

Empirical Research in the Moral Sciences: Qualitative Methods (A006801)

Course size *(nominal values; actual values may depend on programme)*

Credits 7.0

Study time 210 h

Course offerings in academic year 2026-2027

A (Year)

Dutch

Gent

Lecturers in academic year 2026-2027

Provoost, Veerle

LW01

lecturer-in-charge

Offered in the following programmes in 2026-2027

[Bachelor of Arts in Moral Sciences](#)

crdts

7

offering

A

Teaching languages

Dutch

Keywords

Moral research, moral experience, moral judgement, moral attitudes, discourse analysis, systematic review, research proposal, interview guide construction, qualitative research, focus groups, interviews, narrative analysis, grounded theory, interpretative phenomenological analysis, data-analysis, thematic analysis, MAXQDA, interview training

Position of the course

This advanced course teaches students how to select and use research methods of moral science, in particular regarding the collection and analysis of qualitative data concerning moral experiences, moral perception, moral views, and judgments.

Contents

The content and lessons consist of two main assignments:

- 1 A research proposal for an empirical study on a topic related to moral sciences, starting from a research question formulated by the student. In addition to the preparatory work and various feedback moments, two class sessions are allocated for the actual writing process. Students will work on the assignment using on-campus computers without access to generative AI tools.
- 2 A qualitative study or an experiment (group work) in collaboration with a local partner organization: formulate a research question, prepare the forms for the ethics committee, conduct interviews, transcribe the interviews, analyse the data using MAXQDA, synthesize and present the results.

Assignment 1 and 2 are preceded by advanced research seminars where the steps to be taken are explained in detail. In the following lessons, practical tips for using specific software will be given. Students present their work to fellow students at various times. There is always room for discussion and feedback.

Students are guided through all steps of working on these assignments either individually or in small groups. This may be during online sessions. Results of these assignments will be presented (online) to peers. During and after these presentations students will be asked to participate in the discussion and give feedback to their peers.

In light of the COVID-19 crisis, most of the above can also be offered in online format. There will be ample opportunity for intensive (online) guidance and support, both individual as well as in small groups.

Initial competences

- To have successfully completed the course 'Statistics' or to have acquired the

necessary skills by other means.

- To have successfully completed 'Empirical research in Moral Science: quantitative methods' or to have acquired the necessary skills by other means.
- To have successfully completed the course 'Qualitative methods' or to have acquired the necessary skills by other means.

Final competences

- 1 The student is able to assess the relevance, the importance and the usefulness of empirical research results for ethical-theoretical research.
- 2 The student is able to read critically and interpret published research papers about both quantitative and qualitative empirical research.
- 3 The student is able to construct research questions, explain their relevance and situate the research question within the state of the art of the empirical science as well as of moral theorizing surrounding a specific subject.
- 4 The student understands different qualitative research methods and is able to apply these methods in an empirical study on a topic relevant to ethics and moral sciences.
- 5 The student is able to choose the best fitted qualitative empirical research method for a given research question.
- 6 The student is able to practically design a study for which they apply a particular research method (recruitment, selection, informing participants, etc.).
- 7 The student is familiar with scientific integrity and able to identify and assess ethical challenges and risks in research involving participants and is able to formulate appropriate mitigation strategies in line with ethical standards and best practices to address them in a responsible. Furthermore, the student understands the role and procedures of ethics committees in this regard.
- 8 The student is able to design a clear and correct interview guide to address a particular research question, method and participant profile.
- 9 The student is able to design and use elicitation techniques for eliciting moral experience and abstract moral reasoning and judgement in an interview setting with both professionals and lay people.
- 10 The student is able to analyse qualitative data in a scientifically correct and comprehensive way, using specific software (MAXQDA).
- 11 The student is able to present qualitative empirical research results in a clear way, making a clear distinction between main and side issues. The student is able to correctly answer questions or address comments about the research they conducted.
- 12 The student is familiar with (the structure of) reports of empirical studies, published in peer-reviewed journals.
- 13 Without AI-support, the student is able to formulate a sound (and fluently written in scientific language) research proposal for an empirical moral study that will answer a research question they constructed.
- 14 The student is able to create own digital versions of analogue or digital research objects, using (audio)visual or audio-recording and transcription.
- 15 The student is familiar with strategies to store and manage data in a correct and responsible way and with respect for privacy.
- 16 The student is familiar with digital methods to collaborate on a project during several phases of a research process.
- 17 The student is aware of the societal impact, needs and the ethical dimensions of the digital turn and the position of the humanities therein.

Conditions for credit contract

Access to this course unit via a credit contract is determined after successful competences assessment

Conditions for exam contract

This course unit cannot be taken via an exam contract

Teaching methods

Seminar, Lecture, Independent work, Peer teaching

Extra information on the teaching methods

Seminar (8h): introduction to language (writing) support, instructions and practical directions, theoretical deepening about quantitative and qualitative research, collaboration with local organisation, guest lecturer who presents his/her (moral)

research project.

Seminar/demonstration (6h): interview techniques and approaches for qualitative data analysis; group discussion about the points of attention regarding research ethics for the project (including concrete challenges, risks and concrete measures to mitigate risks).

Exercises (6h): construction of interview guides, analyse (own) data, reflecting on analysis approaches.

Microteaching (12h): presentation of assignments, peer feedback, training of interview techniques, peer feedback

Online discussion groups: peer feedback about research questions, interview guides and analysis.

Guided independent work, for instance in the PC-class for the writing of a research proposal without AI-support (3h). This independent writing follows a two-step process. In between the steps students receive individual feedback.

Field work: gather, transcribe and analyse qualitative data (in-dept semi-structured interviews).

Research project: prepare research question, research method, data-analysis, prepare presentations.

Group work/project (11h): consultation class: possibility to work on group assignments, teachers provide help and feedback.

Lecture recordings are readily provided upon request for students with a special status separate from a disability. Students who missed classes due to acceptable reasons are welcome to discuss the content and any linked assignments with the teachers.

Study material

Type: Handouts

Name: Collection of methodological papers, examples of studies, slides, online resources and instructions.

Indicative price: Free or paid by faculty

Optional: no

Available on Ufora : Yes

Online Available : No

Available in the Library : No

Available through Student Association : No

Usability and Lifetime within the Course Unit : intensive

Usability and Lifetime within the Study Programme : one-time

Usability and Lifetime after the Study Programme : occasionally

References

Required reading

ALLEA (2023) Europese Gedragscode voor Wetenschappelijke Integriteit: 2023

Herziene Uitgave (Nederlands). Berlijn. DOI 10.26356/ECOC-Dutch

Ethische Code voor onderzoek met participanten of persoonsgegevens (UGent, 2026)

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis.

Qualitative research in sport, exercise and health, 11(4), 589-597.

Mapp, F. (2017). Reflections on Using a Flash Card Activity for Studying Social Representations of Sexually Transmitted Infections. *International journal of qualitative methods*, 16(1).

Oueslati, R., Reis, R., de Vries, M. C., Slager, M. T., van der Sijp, J. R., Stiggelbout, A. M., & Touwen,

D. P. (2022). Towards culturally sensitive shared decision-making in oncology a study protocol integrating bioethical qualitative research on shared decision-making among ethnic minorities with ethical reflection. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 21, 16094069221086731.

Roger, K. S., & Blomgren, C. (2019). Elicitation as a Mind-Set: Why Visual Data Matter? *International*

Journal of Qualitative Methods, 18.

Smith, J. A., & Osborn, M. (2008). Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. In *Qualitative Psychology: A Practical Guide to Research Methods* (pp. 53-80). Sage. <http://med-fom-familymed-research.sites.olt.ubc>.

ca/files/2012/03/IPA_Smith_Osborne21632.pdf

Optional material

Brocki, J. M., & Wearden, A. J. (2006). A critical evaluation of the use of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) in health psychology. *Psychology and health*, 21(1), 87-108.

Ives, J., Dunn, M., Molewijk, B., Schildmann, J., Bærøe, K., Frith, L., ... & Widdershoven, G. (2018). Standards of practice in empirical bioethics research: towards a consensus. *BMC Medical Ethics*, 19(1), 1-20.

Mihailov, E., Provoost, V., & Wangmo, T. (2022). Acceptable objectives of empirical research in bioethics: a qualitative exploration of researchers' views. *BMC Medical Ethics*, 23(1), 140.

Nowell, L. S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E., & Moules, N. J. (2017). Thematic Analysis: Striving to Meet the Trustworthiness Criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 16(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917733847>.

Roberts, K., Dowell, A. & Nie, J.B. Attempting rigour and replicability in thematic analysis of qualitative research data; a case study of codebook development. *BMC Med Res Methodol* 19, 66 (2019). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12874-019-0707-y>.

Tapson, K., Doyle, M., Karagiannopoulos, V., & Lee, P. (2022). Understanding moral injury and belief change in the experiences of police online child sex crime investigators: An interpretative phenomenological analysis. *Journal of police and criminal psychology*, 37(3), 637-649.
https://www.ted.com/talks/veerle_provoost_do_kids_think_of_sperm_donors_as_family

Software
MAXQDA Analytics Pro

Course content-related study coaching

Personal guidance by professor or assistant. Moments of individual consultation and follow-up of assignments.

Assessment moments

continuous assessment

Examination methods in case of periodic assessment during the first examination period

Examination methods in case of periodic assessment during the second examination period

Examination methods in case of permanent assessment

Participation, Peer and/or self assessment, Assignment

Possibilities of retake in case of permanent assessment

examination during the second examination period is possible in modified form

Extra information on the examination methods

- Peer evaluation: evaluate the assignments of peers
- Working papers: evaluation based on periodical and final documents such as questionnaire, research question, pseudonymised transcripts, auditing files for analysis, presentations
- Report: evaluation based on oral presentation and results of the empirical study for an audience of peers, researchers affiliated with the department and professionals from the local organization involved in the project
- Participation: evaluation on the basis of the student's critical reflection and participation in the discussions in the classes, on online discussion forums and related to the presentations of other students

Calculation of the examination mark

Non-periodical: continuous assessment (100%)

- Assignment 1 (research proposal) – 40% of total score
- Assignment 2 (qualitative interview study) – 40% of total score. For this assignment, most components are scored per group, but there will be particular tasks that are assessed per student individually (e.g., the preparation of research questions and the development of the interview guide).
- Reading assignment qualitative methods – 10% of total score
- Participation - 10%

Students need to obtain a minimum of 50% for each of the first two parts to succeed.

(Approved)

Students are responsible for the accuracy of their work. Responsible use of AI should be discussed with the teacher before the actual use any type of generative AI and all use of generative AI should be documented in a research journal, including the prompts used and the results that were generated as well as if and how the student integrated any of this outcome in their work.

Facilities for Working Students

Students should contact the professor or assistant to ask for the possibilities. Attendance during most lessons is required but alternative assignments and/or electronic learning can be used instead. For more information concerning flexible learning: contact the monitoring service of the faculty of Arts and philosophy