Study Plan

Master

Digital Society

Master major of 90 ECTS-Kreditpunkten

2025

(non-binding English translation)

Inhaltsverzeichnis

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).

2. Description of the study programme

2.1 General description

The *Digital Society* master major programme of 90 ECTS credits is an interdisciplinary study programme. It 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.

The master major programme focuses on the social dimensions of digital technologies in contemporary societies. In today's connected world, the impact of these technologies is multi-layered and influences profoundly how we communicate, work, and participate in society: The ubiquity of smartphones, social media platforms and Artificial Intelligence shapes social interactions, workplace dynamics and civic engagement. The digital society comprises social media, online fandom, hackatons, global activist networks, gig work, online platforms, digital twins and much more. There is no domain of contemporary society that has not been affected by digital transformation. Digital technologies influence private and institutional fields of action, including personal interactions, work domains and political processes. They transform field such as education, health, trade and consumption, media, prosecution, farming or mobility. They deeply impact processes of communication, work and economics and shape social structures and hierarchies.

Conversely, social factors influence the development and introduction of digital technologies from the outset. Cultural norms and values, practices and collective behaviors as well as institutions and power structures play a decisive role in which technologies become established, how they are controlled and regulated, and also how they evolve. We can observe the emergence of new, digitally-driven professional groups (software engineers, influencers) and social milieus (hackers, gamers) and even movements that position themselves against digital technologies (*digital detox*). New digital technologies influence the formation of communities and collective identities, which illustrates further the complex interplay between digital and social spheres.

To understand these phenomena and mutual infleunces, the *Digital Society* master major programme combines perspectives from sociology, anthropology, as well as science and technology studies (STS) with foundations of computer science to focus on issues and challenges of the digital societies. This entails the exploration of digital technologies as social objects being shaped by economy, policy, and culture, but also of the role digital technologies play in shaping social processes and structures.

Students will gain knowledge in the domains of culture, political economy, digital technologies and epistemology, which will empower them to critically analyze and understand the ongoing digital transformation, including political and cultural changes. The

Digital Society master major programme will also advance the study of theoretical competences and development of empirical and analytical methods needed to understand these transformations. It 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 digital technologies and digital skills.

2.2 Professional perspectives

The study programme prepares students for employment in various professional fields such as:

- public sector and administrative institutions;
- private sector and consultancies, particularly in roles of digital transformation and AI governance;
- media and communication sector;
- cultural projects and institutions;
- civil society organisations and foundations;
- professional societies, unions and advocacy groups;
- humanitarian organisations;
- academic career with doctoral studies or applied research in social sciences, STS and some branches of cultural studies.

2.3 General structure

The *Digital Society* master major consists of four study modules plus one master exam module. The four study module are 15 ECTS credits each and consist usually of units of 3 or 6 ECTS credits per learning unit. In the case of courses outside the Faculty of Humanities, these may also consist of a different number of ECTS credits. The learning units can be completed out of order and at an individual pace within the stipulated maximum duration of studies. However, it is recommended to complete the learning units of the module DSS 1 in the first year of study if possible. The master exam comprises the Master thesis and its defence. The defence can only take place after all course units of the four study modules have been validated.

The Master's degree programme of 90 ECTS credits consists of two core modules, two specialization modules and the Master's examination. The core module "Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Digital Transformation of Society" provides an interdisciplinary foundation and introduces the digital transformation and its interdependence with society and culture through introductory lectures and seminars on computer science, the Internet and methodology. It also includes a public lecture series on digital transformation with invited experts. This first core module is complemented by a second core module called "Theories and Case Studies", which focuses on particular areas of transformation related to specific social groups, specific disciplines or different theoretical approaches.

In addition, the Master major programme of 90 ECTS credits consists of two specialization modules: Firstly, the specialization module “Methods, Skills and Applications” deepens methods and applications of digital studies and empirical social research in the digital society and combines science and practice. Analytical skills are acquired and deepened in methodological learning units on relevant approaches. The application of these skills and methods in practice and *in situ* includes science, the working environment, companies, politics, administration or cultural institutions. Therefore, the specialization module “Methods, Skills and Applications” includes an internship or workshop in these areas. The second specialization module, “Society in the Making: Analyses and Debates”, focuses on key debates, critical analyses and conceptualizations in relation to the digital society. It provides students with extensive expertise and specialized analytical knowledge on relevant topics and issues in the field of the Master. Taken together, both specialization modules prepare students for the Master thesis, which can cover a specific empirical field, concrete applications or a theoretical debate.

The Master major program of 90 ECTS credits can be supplemented by a minor program of 30 ECTS credits from the Faculty of Humanities or another faculty. It is not possible to combine the *Digital Society* Master major programme with the *Digital Society* Master minor program.

3. Admission

3.1 Admission without condition

Holders of a bachelor's degree from a Swiss or recognized foreign university or university of applied sciences in one of the following fields (minimum 60 ECTS credits) are admitted to this specialization programme without conditions:

- Political Science, Sociology, Social Policy and Social Work, Social and Cultural Anthropology/Ethnology, Religious Studies, Cultural Studies*, Educational Sciences
- STS (Science and Technology Studies)*
- Computer Science, Software Systems*
- Business Administration (BWL), Economics (VWL), Business Informatics
- Bachelor's degrees from universities of applied sciences in Business Informatics, Business Administration, Economics, Social Work, Communication
- Communication and Media Studies, Communication Systems
- Geography, Environmental Sciences
- Applicants with bachelor's degrees from the University of Fribourg in the following programmes are also admitted to the programme without conditions: Eastern European Studies (Unifr and Unibe), Business Communication, Environmental Sciences and Environmental Humanities, Contemporary History.

*Not listed among the fields of study recognized by Swissuniversities.

3.2 Admission With Conditions

Holders of a bachelor's degree from a Swiss or recognized foreign university or university of applied sciences in one of the following fields (minimum 60 ECTS credits) are admitted with a supplementary programme of up to 30 ECTS credits:

- Law and legal studies
- Philosophy, History, Art History, Musicology, all Language and Literature Studies (e.g., English Studies, German Studies), Theology
- Human Medicine, Sports Sciences and Motor Control, Psychology
- Applicants with bachelor's degrees from the University of Fribourg in the following programs: Biomedical Sciences*, Economic and Legal Studies*

*Not listed among the fields of study recognized by Swissuniversities.

All other CRUS fields of study not listed in the above sections may be admitted with a preparatory programme of up to 60 ECTS credits.

4. Educational goals

The educational goals of the interdisciplinary *Digital Society* master major study programme consist in the transmission of knowledge about digital phenomena and the skills to critically analyse, understand and situate these phenomena. Due to the particular combination of sociological, anthropological and computational approaches, the study programme fosters the unique abilities to understand the digital transformation holistically. The content of the learning units enables an iterative analytical understanding of digital technologies as social phenomena that are embedded in practices and cultures, which in turn are simultaneously influenced by these technologies.

The emphasis of the study programme lies on the acquisition of knowledge about the digital entanglement between materiality and meaning, and the related power dynamics. This provides a broad theoretical and practical understanding of digital transformation in terms of methodology, project management, analysis and intervention. By completing the programme, students will have acquired topical, specialized, transversal and applied competencies that enhance their profile on the job market or allow them to continue their (doctoral) studies. They will be able to inform and support stakeholders on the impact and opportunities of digital technologies in our networked societies based on empirical research. The study programme addresses the following fields and topics:

- the social dimensions of technology;
- the complex interplay between science, technology, and society;

- the history of computer science and the Internet;
- knowledge, information and disinformation in the digital age;
- the evolution and impact of social media;
- challenges in policy, governance and ethics of Artificial Intelligence;
- how to research digital practices, artifacts, and infrastructures;
- methodologies for studying and analyzing the digital society;
- foundations of science and technology studies.

In terms of practical skills acquisition, the study programme covers the following areas:

- Ability to analyse complex social issues;
- Mastery of coherent research designs (quantitative analyses, qualitative investigations, digital methods etc.);
- Communication skills (oral and written);
- Project management and scholarly activities.

5. Begin and duration of studies

The *Digital Society* master major programme can be taken up in the autumn semester or in the spring semester. The minimal duration for the study programme is usually 3 semesters for students in the master major of 90 ECTS credits, and 4 semesters for students in a master programme of 120 ECTS credits (master major of 90 ECTS credits and a master minor of 30 ECTS credits). The maximum duration of the programme is 9 semesters for students in a 90 ECTS programme and 12 semesters for students in a 120 ECTS credits programme.

Master-Vertiefungsprogramm kann im Herbst- oder im Frühjahrssemester begonnen werden. Die Mindestdauer des Studienprogramms beträgt in der Regel 3 Semester für die Studierenden im Master-Studiengang mit 90-ECTS-Kreditpunkten und 4 Semester für die Studierenden im Master-Studiengang mit 120 ECTS-Kreditpunkten (Vertiefungsprogramm zu 90 ECTS-Kreditpunkten plus Nebenprogramm von 30 ECTS-Kreditpunkten). Die Höchstdauer des Studiums beträgt 9 Semester für die Studierenden im Master-Studiengang mit 90 ECTS-Kreditpunkten und 12 Semester für die Studierenden im Master-Studiengang mit 120 ECTS-Kreditpunkten.

6. Language

In principle, the courses are held in English. Exams and written work are also to be conducted and done in English. Students should have good written and oral English skills and can express themselves and communicate orally and in writing in this language. There is no distinction “Bilingual curriculum". In exceptional cases, supplementary courses in German or French will be integrated into the course programme.

7. Structure of the programme

The four study modules are structured according to their learning goals. The description of the teaching units (courses, seminars, seminar papers etc.) specify the addressed topics, the specific pedagogical aims, and the corresponding form of evaluation.

Master major programme *Digital Society* 90 ECTS credits		
4 modules of 15 ECTS credits + Master exam		
DSS 1	**Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Digital Transformation of Society**	15 ECTS credits
DSS 2	**Theories and Case Studies**	15 ECTS credits
DSS 3	**Methods, Skills and Applications**	15 ECTS credits
DSS 4	**Digital Society in the Making: Analyses and Debates**	15 ECTS credits
Exam	**Master exam (Master thesis and defence)**	30 ECTS credits

8. Description of the modules

8.1 Module DSS 1: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Digital Transformation of Society

All lectures and the seminar in module DSS 1 are compulsory. They are offered once per academic year. The type of evaluation is determined by the respective lecturer at the beginning of the semester. The examination modalities are described in section 9.

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 transformation. 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*

	interdisciplinary 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. 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 the University of Fribourg and external experts.*
Seminar 1	**Methods in Studies of the Digital Society** (3 ECTS credits) *This seminar provides the students with an introduction to the methodological skills required to successfully engage with the program 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.*

8.2 Module DSS 2: Theories and Case Studies

Module DSS 2 offers a range of courses that allow students to engage with specific topics, case studies and theories that correspond to current trends and public debates. They offer a wide range of topics to appeal to different student groups. More importantly, given the rapid development of digital technologies, the aim is to keep the courses open and flexible. For this reason, the titles of the courses in module DSS 2 change, allowing new topics to be introduced at any time. The exact titles are communicated each year. The type of evaluation is determined by the respective lecturer at the beginning of the semester. The examination modalities are described in section 9.

Description:
The objective of module DSS 2 is to allow 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 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 (to follow at least one seminar is mandatory)	focusing on specific transformations/social groups or on specific theoretical approaches (with at least a total of 9 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; surveil-*

	lance, 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)	

8.3 Module DSS 3: Methods, Skills and Applications

All lectures, workshops, internships and seminars in module DSS 3 are individually proposed and/or approved by the study advisor. They allow for personalised enrichment depending on individual backgrounds, motivations and interests. The exact titles of the workshops, lectures and seminars are communicated every year.

While lectures and seminars in the DSS 3 module can be found in the usual university timetable, the workshops, internships and study weeks within the science-practice link are individually suggested or approved by the study advisor. They enable personalised enrichment depending on individual background, motivation, interests and career plans. The exact titles of the pre-approved workshops, lectures and seminars are announced each year. The science-practice link is not graded. For the other courses and the research work, the type of evaluation is determined by the respective lecturer at the beginning of the semester. The examination modalities are described in section 9.

Description:
The objective of module DSS 3 is to enhance students' digital competencies and methodological expertise through personalized and practice-oriented learning experiences. This module is designed to provide students with an in-depth understanding of the digital society by integrating theoretical knowledge with practical skills and empirical research methods. The module consists of individual teaching units and a science-practice link that, taken together, foster the students' critical thinking, analytical skills, and practical application abilities.

Workshop	Digital skills workshops offered by Fribourg University, cumulative, as defined in the annual list of courses for *Digital Society* (usually 3 x 1 ECTS credits) T*his series of cumulative workshops, typically structured as 3 sessions of 1 ECTS credit each, focuses on building a baseline of literacy essential for navigating and analyzing the digital landscape. Students engage in hands-on activities on their level, including computational data analysis, online communication tools, and cybersecurity. These workshops aim to equip students with the technical skills necessary for effective digital engagement and research.*
Lecture/seminar	Digital methods (at least 3 ECTS credits) *A dedicated lecture or seminar on a specific methodological approach pertinent to investigating the digital society. This course allows students to enhance their practical and analytical skills in advanced methodologies such as social network analysis, digital ethnography, big data analytics, or machine learning. Students gain a thorough understanding of*

	the chosen method, enabling them to conduct rigorous empirical research in the field of Digital Society.
Science-practice link: Study week, workshop or internship (3 ECTS credits)	*The science-practice link requires students to follow the* Digital Society *study week usually offered by Fribourg University (collectively), external workshops or an internship (individually) with a focus on applying theoretical knowledge to real-world issues. External workshops and the study week are defined in the annual list of courses for* Digital Society*. The science-practice link fosters collaboration with practitioners, enhancing students' understanding of the practical implications of their research. It provides students with the opportunity to bridge the gap between academic learning and practical application. The modalities of the specific activity for this learning unit must be approved by the study advisor.*
1 research paper	related to the seminar, lecture or to the science-practice link (6 ECTS credits) *This paper allows students to demonstrate their ability to situate their research project or practical activity within the broader context of* Digital Society *studies. The paper also showcases students' reflective capabilities.*

8.4 Module DSS 4: Digital Society in the Making: Analyses and Debates

The titles of the lectures/seminars in module DSS 4 are announced each year. The type of evaluation is determined by the respective lecturer at the beginning of the semester. The examination modalities are described in section 9.

Description:
In module DSS 4, students explore the contemporary landscape of the digital society through one lecture and one seminar that address current issues and theoretical perspectives. Topics may include the governance of artificial intelligence, the challenges of dealing with information and misinformation in the digital age, and critical social media studies. Additional areas of focus might involve the impact of digital platforms on democracy, the role of social media in shaping cultural identities, censorship in the digital age, or the ethical implications of data privacy and surveillance. Through these learning units, students gain specialized analytical knowledge and develop expertise in addressing key debates and concerns within the evolving digital society.

As part of this module, students must also participate in the Master's colloquium. Successful participation in the Master's colloquium is mandatory before submitting the Master's thesis; it is not graded. Students receive information about the formal requirements for the Master's thesis and develop their own concept for their Master's thesis. The mode of evaluation will be announced by the supervisor at the beginning of the colloquium.

Lecture	*Digital Society* lecture (3 ECTS credits)

Seminar	*Digital Society* seminar (3 ECTS credits)
1 MA colloquium	Master colloquium (3 ECTS credits)
1 research paper	related to the seminar of this module (6 ECTS credits)

8.5 Master exam (30 ECTS)

The Master exam (30 ECTS credits) includes the Master thesis and its defence. The Master thesis is based on approaches covered in the study programme and combines these with empirical research. The choice of topic is made in consultation with the supervisor of the Master thesis. The Master thesis is defended. The Master thesis and its defence are assessed by two individual grades.

9. Evaluation of achievements

9.1 General modalities

The examination modalities (non-attendance, number of repeat attempts, etc.) are set by the faculty offering the respective course. The general principles for the evaluation of academic performance are therefore 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 des Bachelor of Science und des Master of Science* of the Faculty of Science and Medicine of the University of Fribourg.
- Fakultät

In general, the provisions on the charging of examination fees and the exam deadlines of the faculty in which the exams are taken apply. The relevant information can be found on the websites of the respective faculty:

Faculty of Humanities (in French or German):

https://www.unifr.ch/lettres/de/studium/kurse-und-examen/kurs-und-examenseinschreibung/

Faculty of Management, Economics and Social Sciences:

https://www.unifr.ch/ses/en/studies/exams-theses/info.html

Faculty of Science and Medicine:

https://www.unifr.ch/scimed/en/studies/register

Students register for the exams on the university web portal in due time.

Each teaching unit is evaluated separately. The evaluation modalities are communicated by the lecturers and are binding. The evaluation methods are differentiated (written exam, oral exam, written paper, oral presentation, group work, etc.). Research papers (seminar papers) are usually written as part of a seminar.

All teaching units must be successfully completed or passed. Graded exams and written assignments are graded on a scale of 1 to 6, with 6 being the highest grade. Scores from 6 to 4 indicate successfully passed exams, values below 4 represent a failed exam.

Evaluations that are not graded are assessed by means of "passed" / "failed" grades. A failed teaching unit is considered a failure.

9.2 Modalities of evaluation and repeat attempts of learning units of the Faculty of Humanities

*T*he *lectures* (3 ECTS credits) serve to impart larger, coherent bodies of knowledge. The main form of teaching is the lecture, but other forms can also be integrated. Evaluations take the form of a graded examination. In the event of a first failure, the examination must be repeated. In the event of a definitive failure, a new lecture must be chosen. Exceptions apply to the teaching units in module DSS 1 (see section 9.4 ‘Definitive failure’).

The *seminars* (3 ECTS credits) serve to engage with special topics or research methods. The learning style requires the active participation of the students. The form of evaluation of seminars is determined by the lecturers at the beginning of the semester (e.g. through several smaller performance assessments, presentation, summary, essay, podcast, film, etc.). Seminars are generally graded and, in exceptional cases, validated with a pass/fail grade. In the event of a first failure, the teacher determines an alternative assessment (e.g. an additional written assignment or an oral assessment). In the event of a definitive failure, a new seminar must be chosen. Exceptions apply to the teaching units in module DSS 1 (see section 9.4 ‘Definitive failure’).

The research papers (= *seminar papers*) (6 ECTS credits) are written assignments that are usually produced in connection with a seminar and are supervised and corrected by the lecturers. Detailed information on the design of seminar papers can be found in the ‘Guidelines for Writing Academic Papers’. Alternative formats to the seminar paper (in the form of a film, podcast, etc.) must be discussed with the lecturers and accepted by them. The seminar papers are graded. In the event of a first failure, the lecturer will decide whether the seminar paper can be revised or whether a new topic must be chosen. It must be submitted in one of the subsequent examination sessions after consultation with

the responsible lecturer, but always within the deadlines set by the faculty (see section 9.1 'General examination modalities'). In the event of a definitive failure, a new seminar must be chosen and a new paper written. Exceptions apply to the teaching units in module DSS 1 (see section 9.4 'Definitive failure').

Workshops (1 ECTS credit) within the framework of *Digital Skills* usually comprise specific methods courses that are offered interfaculty at the University of Fribourg and are evaluated as pass/fail. The units are defined in the courses offered in the *Digital Society* study programme.

9.3 Modalities of evaluation and repeat attempts of learning units of other faculties

The *science-practice link* (3 ECTS credits) comprises application-oriented training activities such as a topic-centred study week and workshops or an internship. These units are evaluated as pass/fail and a report on the activities serves as the basis for the evaluation. An internship usually involves at least two weeks of full-time work. The specific modalities are determined in consultation with the study advisor.

For science-practice-link courses or teaching units offered by otherfaculties than the Faculty of Humanities, the options for repeating a course in the event of failure are determined by the lecturers as part of the regulations and examination sessions and communicated to the students.

9.4 Definitive failure

If the student fails the second attempt as well, this constitutes a definitive failure.

Students who achieve a definitive failure in one of the 5 courses of the DSS 1 module, in the Master colloquium or in the Master examination cannot continue their studies in the *Digital Society* study programme (definitive failure of the master major programme of 90 ECTS credits in *Digital Society*). They can also not enrol in the minor programme *Digital Society* of 30 ECTS credits. All other courses in modules 2, 3 and 4 can be replaced by other courses in the event of a definitive failure.

An failed Master thesis and defence can be repeated once. For the resubmission of the Master thesis, the thesis supervisor shall set a reasonable deadline for revision (Art. 61, para. 1 of the *Reglement vom 8. März 2018 zur Erlangung des Bachelors und des Masters an der Philosophischen Fakultät*). For the repetition of the defence, the president of the jury shall set a new date within three months (Art. 61, para. 2 of the *Reglement vom 8. März 2018 zur Erlangung des Bachelors und des Masters an der Philosophischen Fakultät*).

Students on a Master programme with 90 ECTS credits or 120 ECTS credits (incl. minor or specialisation programme) who exceed the maximum duration of 9 semesters or 12 semesters cannot continue with the degree programme; this is considered a definitive failure in the degree programme.

9.5 Grades of modules and overall grade

The grade for each module is calculated from the unweighted average of the graded coursework for the module.

The overall grade of the study programme (60 ECTS credits of modules 1-4) is composed of the unweighted average of the validated module grades of the study programme. The grade for the Master exam (30 ECTS credits) is calculated from the average of the grades for the Master thesis and for the defence; the grade for the Master thesis counts double.

10. BeNeFri and mobility

Students enrolled in the *Digital Society* major programme of 90 ECTS credits may attend courses at the Universitiy of Neuchâtel or another university for a maximum of 12 ECTS credits.

The Learning Agreement must be agreed upon with the Study Advisor before any form of mobility.

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

11. Entry into force

This study plan was ratified by the Study Commission on 25 February 2025. It comes into force with the autumn semester 2025.