

Doctoral Seminar

Academic year 2026-2027

Syllabus

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Introduction

Welcome to the Doctoral seminar!

Most of you are starting their PhD and it is a real pleasure for me to accompany you in the beginning of this journey. Indeed, doing a PhD is undertaking a journey. You will have ups and downs, you will meet friends and supporting people along the way, you will sometimes feel very lonely, you will be sometimes discouraged by the difficulties and the workload, you will sometimes be triggered by the challenges that lie in front of you, you will sometimes feel proud of what you accomplish. But most importantly, you will learn! Learn about a specific topic, about methods, about research, and even about yourself.

This seminar is part of the Core learning of the Doctoral school in Management and is worth 10 credits. This means that the workload is quite heavy and intense. While it is possible (and challenging) to succeed the course in one year, the possibility to spread it over two years exists.

My intention is not to deliver you with *The* method on how to develop and publish a paper – in my opinion, there is not such a thing as one best way and I don't pretend to know everything about the writing and publication process – but to guide and accompany you in this process, while also giving you some tools to grow as a researcher and to survive the doctoral journey.

I would also like to stress the importance of being surrounded by peers as a PhD student. This doctoral seminar is one of several occasions for you to bond with other comrades in fortune and create a cohort feeling, beyond your respective research teams and centres.

Finally, do never hesitate to make suggestions on how to improve the seminar, to suggest topics that should be discussed, to provide feedback to one another, to ask for feedback, etc. We all learn through interacting with others.

Looking forward to making part of your doctoral journey together!

Frédéric

Objectives

The general objective of the Doctoral seminar is to familiarize you with the scientific method and the writing of scientific articles. It also intends to accompany you in finding your way while taking your first steps in the academic world.

More specifically, this course aims to develop your doctoral student's skills in structuring, positioning, and presenting your doctoral thesis project within the research community. This involves among others structuring and planning your research work, designing your research questions, adopting relevant theoretical and methodological tools, identifying meaningful contributions, and designing relevant publication strategies.

The course intends to improve your ability to:

- structure and plan your doctoral project
- position your project within your research community
- formulate a clear research question
- draft an appealing literature review
- make theoretical and methodological choices
- present and discuss research findings
- understand how to identify research contributions
- design relevant publication and diffusion strategies
- develop your critical thinking
- make explicit and justify your choices
- strengthen your writing and presentation capacity

Course material

The seminar is based on a broad variety of material, among others on the following book, which participants can but do not need to acquire:

Saunders, M. N. K., Thornhill, A., & Lewis, P. (2019), *Research Methods for Business Students*, Harlow: Pearson.

Compulsory readings are posted on Lola, the online platform of HEC Liège, by session and identified as such. Additional resources are either posted or referred to on Lola.

Expectations and evaluation

The seminar takes place in English. Students are expected to have a good command of English to participate. The assignments can be written in English or in French. However, I would like to stress here that the main vehicle for diffusion of knowledge is now English – whether we like it or not – and I therefore strongly encourage you to take advantage of this course to practice your English writing skills.

The course consists of presentations by the instructor, interactive class discussions in which **active participation** is required, and group exercises. It is **absolutely necessary to prepare**

and submit the assignments on Lola on time in order to attend the classes with prepared contents and concrete examples. Some prior readings are expected for class discussion. Substantial time will be devoted to the presentation and discussion of doctoral students' ongoing research projects and the course settings are designed to allow for constructive feedback.

The course grade will be determined by a set of intermediary assignments (40%) as well as by a final work (50%) and its presentation (10%).

Final work

The final objective of the seminar is to lead you to **writing an original paper in a perspective of scientific publication**. As the Doctoral seminar aims to familiarize you with the scientific process and the writing of academic articles, the paper you will be working on and submitting should be a sole author article (or possibly co-authored with your supervisor, but not with other doctoral students). The research theme of the paper can be linked to any Business and Management studies domain.

The paper should be maximum 12,000 words long (all included) and should follow the formatting guidelines of the targeted journal (with regard to citations, etc.).

Prepare also the abstract and a cover letter mentioning the fit with the targeted journal.

The paper is to be uploaded on Lola before 20 May 2027. Students who do not submit then or if the text does not meet the minimum expectations, a new version can be submitted for the re-sit in September, with the deadline on 20 August 2027.

A draft version can be sent by March 30 and discussed with the instructor in April during one-to-one appointments (not mandatory).

Presentation of the final work

This work will be presented orally (15 minutes presentation). Each student will play the role of discussant for another student (5 minutes). Then, there will be a moment for discussion (Q&As)

Your grade for the presentation will be based:

- on your presentation skills (visual support and oral presentation skills),
- your ability to deal with the questions asked, and
- the way you discussed another student's paper.

Intermediary assignments

- **Assignment 1** (deadline: 30 October 2026, 10%): Formulate the (tentative) overarching research question of your dissertation. If you wish, you can add a maximum of 3 sub-questions. Explain and argue in one page maximum (references excluded) why this research question is relevant and interesting for your research field.
- **Assignment 2** (deadline: 20 January 2027, 10%): Hand in a project of paper (3 pages maximum, single interline, with a bibliography of 15 peer-reviewed articles). This project

should be presented in maximum 10 minutes during the class session of 27-29 January, with feedback from the instructor and from the fellow students.

- **Assignment 3** (deadline: 20 January 2027, 10%): Interview a senior scholar in your field about his/her publication experience, including good and bad surprises ; ask for a cover letter and a response letter to reviewers ; and ask about his/her publication strategy recommendations for doctoral students. Write a synthesis of this interview and your reflections (what surprised you, what questioned you, what was reassuring, etc.) about this interview and the documents that you were provided with in maximum 5 pages.
- **Assignment 4** (deadline: 15 April 2027: 10%): Write a review (aka referee report) of maximum 3 pages on one of the proposed articles (as if you were reviewer for a journal)

The assignments are to be uploaded on Lola prior to the deadline midnight. They will serve as support for the discussions in class (except assignment 4).

A final ungraded assignment consists in writing a letter to your future self. This letter will be kept sealed and given back to you on the day of your PhD defense or when you quit the doctoral trajectory. A moment to write the letter will be given during the final session, but if you need more time, you can give it back on the day of the final presentations.

Preparatory work

Prior to the 4-6 November session:

- Prepare the elevator pitch of your research (see guidelines on Lola)
- Read Chapter 4 of Saunders + another article based on your field (see on Lola)
- Find a set of 5 relevant (ideally empirical) papers from your field (not necessary about your research topic) and that you consider of good quality. Please check that they are coming from a journal that is ranked A+, A, B or C from HEC Liege Journal Guide (see https://www.hec.uliege.be/cms/c_8631209/fr/hec-liege-academic-journal-guide-march-2025?details=true), Read them and re-read them with much attention to be able to navigate in and among them very easily during class as we will analyse their structure and the way different parts of it are built.

Prior to the 27-29 January session:

- Watch the movie Paywall and sum up your surprises and questions about the publication process and industry.
- Read and be prepared to present the key messages of 2 selected papers (see on Lola).

Course attendance and participation

Attendance is required and active participation strongly encouraged if you want to make the most of this seminar. However, I expect intrinsic motivation to improve scientific skills for a starting PhD student high enough to make any attendance list or participation grade unnecessary. I truly hope you won't prove me wrong.

As indicated above, it is crucial that you prepare the assignments in advance. Our in-class discussions will rest on this preparation.

The course is richer from what you share with your fellow PhD students. On Lola, there is a **Wiki** named 'Shared resources' to which you are encouraged to contribute. Post your recommendations for apps, websites, software, readings on (part of) the research/doctoral/publication process, etc.

Also, as this course intends to assist you in the beginning of your doctoral journey, I will do my best to address your questions on this journey. Don't hesitate to ask them during class, during breaks, or via email if this is more convenient for you.

Planning (order of topics subject to change within a class period)

Date Room	Main theme/objectives
30/10	<i>Deadline Assignment 1</i>
04/11 9.30 am 5 pm N1d – 2/81c	Introduction to the course Positioning yourself as a researcher Lunch together (sandwiches provided) Positioning your research and identifying gaps Formulating a research question Acknowledging the diversity of worldviews
05/11 12.30 pm 5 pm N1d 5/81c	Reading a paper and its structure Crafting a literature review Understanding the publication process (part 1) Defining a research design Identifying specific issues in data collection (part 1)
06/11 9.30 am 12.30 pm N1a 2/24	Identifying specific issues in data collection (part 2) Analysing data Reporting and discussing findings
20/01	<i>Deadline Assignments 2 & 3</i>
27/01 9.30 am 12.30 pm tbd	Presentation of paper projects
28/01 9.30 am 12.30 pm / 1.30 pm 5.30 pm tbd	Crafting the introduction Living the PhD life Research integrity and data management Writing a review
29/01 9.30 am	Understanding the publication/peer-review process (part 2)

12.30 pm / 1.30 pm 3.30 pm tbd	Being an impactful researcher Writing a letter to one's future self
15/04	<i>Deadline Assignment 4</i>
20/05	<i>Deadline Final paper (1st sit)</i>
04/06	Presentation Final papers (1 st sit)
20/08	<i>Deadline Final paper (re-sit)</i>
27/08	Presentation Final paper (re-sit)