochschule für Soziale Arbeit
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Program of Fall Semester 2025-2026

Seminars	Dates	Page
PhD colloquium	Friday September 26 (full day 9h15-17h15)	X
Starting a PhD thesis: entering the PhD process	Thursday September 18 (full day 9h15-17h15) Friday January 30 2026 (full day 9h15-17h15)	3
Social work research methods: developing a PhD project	Friday September 19 (full day 9h15-17h15) Friday October 3 (9h15-12h45) Friday October 17 (13h45-17h15) Friday October 31 (13h45-17h15) Friday November 14 (13h45-17h15)	4
Social Work Theories: epistemologies, classics and current issues	Thursday November 6 & Friday November 7 (full days 9h15-17h15), Wednesday December 3 & Thursday December 4 (full days 9h15-17h15)	6
Making Sense of Data: An introduction to quantitative reasoning in social sciences	Friday October 17 (9h15-12h45) Friday October 31 (9h15-12h45) Friday November 14 (9h15-12h45) Friday November 28 (full day 9h15-17h15) Friday December 12 (full day 9h15-17h15)	8
<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)	10



Starting a PhD & entering the PhD process (1.5 ECTS, mandatory)

Teaching periods

Thursday 18 September 2025; Friday 30 January 2026; 9h15 – 17h15

Teaching team

Barbara Waldis, ITTS, UniNE

Michaela Slotwinski, ITTS, UniNE

Sara Cotelli Kureth ILCF, UniNE

Venue

Main Building, University of Neuchâtel, Avenue du 1er Mars 26

Thursday 18 September: room C43; Friday 30 January: room B29 (provisional)

Content of the seminar

This seminar is mandatory for all doctoral students of the ITTS at the beginning of their PhD process. Starting a PhD project requires the sharpening of diverse professional and scientific skills. Beyond the development of a precise research question and a literature review, it implies managing the planning of a project and its long-term administration, the consideration of the social and financial environment, as well as the organization of daily scientific work. During the PhD process it implies the refinement of practice in scientific writing, the development of a scientific network, the presentation of the PhD work in progress at conferences and the development of publication strategies.

This doctoral seminar consists of a first day with the planning and the organization of a PhD thesis (Barbara Waldis, ITTS), and a workshop on the use of AI tools in academic writing (Sara Cotelli Kureth, ILCF, UniNE).

The second day, at the end of the fall semester, you will present a first version of your PhD project (Barbara Waldis, Michaela Slotwinski, ITTS).

Form of teaching

Workshop, discussions, elaboration and presentation of texts

Form of evaluation

Internal evaluation: Presentation and discussion of the first version of your PhD project (30 January 2026).

Learning outcomes

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

- Articulate the conceptual framework of your PhD at the ITTS
- 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
- Present and critically discuss your PhD project

Transferable skills

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

- Prepare a plan for a scientific research project
- Present and defend a research project
- Develop a critical understanding of AI tools
- Develop standards of ethics in academic integrity

Pre-condition

Registration as a PhD student at the ITTS.

Documentation & literature

All the documentation will be available on Moodle on the first day of the seminar.

Social work research methods: developing a PhD project (3 ECTS)

Barbara Waldis ITTS UniNE, Swetha Rao Dhananka UAS Western Switzerland SW FR, Isabelle Skakni, UAS Western Switzerland

Teaching periods

Friday 19 September, Friday 03 October: full day (09h15-17h15)

Friday 17 October, Friday 31 October, Friday 14 November: pm (13h30-17h15)

Teaching team

Barbara Waldis, ITTS UniNE;

Swetha Rao Dhananka, UAS Western Switzerland, SW Fribourg

Isabelle Skakni, UAS Western Switzerland

Marta Marques, Assistant ITTS UniNE

Venue

UniNE main building, Ave. 1^{er} mars 26, University of Neuchâtel

19 September & 3 October: room B29; 31 October: room D59; 14 November: room B29

Content of the seminar

How to elaborate a PhD project? This is the first key question of this course. How to grasp the gaps in the existing literature on a specific topic? How to consider social work practice relating to the PhD subject? How to formulate a research problem and research goals? Which methodology allows best to find answers to the research questions? How about different techniques for literature research? What is specific for social work in terms of participation and research ethics?

The seminar proposes inputs, application of different working tools, communities of practice, and presentation of PhD students and their PhD project. As much as possible PhD students should work and progress on their own project. The seminar is divided into the following parts:

B Waldis (19 September, 3 October am; 17 October pm): The specificity of social work research as an action science asks for a disciplinary bound reflection and it does entail theoretical, conceptual, empirical and professional orientation for the PhD project. As social work builds upon egalitarian collaboration with users and their perspectives, ethical questions of participation are key for research.

B. Waldis / M. Marques (19 September pm): Together with all the existing electronic means and programs, literature research becomes a highly complex and delicate issue. A (systematic or scoping) literature review and the state of the art for the PhD project are intrinsically connected with the formulation of the research questions and influence significantly the quality of the research design.

S Rao Dhananka (3 October & 14 November pm): Special attention is given to the question of internal cohesion, the research design. The aim of this part is to equip the PhD 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 the variance and to conceive data collection and analysis in a manner that presents a logical basis for countless decisions with adequate feasibility and procedure.

I Skakni (31 October pm) : This research-based workshop aims to provide a rare opportunity to take stock of your doctoral journey and shore 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.

Form of teaching

Presentations, discussions, groupwork, guided reflection to directly apply lessons to your own project

Form of evaluation

Internal evaluation: Critical readings & assessing, discussions, presentations, Presentation and discussion of first PhD project version, Friday 30 January 2026, submission deadline for the project Friday 16 January 2026

General learning outcomes

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

- Construct a comprehensive literature research
- Write a literature review
- Formulate research problems and questions
- Select an appropriate empirical field and research method aligned with the research question
- Develop a preliminary comprehensive research design for the PhD project
- Be aware of your goals and expectations for your PhD process
- Take a realistic look at your career path and opportunities after the PhD

Transferable skills

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

- Integrate theoretical frameworks with empirical research design in a coherent manner.
- Choose an empirical field and research methods aligned with the research question
- Plan career objectives and develop a contact network

Pre-condition

Registration as a PhD student at the ITTS

Documentation & literature

All the documentation will be available on Moodle.

Date	Topic
Friday, 19 September, am, B. Waldis	Social work research & literature research
Friday, 19 September, pm, B. Waldis, M. Marques	Systematic literature review, tools for literature research
Friday, 3 October, am B. Waldis	Nexus literature review & problem formulation
Friday, 3 October, pm, S. Rao Dhananka	Research Design I
Friday, 17 October, pm B. Waldis	Ethics and Participation in social work research
Friday 31 October, pm, I. Skakni	Why am I doing a PhD?
Friday, 14 November, pm, S. Rao Dhananka	Research design II

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

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

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