

Course memo Autumn 2026

FAK3148 Introduction to Research Ethics for PhD students, 1.5 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 *

Central problems and concepts in research ethics, relevant legal frameworks and codes of conduct, concrete discussion cases.

Intended learning outcomes *

The aim of the course is to prepare students for a professional research career. After completing it, students should: be familiar with the most central laws, rules, and practices that govern research; be able to make independent ethical judgments about research in their own fields with support in central research ethical concepts; know how to find practical guidance if they encounter complex research ethical problems.

Learning activities

The course consists of two lectures, two seminar cycles, individual reading and source work, an assignment on authorship and responsibility, and a Research Ethics Decision Memo. 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. investigate authorship criteria in your field and interview your supervisor or another research-active person;
4. develop the map into a **Research Ethics Decision Memo** of 600–800 words;
5. submit a substantially complete memo in Canvas by 7 October 2026 at 23:59, bring it to the Memo Workshop in Seminar 2 and make a limited final revision afterwards;
6. submit the final memo and the authorship assignment in Canvas by 12 October 2026 at 23:59.

The Decision Memo case may be real, past, documented or realistically hypothetical. It may come from your own doctoral project or another field with which you are familiar, and it does not require prior approval from the teacher. Anonymise people, collaborations and sensitive project information.

There is no separate generic assignment after either seminar. Instead, each seminar ends with a short handwritten exit ticket that you hand in, and you carry those priorities into the next version of your own document.

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, authorship interview and final Decision Memo together form a coherent Research Ethics Portfolio. 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 1.5 credits. The following figures are planning estimates, not individual time limits:

Activity	Hours
Four scheduled activities	8
Preparation for Seminar 1	11
Preparation for Seminar 2	11
Assignment on authorship and responsibility	5
Revision, finalisation and administration	5
Total	40

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 is not registered as a separate examination requirement.

Seminars

To participate in and complete a seminar, 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.

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 doctoral-student group.

Seminar 2 – Memo Workshop is the final development stage. You submit a substantially complete Decision Memo by the Canvas deadline, bring the same draft and test it in a doctoral-student group: you pitch the decision and recommendation, answer questions from your peers and have the argument stress-tested against the five assessment areas. The seminar ends with no more than three final revision priorities.

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 participation requirement and are the reason attendance cannot be replaced by simply submitting text.

The Research Ethics Decision Memo

The memo is a short professional decision document for a named decision-maker, not a traditional essay. It is 600–800 words excluding the reference list and the assistance/AI statement, and it consists of four heading lines followed by four sections:

- **Heading lines:** *To* (the intended decision-maker), *From* (your name and course code), *Decision required* (in one sentence) and *Recommendation* (in one sentence).
- **Section 1 – Situation, responsibilities and uncertainty:** the necessary context, who holds authority, the established facts and the important uncertainties.
- **Section 2 – Ethical analysis:** the relevant rules, principles, responsibilities or legitimate interests applied to the case, including at least one genuine tension.
- **Section 3 – Alternatives:** at least two feasible alternatives compared fairly on their ethical advantages, disadvantages and risks.
- **Section 4 – Recommendation:** the justified recommendation, an important objection or residual risk, a safeguard or condition, and what would make you reconsider.

The memo must use at least two relevant and authoritative sources with exact references, and must be understandable without access to the seminar discussion or earlier drafts. The template and the full instructions are published in Canvas.

Authorship and responsibility

The course includes an individual assignment on authorship and responsibility with an expected workload of approximately five hours:

1. identify the authorship and responsibility criteria used by a leading journal or another relevant publication channel in your field;
2. interview your supervisor or another research-active person about actual practice and common difficulties;
3. write approximately one A4 page comparing the formal criteria with the practice described in the interview;
4. formulate one concrete principle that you intend to use in future research collaborations.

The interview is a separate but related course assignment. It may be connected to the case used in your Decision Memo, but it does not have to address the same case.

Arrange the interview well in advance, ideally booked by 18 September, because it depends on another person's availability. The assignment is part of the Research Ethics Portfolio and must be submitted in Canvas by **12 October 2026 at 23:59**.

Submission sequence and deadlines

The Research Ethics Portfolio is a collective name for several connected Canvas submissions; it is not one combined portfolio file. The submission sequence is:

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 Decision Memo draft:** submit in Canvas by **7 October 2026 at 23:59**. This is the hard eligibility deadline for Seminar 2.
3. **Authorship and responsibility assignment:** submit in Canvas by **12 October 2026 at 23:59**.
4. **Final Research Ethics Decision Memo:** submit in Canvas by **12 October 2026 at 23:59**. Include the reference list and assistance/AI statement in the same file.

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 memo draft, the four heading lines, all four sections described above, at least two authoritative sources, at least two compared alternatives, a recommendation and a length of 600–800 words. A serious attempt qualifies even if you consider the analysis weak. The exact criteria are published with each assignment in Canvas.

The submissions due on 12 October are final course deadlines and do not determine seminar eligibility.

Schedule

All four 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 – Memo Workshop. The substantially complete Decision Memo draft must have been submitted in Canvas by 7 October at 23:59 and brought to the seminar.

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.

Required sections for each seminar are specified in Canvas, which is open from the start of the course. Additional authoritative codes, regulations and field-specific sources 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 *

P, F

Examination *

- UPP1 - Essay, 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.

Essay and active participation in seminar discussions

Course-offering examination and completion requirements

UPP1 – Research Ethics Portfolio and Decision Memo, 1.5 credits

The syllabus term “Essay” is implemented as a coherent Research Ethics Portfolio whose final written product is a professional **Research Ethics Decision Memo**, not a traditional general essay. To pass UPP1, you must complete:

- a relevant and sufficiently complete Ethical Decision Map submitted in Canvas by 9 September 2026 at 23:59;
- a substantially complete Decision Memo 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 authorship and responsibility assignment submitted in Canvas by 12 October 2026 at 23:59;
- a final Research Ethics Decision Memo of 600–800 words submitted in Canvas by 12 October 2026 at 23:59;
- a transparent statement about assistance and any use of generative AI.

The Decision Memo must address a concrete research-ethics decision for an identified decision-maker, use at least two relevant and authoritative sources, distinguish facts from important uncertainties, apply relevant rules and ethical considerations, compare at least two feasible alternatives, and give a justified recommendation with an objection, safeguard or condition for reconsideration. 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.

The memo is assessed as Pass or Fail in five areas:

1. **Decision and scope:** the research-ethics problem, decision-maker, decision and delimitation are clear and workable.
2. **Evidence and uncertainty:** relevant sources are used mainly correctly, and important facts, assumptions and uncertainties are distinguished.
3. **Ethical analysis:** relevant rules, principles, responsibilities or legitimate interests are applied to the case and at least one genuine tension is explained.
4. **Alternatives and recommendation:** at least two feasible alternatives are compared and the recommendation is ethically justified and addresses an important disadvantage or objection.
5. **Revision and ownership:** seminar feedback has led to concrete development, assistance is disclosed honestly, and the student can explain the main sources, choices and recommendation. Development is assessed by comparing the seminar draft with the final memo, both of which are in Canvas; no change log is submitted. Before a pass is registered, the teacher may ask one short question about a source, an analytical choice or the recommendation.

Pass requires the Pass standard in all five areas and completion of all portfolio requirements. A

limited deficiency normally leads to a targeted revision with an individual deadline. Fail is awarded if the requirements are still not met after an offered revision, if the analysis requires substantial reconstruction, or if the student cannot take responsibility for the submitted work. If you have not completed the course by the end of the course offering on 23 October 2026, contact the course coordinator.

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 result.

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. 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 portfolio or submission requirements.

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 FAK3148 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