



**SANS001 Social Science and Human Nature and Society.
Conceptual and Philosophical Issues, 7.5 credits, third cycle**

The course was adopted by the Board of the Lund University Faculty of Social Sciences 28 April 2016 and the syllabus approved by the Research Studies Council 13 April 2016.

The syllabus is valid from the fall semester 2016.

A. General Information

The course is offered as an elective course on Third Cycle level for Doctoral students at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Lund University. The language of instruction is English.

Main fields of studies

Social Work. The course is relevant to Doctoral students in all social sciences.

B. Learning outcomes

Knowledge and understanding:

On the completion of the course, the student shall be able to

- demonstrate in-depth knowledge of some of the most important theories of human nature and society developed in the Western Intellectual Tradition
- demonstrate an understanding of how these meta-theories influence and guide the choice of empirical theories and research methodologies in contemporary social science
- have knowledge of how to use the most fundamental tools for assessing theories of human nature and society, and how to formulate adequate criteria for such theories

Skills and abilities:

On the completion of the course, the student shall be able to

- critically reflect on various theories of human nature and society
- be able to analyse how different theoretical approaches impact on actual research and various policies
- be able to independently identify a specific problem in the area of the course relevant to their own research/dissertation and discuss this on the basis of relevant research literature and make critical judgement

- make informative, critical and supported written and oral presentations
- demonstrate ability to independently and analytically contribute to research in social science, including social work

Making judgement

On the completion of the course, the student shall be able to

- be able to reason and judge how research contributions (articles, studies, policy documents etc.) can be evaluated from different epistemological and ontological point of views

C. Course content

Generally, the course aims to provide knowledge and critical tools for the assessment of theories of human nature and society, which, often unconsciously and implicitly, influence and govern empirical theories and research activity in the social sciences, including social work and its practices.

Thus, it aims to deepen student's historical, conceptual/philosophical and methodological knowledge and also to strengthen their ability to individually contribute to research in social work and the social sciences more generally.

More specifically, the course presents and critically assesses the explicit and implicit conceptions/theories of human nature and society, developed in the Western World and now prevalent in contemporary social sciences. The overall aim is to formulate adequate criteria for such assumptions and to develop a non-reductive basis for the social sciences taking both cultural variation and biological constraints into consideration.

A specific emphasis will be on discussing ideas of how human beings function and develop emotionally, socially and cognitively and the role of communication practices and social institutions in this respect.

The course also provides training in scientific oral and written communication.

The course consists of 8-9 lectures/seminars:

Seminar I: Introduction: Problem context, historical background and conceptual-evaluative tools. This seminar presents the rationale for the course and the historical context of the issues discussed. Theories of human development will function as case studies.

The fundamental ideas of internal and external criticism as a base for different kinds of evaluations will be presented and discussed.

Seminar II-III: Theories of Human Nature and Society. These seminars present and discuss the most influential theories of human nature and society, as they have developed in the West up to the present time.

Seminar IV: Biologizing of human activity. This seminar presents and evaluates evolutionary and neurophysiological approaches to the conceptions presented.

Seminar V-VI: Socio-historical approaches to human beings and their activity. These seminars present and evaluate alternatives to the approaches discussed in the previous seminar: "discursive psychology" and various kinds of "social constructivism", with their underlying assumptions and guiding principles. The

role and importance of social institutions and their histories are also discussed.

Seminar VII: The domestication of biology: A synthesis of biological and socio-historical factors. This seminar presents and discusses a possible synthesis of the different approaches, presenting a number of tentative ideas for an adequate conception of human nature and society.

Seminar VIII-IX: Student presentations. The course will end with a seminar or two (depending on the number of students enrolled); where the participants are required to present a specific problem they are presently working on and suggest ways for a proper resolution.

D. Pedagogy and Assessment

The course consists of a combination of lectures and seminars. The lectures have an interdisciplinary focus and students are encouraged to participate actively, based on their own research interests and reading and analysis of the course- and other relevant literature.

Students are also expected to give oral and written presentations of the literature and of specific topics related to their own research. Participation in seminars is mandatory.

Specifically, examination will be based on the following:

- active participation in lectures/seminars
- individual oral presentations
- a course paper consisting of 8-10 pages dealing with a specific research problem that the student is working on, showing the relevant implication of the material discussed in the course
- mandatory participation in 4 of 7 seminars, as well as seminars VIII and IX. Absence is compensated for by written summaries of the literature.

Re-examination takes place after the end of the course. If necessary, a second re-examination is arranged at a later date.

E. Grading scale

Marking scale: Fail, Pass. For the grade of Pass the student must show acceptable results on the requirements listed above. For the grade of Fail the student have shown unacceptable results.

At the start of the course students are informed about the learning outcomes stated in the syllabus and about the grading scale and how it is applied in the course.

F. Entry requirements

The student must have been admitted to Doctoral Studies at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Lund University. However, other students may be accepted by approval of the Course Director.