

Syllabus for Ethics in Social Sciences, Spring 2025

The schedule and structure of classes and assignments in this version of the syllabus are settled, but there may still be some changes to the literature. The final literature list will be available on Studium.

Course coordinator: Stina Bergman Blix
Teachers: Emma von Essen and Marie Flinkfeldt

1. General information

2,5 credits

Education cycle: Third/forth cycle 2025

Grading system: Fail (U), Pass (G)

Entry requirements: 180 credits including 90 credits in sociology, social psychology, social work or equivalent competence from relevant courses.

Responsible department: Department of Sociology

Language: The class will be taught in English.

This course will consist of five shorter lectures with following discussions focusing on specific cases and students' own examples. The examination consists of active participation in the discussions and a final written assignment, where the students evaluate a research project (provided by course coordinators) from an ethical perspective. They will identify ethical issues and questions and suggest solutions building on the Uppsala University CODEX.

Apart from the learning outcomes specified below, an important outcome of this course is that students will collect and have all relevant information and links to relevant readings/regulations and support in one place to revisit when ethical issues arise during their education/project.

Learning Outcomes

Upon accomplishment of the course, the participants are expected to:

- Be able to critically discuss the legal and historical grounding of research ethics.
- Be able to make balanced judgements concerning risk, privacy, and informed consent for a wide range of empirical approaches within the social sciences.
- Be able to make balanced ethical judgements as a teacher and supervisor at the undergraduate and graduate levels.
- Be able to perform an ethical vetting of a research project in line with the Uppsala University CODEX.

Schedule spring 2025

Date	Time	Room	By	Topic
Tues 22/4	13:15-16	2-1025	Stina/Marie	Intro: History and law
Tues 6/5	9:15-12	2-1025	Emma/Marie	Register data, documents, transcriptions – not interacting with participants
Thur 8/5	9:15-12	2-1025	Stina/Emma	Observations, interviews - interacting with participants
Tues 13/5	10:15-12	2-1023	Stina & Marie	Teaching and supervising

Thur 15/5	9:15-12	2-0026	Emma/Marie/ Stina	Spanning boundaries
Tues 27/5				Hand in assignment

Lectures and discussions

Each occasion comprises a lecture followed by a discussion. Below the topics for each occasion are presented along with required and recommended readings.

1. Introduction - Historical background and Swedish laws and legal regulations

This lecture will place the development of ethical rules and regulation in an historical perspective and present the current legal regulations surrounding research ethics in the social sciences in Sweden today. It will describe how a more systematic approach and regulation of research ethics came after WW2. The Nuremberg code in 1947, the Vipeholm experiments in Sweden in the 40-50ies, the Declaration of Helsinki in 1964 etc. The regulations that originated from these historical events are reflected in the Swedish constitutional law to protect the human body and people's right to privacy (personal data and invasive procedure, i.e. experimental research). All these regulations relate to an ideal of universal human rights and primarily focus on medical research.

Focusing current rules we will look at the ethical guidelines from the Swedish Research Council (Codex) and the relevant legal regulations: The Ethical Review Act; Public Access to Information and Secrecy Act; Data Protection Act (Swedish adaption to GDPR), to get an overview of the regulatory framework, and the recent and continuous changes in both regulation and praxis.

We will discuss criticism for employing a biomedical frame for ethical evaluations of social and humanist research and the changing emphasis on protection from harm to increased standardization and regulation, but also the support available at UU (Data protection officer etc.).

Literature

Required

Codex rules and guideline for research, <https://www.codex.uu.se/?languageId=1>

Ethics in Social Science and Humanities (European Commission, pdf in Studium)

The Ethical Review Act (translated into English, pdf on Studium),
https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/dokument/svensk-forfattningssamling/lag-2003460-om-etikprovning-av-forskning-som_sfs-2003-460

The Swedish Data Protection Act: (Swedish, supplements in English on Studium and description in link below), https://www.riksdagen.se/sv/dokument-lagar/dokument/svensk-forfattningssamling/lag-2018218-med-kompletterande-bestammelser_sfs-2018-218

<https://www.imy.se/en/organisations/data-protection/this-applies-according-to-gdpr/lawful-grounds-for-personal-data-processing/>

Gaztambide-Fernández, R. A. (2015). Elite entanglements and the demand for a radically un/ethical position: the case of Wienie Night. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 28(9), 1129-1147. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09518398.2015.1074752>

Rogers, J. (2012) Anti-Oppressive Social Work Research: Reflections on Power in the Creation of Knowledge, *Social Work Education*, 31:7, 866-879, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/02615479.2011.602965>

Recommended

Eldén, S. (2020). *Forskningsetik: Vägval i samhällsvetenskapliga studier*. Studentlitteratur AB. (in Swedish)

Guidance Note for Researchers and Evaluators of Social Sciences and Humanities Research (EU guidelines, pdf on Studium)

Meyer, M. N. (2018). Practical tips for ethical data sharing. *Advances in methods and practices in psychological science*, 1(1), 131-144. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2515245917747656>

2. Register data, documents, transcriptions – not interacting with participants

Lecture

The lecture includes a discussion on ethics in gaining access to data, collecting quantitative data, informed consent and data storage. The lecture distinguishes between ethical dilemmas regarding register-based data and data collection involving human subjects. Within the quantitative methods ethics is also closely related to using the appropriate scientific method. The paper by Andrew Gelman taps into the discussion on ethical issues of transparency and credibility linked to the researcher's degree of freedom. The paper of Duflo and co-authors critically discuss the proposed solution of using elaborate pre-analysis plans. For example, discussing the risk of discounting non-pre-specified research, the emergence of big data and how to create a reasonable reporting culture in quantitative social science.

Literature

Browse the following site <https://www.registerforskning.se/en/> to gain and understanding of register-based research.

<http://www.stat.columbia.edu/~gelman/research/published/ForkingPaths.pdf>

Banerjee, A., Duflo, E., Finkelstein, A., Katz, L. F., Olken, B. A., & Sautmann, A. (2020). *In praise of moderation: Suggestions for the scope and use of pre-analysis plans for rcts in economics* (No. w26993). National Bureau of Economic Research.

<https://www.nber.org/papers/w26993>

3. Observations, interviews - interacting with participants

The lecture will focus on ethics in gaining access to a field, voluntary consent, transparency, vulnerability, and the critique about current ways to approach ethics as not fitting for qualitative research. The last point includes understanding ethics as an interpersonal achievement rather than protecting bodies from harm, making level of participation, the ideal of the objective researcher, and power structures come to the fore and in need of problematizing. We will also shortly cover covert research.

Literature

Required

Brinkmann, S., & Kvale, S. (2005). Confronting the ethics of qualitative research. *Journal of constructivist psychology*, 18(2), 157-181. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10720530590914789>

Punch, M. (1994). Politics and ethics in qualitative research. *Handbook of qualitative research*. Sage. Pp. 83-97 (pdf in Studium).

Simpson, B. (2011). Ethical moments: future directions for ethical review and ethnography. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 17(2), 377-393. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9655.2011.01685.x>

Recommended

Ellis, C. (1995). Emotional and ethical quagmires in returning to the field. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 24(1), 68-98. (pdf in Studium)

Hammersley, M., & Traianou, A. (2012). *Ethics in qualitative research: Controversies and contexts*. Sage.

Mietola, R., Miettinen, S., & Vehmas, S. (2017). Voiceless subjects? Research ethics and persons with profound intellectual disabilities. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 20(3), 263-274. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13645579.2017.1287872>

Wästerfors, D. (2019). Den etnografiskt okänsliga etikgranskningen. *Statsvetenskaplig tidskrift*, 121(2). (in Swedish)

4. Ethics in teaching and supervising at the university

The PhD education often also includes teaching and supervising thesis work. The ethics review authority does not regulate students' assignments or thesis projects, so the responsibility for ethically sound student work sits at the department level. What is essential to think about when designing and supervising students' work?

This occasion is set up as a seminar including two x 45 min discussion sessions.

The first discussion involves reading outlines of bachelor theses and in the second session, we will discuss how you as a teacher and supervisor can think about and evaluate students' work from an ethical perspective.

5. *Spanning boundaries: data from outside of Sweden or the internet*

This lecture focuses ethical issues in research that crosses boundaries in different ways. It is common sense that the growing prevalence of digital worlds raises ethical issues, but how should social science research practices adapt to meet these changing conditions? This lecture examines emerging interfaces between research ethics, theorisation, and methodologies to provide tools for thought on navigating this increasingly complex field. We will also discuss how to think about and abide by ethical regulations and issues when doing research across national borders.

Literature

Required

AoIR (2019): Internet Research: Ethical Guidelines 3.0. <https://aoir.org/ethics/>

Boyd, D., & Crawford, K. (2012). Critical questions for big data: Provocations for a cultural, technological, and scholarly phenomenon. *Information, communication & society*, 15(5), 662-679. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369118X.2012.678878>

Markham, A. N., Tiidenberg, K., & Herman, A. (2018). Ethics as Methods: Doing Ethics in the Era of Big Data Research—Introduction. *Social Media + Society*, 4(3). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305118784502>

Pink, S. (2019). Ethics in an Uncertain World: Between Theory and Practice. In S. Pink, V. Fors, & T. O'Dell (Eds.), *Theoretical Scholarship and Applied Practice* (1st ed., Vol. 11, pp. 29–50). Berghahn Books. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctvw04bkj.6>

Pink, S., & Lanzeni, D. (2018). Future Anthropology Ethics and Datafication: Temporality and Responsibility in Research. *Social Media + Society*, 4(2). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305118768298>

Recommended

Gerrard, Y. (2021). What's in a (pseudo) name? Ethical conundrums for the principles of anonymisation in social media research. *Qualitative Research*, 21(5), 686-702. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794120922070>

Kozinets, R. V. (2015) *Netnography: redefined*, Sage, chapter 6 on ethics

Norwegian National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and the Humanities, <https://www.forskningsetikk.no/en/guidelines/social-sciences-humanities-law-and-theology/a-guide-to-internet-research-ethics/>

Examination

The course is examined partly through students' active participation in the lectures/seminars. The examination also includes conducting an ethical vetting of a given project proposal (in written form). The deadline for submission of the essay is 27/4.