

**Department of Sociology, Fall 2018**  
**Professor Patrik Aspers**  
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To sign up for the course please e-mail: [ylva.nettelblatt@soc.uu.se](mailto:ylva.nettelblatt@soc.uu.se)  
 (The number of students to be registered is restricted).

### **Graduate Course: Basic problems of social science: Ambiguity, Uncertainty and Risk**

This course will look at the ways a set of basic social science problems, namely ambiguity, uncertainty and risk, can be analyzed. These are problems addressed not only in sociology, but also in, for example, economics and anthropology. Ambiguity refers to the ontic problem of what is there and not there, uncertainty refers to the epistemic problem of not knowing the state of the world to foresee the consequences of action. Risk refers to the situations in which uncertainty can be calculated since there are numbers related to uncertainties. The bulk of the course will be concerned with the most commonly discussed problem, uncertainty.

Ambiguity and uncertainty and risk are problems that, ultimately, people are facing. The focus of the course is on the public ways of addressing these problems. In other words, individualized solution, experienced—such as those highlighted in psychology and in the “self-help” literature, are mentioned but not discussed.

The role of grown institutions and forma institutions, evaluations, decision, convaluations (like markets), and contests (like combat) will be analyzed theoretically and empirically.

The course will give participants an overview and understanding of the problems of ambiguity, uncertainty and risk, and analyzes ways of addressing them. The first part deals with ways of reducing uncertainty that result in certainty of the state of the world. Part II deals with ways (forms) by which no state of the art can be, and are, established. The course draws on examples from different fields and research, and it is theoretically to be labelled as eclectic.

#### **The course**

The course consists of lectures and seminar. The reading is composed of core text that should be read, and suggestions, which are recommended. A manuscript will also be circulated and discussed. With the exception of the first lecture, the first hour will be a seminar on the literature presented in the last class. Hour 2, with the exception of the last class, will be a lecture on the literature for the next class. Class 1 will also introduce the course, and the final class summarizes the course.

#### **Examination**

To pass the class each student must (1) be present at the last 4 of the 7 classes; (2) Each student has to present (individual or in pair/group depending on the number of students) the literature and come up with a few questions to be discussed for one class (class 2-6). The presentations should be no more than 10 minutes. (3) Each student is required to write one review on the manuscript of the course to be submitted in the final class (800-1200 words). (4) A paper, for example on a topic relevant for the student’s own Ph.D. project, in which it is clear that a substantial literature from the course is used of about 4000-5000 words must be written. The paper can also be an extended review of the literature or an analysis of specific problem clearly related to the literature and topic of the course. The paper should be submitted no later than three weeks after the course has ended.

Date	Theme	Time, Room	Texts
30/10	<b>Introduction and outline of the course</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The problem</li> <li>• How to address the problem</li> </ul>	13-15 Torgny Sege rstedt- rummet Eng 2-1026.	Beckert (1996)  Suggested Knight (1921) Carruthers (2013) Kahnema and Tversky (1974)
22/11	<i>Part I State of the world</i> <b>Institutions as grown orders</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is an institution</li> <li>• How do they come about?</li> <li>• Socialization</li> <li>• Notification of institutions</li> </ul>	10-12 Torgny Sege rstedt- rummet Eng 2-1026.	Berger and Luckmann 1967; selection) Willamson (2000)
22/11	<b>Formal rules (formal institutions)</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is a formal institution</li> <li>• How do they come about?</li> <li>• Decisions and authority</li> </ul>	13-15 Torgny Sege rstedt- rummet Eng 2-1026.	North (1990; selection) Weber (1921-22; selection)
27/11	Evaluations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluations based on scales</li> <li>• Evaluations not based on scales</li> </ul>	13-15 Torgny Sege rstedt- rummet Eng 2-1026.	Dahler Larsen (20122; selections) Vedung (2010; 2015)  <i>Suggested:</i> Aspers (2009)
4/12	<i>Part II Judgment</i> <b>Decision,</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decision for others</li> </ul>	13-15 Torgny Sege rstedt- rummet Eng 2-1026.	Lamont (2009) Aspers (2018)  <i>Suggested</i> Ahrne Brunsson (2011) Roumbanis (2017) Zuckermann (2003) Beckert (2016)
11/12	<b>Convaluations</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Valuation of alternatives</li> <li>• Direct and indirect</li> </ul>	13-15 Torgny Sege rstedt- rummet Eng 2-1026.	Podolny (2013)  <i>Suggested:</i> Zuckerman (2012) Furst (2017) Espeland and Stevens (1998) Menger (2014)
18/12	<b>Contest and Conclusion</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• “To fight things out” in direct contact</li> <li>• Violence and negotiation</li> </ul>	13-15 T.S.R Eng 2-1026.	Simmel 1923 (Kampf/ also in English “Struggle”

## Literature

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