

Course memo Autumn 2026

AK2017 Introduction to Research Ethics, 3.0 credits

Headings marked with an asterisk (*) are retrieved from the course syllabus. The remaining sections describe this particular course offering.

Course offering

Autumn 2026 (Start date 24 August 2026, English)

Language Of Instruction

English

Offered By

ABE/Philosophy

Content and learning outcomes

Course contents *

This is an introductory course in research ethics. The course covers the major research ethical problems and concepts, such as autonomy and informed consent, scientific fraud and misconduct, the researcher's responsibility for the consequences of her research, and the relevance of ethical theories to research ethics. Research ethical declarations such as the declaration of Helsinki will be introduced.

The course is offered to students from the natural sciences and engineering and from the social sciences and humanities. Some classes are given jointly, whereas others are given separately for the different groups.

The course is only taught provided at least 5 applicants accept the course spot offered them. Should less than 5 applicants accept their spot, it is possible to take the course as a reading course in consultation with the teacher.

Intended learning outcomes *

After completing this course, the student should be able to identify and describe common research ethical problems, and analyze the problems taking relevant empirical factors into account. Moreover, the student should be able to suggest possible solutions to the problems and to justify the chosen solution by means of basic ethical principles.

Disposition *

The course consists of 5 lectures/seminars. It is taught in English.

Learning activities

The course consists of two lectures, two seminar cycles, an oral Decision Clinic, individual reading and source work, and a written **Research Ethics Decision Dossier**. You will work with the same research-ethics case throughout the course:

1. formulate the case in a two-page **Ethical Decision Map** and submit it by 9 September 2026 at 23:59;
2. test and revise the map through structured seminar feedback;
3. develop the map into a **Research Ethics Decision Memo** of 600–800 words and build the supporting **Decision Record** around it;
4. submit a substantially complete dossier in Canvas by 7 October 2026 at 23:59 and bring it to Seminar 2 for the Dossier Audit;
5. make a limited final revision and submit the complete dossier by 12 October 2026 at 23:59;
6. defend the submitted dossier individually in the **Decision Clinic on 14 October 2026**.

Your case may be real, past, documented or realistically hypothetical, and it does not require prior approval from the teacher. **You do not need a research project of your own.** A degree project, a documented published case, a case from an internship or work placement, or a realistic hypothetical project all work equally well, provided the case contains a decision in which at least two relevant rules, responsibilities, principles or legitimate interests create genuine uncertainty or tension. Anonymise people, collaborations and sensitive project information.

Overview of pedagogical approach

The course uses a flipped-learning approach. Reading, source work and the first version of the analysis are completed before the seminars. Scheduled time is used for structured discussion, argument testing, comparison of alternatives and revision.

The central principle is one developing case rather than several unrelated written tasks. The Ethical Decision Map, seminar feedback, Decision Memo and Decision Record together form one final product. The design makes your analytical choices and revisions visible without requiring individual supervision.

Generative AI is not generally prohibited, but it may not replace your ethical judgement. You remain responsible for every factual claim, source, argument and recommendation and must disclose relevant assistance. Confidential, sensitive or identifiable research information must not be entered into an external AI service.

Expected workload

The course is worth 3.0 credits. The following figures are planning estimates, not individual time limits:

Activity	Hours
Five scheduled activities	10
Decision Map	20
Decision Dossier	40
Revision, finalisation and administration	10
Total	80

Decision Map covers the reading, source work and drafting needed to prepare the Ethical Decision Map for Seminar 1. Decision Dossier covers developing the map into the Decision Memo and building the Decision Record around it, ready for the Seminar 2 draft. Revision, finalisation and administration covers the limited final revision after Seminar 2, preparation for the Decision Clinic, and other course administration.

Detailed plan

Lectures

Lecture 1 – Introduction to research ethics introduces research integrity, fabrication, falsification and plagiarism, authorship and responsibility, historical cases, research-ethics codes, ethical review, Swedish regulation and sources of practical guidance.

Lecture 2 – Data management in research addresses research data, openness, information management, responsible practice and relevant KTH support functions.

The lectures are strongly recommended and their content forms part of the course, but attendance at the lectures is not registered separately.

Seminars

To participate in and complete Seminar 1 or Seminar 2, you must finish and submit the required preparation in Canvas by the hard deadline before the seminar. If the preparation is missing, insufficiently complete or submitted after the deadline, you may not participate in the seminar and must complete a compensatory assignment instead.

Because the Decision Clinic examines the dossier you have submitted, you must have submitted it by 12 October in order to take part on 14 October. If you have not, contact the course coordinator: an individual oral examination is arranged once the dossier has been submitted.

Seminar 1 – From a research-ethics problem to a decision is a Decision Map Workshop. You bring a two-page Ethical Decision Map and test the decision, evidence, uncertainty, ethical tension, alternatives and provisional recommendation in a small group.

Seminar 2 – Dossier Audit is the final development stage before submission. You submit a substantially complete dossier by the Canvas deadline, bring the same draft and work in a Dossier Audit group that examines whether the evidence supports the recommendation, whether the alternatives are compared consistently and whether the recommendation can realistically be implemented.

Both seminars end with a short **handwritten exit ticket** that you hand in before you leave, and during the case round you answer one brief oral question about a choice you made in your own

analysis. Neither is graded on quality; both are part of the DELA participation requirement.

Seminar 3 – Decision Clinic on 14 October 2026 is the course’s oral examination. You defend the dossier you submitted on 12 October, so nothing further needs to be written for it. Each student has eight minutes: five minutes to state the decision, the genuinely available alternatives, the recommendation and the decisive reason for it; three minutes to answer two or three focused questions about the evidence, the ethical reasoning or a central choice. You may use brief notes, but you should not read a prepared continuous text and you should not prepare slides. The clinic has no separate Canvas submission. It forms part of the assessment of INLA; a nervous or linguistically uneven presentation does not in itself lower the grade, since what is assessed is whether you can explain and take responsibility for the central choices in your dossier.

The Research Ethics Decision Dossier

The dossier is not a traditional essay. It is a structured professional decision record for a specified decision-maker, such as a research group, project leader, supervisor or department management. Concise prose, tables, maps and registers are welcome where they make the reasoning easier to examine.

The dossier has two levels: a short **Decision Memo** that the decision-maker can read first, and a **Decision Record** that shows why the recommendation is defensible and how it should be implemented. Required components:

1. **Executive Decision Memo**, 600–800 words: the intended recipient, the decision required, the recommendation, the necessary situation and uncertainty, applied ethical considerations, feasible alternatives and a justified recommendation.
2. **Decision context and responsibility map**: central actors, formal and practical authority, relevant responsibilities, those affected and important contextual constraints.
3. **Evidence and uncertainty register**: established facts, reasonable but unverified assumptions, unresolved uncertainties and information that should be obtained. For each important uncertainty, explain whether and how it could change the recommendation.
4. **Source trail**: at least **three relevant and authoritative sources in total**, including those used in the memo, with exact references, the analytical role of each source, and a distinction between binding requirements and guidance.
5. **Ethical analysis**: the most important rules, rights, responsibilities, principles and legitimate interests, where they support one another and where they conflict, and how they should be balanced in this case.
6. **Options appraisal**: at least **three genuinely feasible courses of action** compared using a consistent set of criteria, covering consequences, ethical and practical risks, feasibility, safeguards and the strongest objection to each option.
7. **Recommendation, implementation and review**: why the recommended option is preferable overall, which residual risk must be accepted, which safeguards and implementation steps are necessary, who should do what next, what should be monitored and what should trigger reconsideration.
8. **Assistance and AI statement**.

Format: maximum eight pages including the Decision Memo, but excluding a title page, reference list and assistance/AI statement. Use a normal readable font and layout; attempts to evade the page limit through compressed formatting may be returned for revision. Include page numbers and a reference list with links where sources are available online. The dossier must be understandable

without access to your seminar discussion or earlier drafts. The template and the full instructions are published in Canvas.

Submission sequence and deadlines

1. **Ethical Decision Map:** submit in Canvas by **9 September 2026 at 23:59**. This is the hard eligibility deadline for Seminar 1.
2. **Substantially complete Research Ethics Decision Dossier draft:** submit in Canvas by **7 October 2026 at 23:59**. This is the hard eligibility deadline for Seminar 2.
3. **Final Research Ethics Decision Dossier:** submit one complete file, including the reference list and assistance/AI statement, in Canvas by **12 October 2026 at 23:59**. This is the final written deadline and does not determine seminar eligibility. You then defend this file in the Decision Clinic on 14 October.

The Canvas timestamp determines whether the hard eligibility deadlines have been met. If the required submission is late, missing or insufficiently complete, you may not participate in that seminar and must complete the compensatory assignment for that seminar.

Eligibility is checked against presence, not quality. A submission is sufficiently complete when every required part is there: for the Decision Map, all template fields, at least two alternatives, a provisional recommendation, a seminar question and references to at least three required reading sections; for the dossier draft, the memo of 600–800 words together with components 2–7 above, that is the responsibility map, the evidence and uncertainty register, a source trail with at least three sources, the ethical analysis, at least three compared alternatives and a recommendation with implementation and review conditions. A serious attempt qualifies even if you consider the analysis weak. The exact criteria are published with each assignment in Canvas.

You submit only one dossier file at the end of the course. The Decision Memo is part of it; it is not submitted separately, and you do not submit revision notes or a change log.

Schedule

All five scheduled activities take place from **13:00 to 15:00** in **Teknikringen 74D, Floor 5, StoraSem**.

- **Thursday 27 August 2026:** Lecture 1 – Introduction to research ethics, Per Wikman Svahn.
- **Thursday 10 September 2026:** Seminar 1 – From a research-ethics problem to a decision.
- **Monday 14 September 2026:** Lecture 2 – Data management in research, Mattias Vesterlund.
- **Thursday 8 October 2026:** Seminar 2 – Dossier Audit. The substantially complete dossier draft must have been submitted in Canvas by 7 October at 23:59 and brought to the seminar.
- **Wednesday 14 October 2026:** Seminar 3 – Decision Clinic, individual oral examination of the submitted dossier.

The course offering runs from 24 August to 23 October 2026.

Once the Canvas course room has been published, Canvas is the authoritative source for scheduled times and rooms. Until then, use [KTH Schedule](#) (TimeEdit). Canvas also contains submission links and intermediate deadlines.

Preparations before course start

Literature

Swedish Research Council (2024), *Good Research Practice*. Available as a free PDF from the Swedish Research Council.

The required sections are, in the 2024 edition:

- Section 2.2, pp. 10–11: the ALLEA principles of Reliability, Honesty, Respect and Accountability;
- Section 2.3, pp. 12–14: research, protection, openness and trust interests;
- Section 3.1.2, pp. 25–27: the researcher’s ability and responsibility to apply principles, rules and professional judgement;
- Section 4.1, pp. 43–45: causes, consequences and prevention of deviations from good research practice;
- Section 8.2, pp. 94–96: the four-step guide to ethical reflection.

How the sections are distributed between the two seminars is specified in Canvas. The dossier additionally requires you to find and verify authoritative sources relevant to your own case, such as legislation, official guidance, professional or disciplinary codes and journal policies. Further material will be introduced in the lectures or specified in Canvas.

Support for students with disabilities

Students at KTH with a documented permanent disability can apply for compensatory support from [Funka](#). Apply in good time and contact the course coordinator if an approved recommendation needs to be considered in the course.

Examination and completion

Grading scale *

A, B, C, D, E, FX, F

Examination *

- INLA - Assignment, 1,5 credits, grading scale: A, B, C, D, E, FX, F
- DELA - Attendance, 1,5 credits, grading scale: P, F

Based on recommendation from KTH’s coordinator for disabilities, the examiner will decide how to adapt an examination for students with documented disability.

The examiner may apply another examination format when re-examining individual students.

If the course is discontinued, students may request to be examined during the following two academic years.

Other requirements for final grade *

Satisfactory attendance and passed written assignment.

Course-offering examination and completion requirements

DELA – Attendance and active participation, 1.5 credits, P/F

To pass DELA, you must complete:

- a relevant and sufficiently complete Ethical Decision Map submitted in Canvas by 9 September 2026 at 23:59;
- a substantially complete Research Ethics Decision Dossier draft submitted in Canvas by 7 October 2026 at 23:59;
- active participation in both seminars, or an approved compensatory assignment;
- the handwritten exit ticket at the end of both seminars and the oral ownership question during the case round.

The Decision Clinic belongs to INLA, not to DELA.

Active participation means presenting your own case and contributing constructively to the analysis of other students' cases. DELA is assessed as Pass or Fail and is not graded on the quality of the analysis.

INLA – Research Ethics Decision Dossier, 1.5 credits, A–F

INLA consists of the final written Decision Dossier and your individual response in the Decision Clinic on 14 October, assessed together in five equally weighted areas. The oral response is weighed into area 5 and has no separate Canvas assignment. The final dossier must be understandable without access to the seminar discussion or earlier drafts. Anonymise people, collaborations and sensitive project information. You are responsible for checking all factual claims and references, including material suggested by digital or generative-AI tools, and you must never cite a source that you have not checked yourself.

Area	A – excellent	C – good	E – sufficient	Fx/F – not yet sufficient
1. Decision, responsibility and scope	Formulates a precise and ethically complex decision; justifies the scope and shows nuanced understanding of actors, authority and responsibility.	Formulates a clear and relevant decision with a reasonable scope; the main actors, authority and responsibilities are explained.	Identifies a relevant decision, but the scope or distribution of responsibility is somewhat broad, simplified or implicit.	Mainly describes a topic or event; it remains unclear what must be decided, by whom or why the issue is ethically significant.

Area	A – excellent	C – good	E – sufficient	Fx/F – not yet sufficient
2. Facts, sources and uncertainties	Selects and integrates authoritative sources critically; consistently distinguishes facts, assumptions and uncertainties and evaluates their significance and the limitations of the evidence.	Uses relevant authoritative sources correctly; distinguishes important facts from uncertainties and explains how they affect the decision.	Uses at least three relevant sources mainly correctly and identifies the most evident facts and uncertainties.	The basis is substantially incomplete, misleading or difficult to verify; central uncertainties are ignored or unsupported claims are treated as facts.
3. Rules, principles and legitimate interests	Integrates rules, responsibilities, principles and interests into an independent analysis; exposes genuine conflicts and convincingly justifies interpretation, balancing or priority.	Applies several relevant normative considerations correctly and analyses the important tensions between them.	Identifies and applies relevant norms mainly correctly, but the treatment of conflicts is basic or partly descriptive.	Lists norms without applying them, uses them incorrectly or overlooks a central research-ethics conflict.
4. Alternatives, consequences and objections	Develops at least three genuinely feasible options and compares them systematically; analyses short- and long-term consequences, feasibility, risks, safeguards and strong objections with clear sensitivity to trade-offs.	Compares at least three feasible options using relevant and reasonably consistent criteria; treats important consequences, risks and objections.	Presents at least three distinguishable options and makes a basic but relevant comparison of their main implications.	The options are unrealistic, artificial or inadequately compared; important consequences, risks or objections are missing.

Area	A – excellent	C – good	E – sufficient	Fx/F – not yet sufficient
5. Recommendation, implementation and ownership	Gives a clear, feasible and well-balanced recommendation that follows convincingly from the analysis; specifies implementation, safeguards, review conditions and residual risks and defends the central choices independently in the oral examination.	Gives a clear and feasible recommendation grounded in the analysis; explains important implementation conditions and can defend the central choices and respond to a focused question.	Gives a relevant recommendation with sufficient justification, indicates basic practical conditions and can explain the analysis and take responsibility for the work.	The recommendation lacks support, is impractical or contradicts the analysis; implementation is ignored, or the student cannot explain central choices or take responsibility for the submitted work.

B lies between A and C; **D** lies between C and E. The grade is determined by the following main rule:

- **A:** at least four areas at A level and no area below B.
- **B:** at least four areas at B level or higher and no area below C.
- **C:** at least four areas at C level or higher and no area below D.
- **D:** at least four areas at D level or higher and no area below E.
- **E:** all five areas reach at least E level.
- **Fx:** the work is close to E, but one or two areas have limited deficiencies that can be corrected without rebuilding the case, the main analysis and the recommendation.
- **F:** several areas are below E, the deficiencies require substantial reconstruction, or you cannot demonstrate ownership of and responsibility for the work after being offered the opportunity to correct it.

The teacher may make an overall professional judgement when a performance lies exactly between two grades, but any departure from the main rule is justified in writing on the basis of the matrix. The dossier, the assistance/AI statement and the Decision Clinic must all be completed for INLA to be complete.

An **Fx** means that you are offered a clearly delimited revision of the same dossier, with an individual deadline set when the result is communicated. The grade is set on the revised version. If you have not completed the course by the end of the course offering on 23 October 2026, contact the course coordinator.

The course grade is the INLA grade, awarded once DELA has been passed.

Assistance and AI statement

After the reference list, add a short statement. State whether generative AI assisted you with any of the following: (a) choosing or delimiting the case; (b) identifying or interpreting sources; (c) generating alternatives or objections; (d) formulating the recommendation; (e) drafting or revising sentences. For each category used, state what you checked, rejected or changed. If you did not use generative AI, say so explicitly. Also state which people or other tools, if any, assisted you and how you verified factual claims and references.

“I did not use generative AI or other assistance beyond ordinary spelling and reference tools” is a complete answer when it is true.

The assessment does not attempt to determine whether a passage “sounds AI-generated”. It assesses whether your evidence can be verified, your reasoning can be defended and you can take responsibility for the submitted decision.

Alternatives to missed activities or tasks

If you miss a seminar, fail to submit the required preparation by the hard deadline, or submit work that is not sufficiently complete, you may not participate in the seminar and complete a compensatory assignment instead. Illness or another valid reason is handled in exactly the same way: the compensatory assignment carries no penalty and does not affect your grade.

There is one compensatory assignment for each seminar, and each is designed to take **about two hours**, the same as the seminar itself. It replaces the learning opportunity you missed. Both have the same two parts of approximately 400 words each:

1. **Review of another case (about one hour).** An anonymised sample is published in Canvas. Apply the same review protocol your group used in the seminar and write a structured response to it.
2. **Review of your own work (about one hour).** Apply the same questions to your own document and end with no more than three concrete revision priorities: Verify, Strengthen, Revise.

The compensatory assignment has no fixed deadline and is part of DELA. It is assessed as complete or incomplete only. Until it has been passed, the seminar assignment it belongs to remains Incomplete, and no result is reported for the course. Complete it in good time before the course offering ends. Contact the course coordinator and consult Canvas for the instructions and the sample document.

You may complete **at most one compensatory assignment** during the course. If you miss both seminars, you cannot compensate your way to a pass and will need to take the course in a later round, because the participation requirement rests on defending your own case in front of others.

Once the compensatory assignment has been passed, you can continue towards completion of the course, but it does not create a later right to attend or repeat the missed seminar. It also does not remove the remaining submission requirements.

If you cannot attend the Decision Clinic on 14 October, contact the course coordinator as soon as you know. An individual oral examination of approximately ten minutes is arranged instead. The oral component cannot be replaced by written work, because it examines whether you can explain and take responsibility for your own analysis.

Ethical approach *

- All members of a group are responsible for the group's work.
- In any assessment, every student shall honestly disclose any help received and sources used.
- In an oral assessment, every student shall be able to present and answer questions about the entire assignment and solution.

Contacts

Communication during course

For questions about course content and examination, email Per Wikman Svahn at per.wikman@abe.kth.se. For questions concerning the lecture *Data management in research*, email Mattias Vesterlund at matves29@kth.se. For administrative questions concerning registration, admission or course records, email kursexp@abe.kth.se.

Please include the course code AK2017 in the subject line. Detailed instructions, submissions and intermediate deadlines are published in Canvas.

Course Coordinator

Per Wikman Svahn

Teachers

Per Wikman Svahn
Mattias Vesterlund

Examiner

John Cantwell