Stockholm University
Department of Psychology

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COURSE SYLLABUS

Degree project for Master's degree 30hp
(PSMT42)

International Master program Psychology 120hp
Masterprogram in Work and Organizational Psychology 120 hp

Course Instructor
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COURSE SYLLABUS

AIMS AND CONTENT

In this course, the student independently designs and completes a scientific project including an empirical data collection based on a research question. The research question should have clear relevance to, be grounded in psychology, and be formulated in consultation with a supervisor. The presentation of the study has the form of a scientific report designed in accordance with international guidelines for publication of empirical studies in the field of psychology.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Upon finishing the course, the student shall be able to:

- Identify scientific research questions, choose a research design process, analyze, and interpret collected data based on theories and past empirical studies.
- Orally and verbally present own results, evaluate the scientific value of the results.
- Present, analyze, evaluate peers' scientific results, and give constructive criticism.

TEACHING AND SCHEDULE

The course includes an introduction lecture, seminars and individual supervision. The schedule includes teaching and deadlines for submission and is published on the course homepage on Athena.

- **Introduction:** Description of guidelines, ethics, and learning objectives for the course.
- **Research plan**: Seminar about 3-4 weeks after introductory lecture. Before the seminar, a research plan of 1-2 pages should be submitted (ethical aspects and thoughts about analyzes should be included in the research plan). Review and feedback from both students and course instructors are given in a peer-review process. Prior to the seminar, a schedule for the peer-review process is posted on Athena. This process is mandatory.
- **Scientific writing:** At a midterm seminar, we discuss scientific writing and any issues that arise during ongoing thesis work.
- **Examination**. The course ends with mandatory seminars where the student defends their own thesis and discuss another student's thesis.

Each student must have at least one supervisor (the main supervisor must be employed at the department of Psychology). Supervision means that the students gets guidance in planning, implementing, analyzing and reporting on their scientific work (for more detailed information, see the heading "Supervision").

ETHICS

Master thesis projects at the Department of Psychology must follow applicable laws and guidelines regarding ethics in research. Students and their supervisors (Both main and co-supervisor) must fill in and sign the document Ethics Declaration. The document is submitted at Athena.

Students who collect their own data must submit the completed and signed document before data collection begins. Keep in mind that you cannot collect personal data and sensitive personal data according to the Ethics Review Act. Such data can only be collected in projects where an ethical approval from authorities already exists (when applicable: Include the ethical approval number in the Ethics Declaration and in the thesis). There are also important ethical regulations on how data is saved and handled during the process. See more on Athena.

GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT TIME

The goal of the course is that students should be able to complete the thesis during the current study semester. Therefore, it is important that the student can devote full-time work to the scientific work. Before the student submit their thesis for examination, the main supervisor should confirm that the thesis is ready to be presented at an examination seminar. In case the student has not been able to finish within time, they can present it at seminars during the next semester. Deadlines are given in the autumn, but note that two students need to have their thesis submitted to organize an examination seminar. Therefore, it cannot be guaranteed that an examination seminar follows after the deadlines in the autumn (a student might need to wait to the next deadline if only one submitted a thesis).

SUPERVISION

The thesis project must be an original work. It is carried out independently in consultation with a supervisor. The supervisor should function as a knowledgeable discussion partner that guides the student through the thesis work. The student's task is to use and take advantage of the guidance that the supervisor provides. Discussions with the supervisor should, for example, ensure that the research question is empirically possible to answer within the limited time period and with resources available. The supervisor can give tips on relevant literature, guide before data collection and data processing, and give their input on the results. The student, not the supervisor, is responsible for the study and for completing the thesis.

The first step is to write a research plan. The research plan includes a brief theoretical background, purpose, research question, description of how the study is completed (i.e., participants, materials, measures, (equipment), analyses plan, and a time schedule of the different tasks). **The research plan must be reviewed by the supervisor and the course instructor before the student start work on the study. The ethical declaration should also be fulfilled at this time.**

The supervisor should be informed in advance of what the student plans to do at each stage of the investigation - **questionnaires and procedures must always be approved by the supervisor before data collection takes place**. The supervisor has the ultimate responsibility for student activities in their thesis work. However, the student is not released from liability in case of violation of any rules or guidelines that the supervisor or course instructor informed about, or if the student fails to inform the supervisor about what they intend to do.

Students should be attentive to the supervisor’s recommendations regarding the scope and research question. This is based on the fact that some research ideas can take too long time, be too broad etc, and here, supervisors can help as they are experienced regarding these challenges. Meetings between student and supervisor should be planned carefully, for example on aims with the meeting and what should be prepared. A timetable including how contacts are taken is helpful. To repeat, the student should take advantage of the guidance from supervision meetings in the best possible way (e.g., send drafts in advance, prepare questions to be discussed). Exactly when different versions of the text should be submitted can be agreed upon by the parties. **This is extra important when the final deadline approaches, so that you assure that your supervisor will have enough time to read your complete thesis before submission.**

The supervisor grades the student after the thesis have been finished (on their independence in writing, formulating question, taking responsibility for time plans and being adherent to the supervisors’ guidelines).

THESIS FORMAT

The purpose of this degree is that the student should be able to show that they have accomplished a scientific approach. The structure of how a scientific study is presented is guided by publication manuals. At the department of psychology, such instructions should be followed as far as possible. These are published on the course's website.

The thesis should follow APA-guidelines. There is a template on Athena that includes the first page and subheadings (formatted in line with SU-guidelines) which should be used. Spacing is simple as the thesis is a layout version and not a manuscript version. On the website there are also guidelines on how to write and links to APA websites about different parts of the paper. All paper follows the IMRaD structure (Introduction, Methods, results and Discussion). The template includes additional subheadings that are recommended.

In short, the reader should get a clear picture of; (a) the research problem and why it is important to study; (2) the methods used; (3) the results obtained; (4) the conclusions drawn and what they were based on. The guiding principle is to give the reader a reasonable chance to assess whether the chosen methods were appropriate for the question, and whether there is sufficient support in the results for the conclusions drawn, and whether the study is theoretically grounded and linked to other relevant studies.

A **quantitative thesis** should include about 15-25 pages (excluding title page, abstract and references). In word count this reflects about 8000 - 11000 words. A **qualitative thesis** is often longer, including about 20-30 pages and more words than tables (e.g., from 10.000 to 13.000 words). The length of a paper may vary in different psychology topics, consult your supervisor on these matters. An appendix might be used for questionnaires, extra calculation that are not central to the research question or hypothesis. The appendix can be useful for clarifications but is not included in the grading of the thesis. Fonts: Calibri och Times new Roman (12 p).

EXAMINATION

The examination includes two sessions:

1. Own thesis (written and orally)
2. Discussant of a peer's thesis (written and orally).

At the examination seminar, approximately 1.5 hours are reserved for each thesis. A discussant is appointed for each thesis and seminar. Their task is to present the thesis (15-20 min) and provide a solid discussion about the content of the thesis (45-50 min). Fulfilling the role of the discussant is a mandatory task that is graded. The master thesis will be available on Athena a few days before the seminar. Peers are invited to seminars, but presence is only mandatory for defending the own thesis and being the discussant of a peer's thesis.

PLAGIARISM, CHEATING, AND ILLEGAL COLLABORATION

As a student you need to be aware of the examination rules at Stockholm University. Detailed information is available both at the web pages of the Department of Psychology and Stockholm University (see links at Athena). When the thesis is uploaded on the submission platform it is automatically checked against published papers, student papers and past examination tasks. Teachers

are obliged to report suspicion about cheating and plagiarism to the principle and the disciplinary board. Plagiarism and cheating are always disciplinary matters and can lead to shutting off from studies. One example of plagiarism is to verbatim (word- by-word) or almost verbatim – regardless if a source has been given – copy a text (also concerns occasional sentences) and not refer to the source of the text. This also concerns texts that you have yourself authored previously (self-plagiarism, although not work in progress). To be involved in study groups is developing and time efficient, but when it comes to examination tasks you will need make sure that you are working on your own (if nothing else is instructed)

At the course one of the grades A, B, C, D, E, Fx and F is given. To pass the course, the student has to get the grade E or higher.

The grading takes into account:

- **The master thesis' quality**.
    - **Theoretical understanding and analysis**; is demonstrated by coherent, focused and relevant theoretical reasoning that clarifies the current study's relationship and contribution to the advancement of knowledge in the research field. Assessed by examiner
    - **Methodological knowledge and skills** in selecting and applying research methods that can answer the research question, including choice of design, sample selection, type of data and analysis. Awareness regarding the choice of method, its requirements and limitations. Assessed by examiner.
    - **Report writing** is assessed by the examiner on the basis of master thesis' structure and logics, its consistency and clear focus on the purpose and question (s) of the study. The language should be as easy to read as the subject allows. Formal rules must be applied consistently and correctly, especially with regard to references and citations.
- **Independence**. Assessed by examiner in consultation with supervisor on the following criteria: the student (1) can plan the work and carry it out according to a set schedule; (2) takes own initiatives and shows creativity, actively seeks new knowledge; (3) independently structures the thesis; (4) evaluates the supervisor's advice and based on these, develops own positions and takes responsibility for them.
- **Examination seminar**. Assessed on the basis of the student's ability to orally defend their dissertation, as well as the student's ability to orally critically present, evaluate and discuss another master students' thesis. Assessed by examiner.

Grading scales: The written thesis: The areas of Theoretical understanding and analysis, Methodological knowledge and methodological skills, Report writing, and Independence are assessed individually on a six-point scale

0	1	2	3	4	5
Unacceptable	acceptable despite shortcomings	satisfactory	good	very good	excellent

Oral presentation: Being a **discussant is** assessed at the seminar on a three-point scale.

0	1	2
Unacceptable	Satisfactory	Very good

- For the highest score (2), a very accurate, committed and interesting presentation of another student's master thesis is required. Significant discussion points; relevant prioritization of central versus peripheral problems in the thesis, constructive criticism is provided.
- A satisfactory discussion (1) involves a careful review of another student's master thesis, with discussion of both merits and shortcomings.

- An unacceptable discussion (0) means a deficient review of another student's master thesis. Obvious shortcomings and merits are overlooked. The discussion is characterized by inappropriate prioritization of central versus peripheral problems in the thesis **.**

Maximum number of points is 22; 20 from own master thesis and 2 from the discussion. These points are converted to the grades A-F as follows:

GRADING SCALE

A	Excellent: The learning objectives have been met to an exceptionally high degree.	The achievements in all five areas have been assessed as at least "good" and summed up to 20-22.
B	Very good: The learning objectives have been fulfilled to a very high extent.	The achievements in all five areas have been assessed as at least "good" and summed up to 18-19.
C	Good: The learning objectives have been fulfilled to high extent.	The efforts in all five areas have been assessed as at least "acceptable" and summed up to 15-17.
D	Satisfying: The fulfillment of the learning objectives is completely acceptable.	The efforts in all five areas have been assessed as at least ”acceptable despite shortcomings” and summed up to 12-14.
E	Acceptable: The learning objectives have been met, despite some shortcomings.	The efforts in all five areas have been assessed as at least ”acceptable despite shortcomings” and summed up to 9-11.
Fx	Fail: Some more work is required. The learning objectives have not been met sufficiently and there are shortcomings that need to be addressed	The effort in one or more areas is assessed as having "certain shortcomings that must be taken care of", but no area has been assessed as "unacceptable".
F	Fail: The learning objectives have not been met and are not considered possible to fulfill within the framework of supervised time.	The effort in one or more areas is assessed as "unacceptable".

In case of grade Fx: The student has two weeks to complete the thesis according to instructions to receive an E. If no completion is handed in to the examiner, the seminar version is graded, which means that the thesis is graded F. If a submitted new version is still not judged to correspond to a passing grade, an F is set. A grade F means that a new master thesis has to be submitted the next time the course is given.

PROCEDURE OF MASTER THESIS EXAMINATION

- The master thesis is submitted via Athena on the specified deadline. The spring semester's examination seminars take place around the turn of the month May/June. Note that you

should ask the supervisor on whether they can confirm that the master thesis is ready to be submitted and discussed.

- Scheduling the examination seminars: the student is given (1) a time for their thesis defense and (2) a time for having the role as discussant of another student's master thesis. An examiner leads the seminars. The schedule of examination seminars is published on Athena 1-2 days after submission.
- After the thesis seminar, the student have ten working days to make minor changes (based on the discussion). Submission of the final version is due ten working days after the examination seminar. If a final version has not been submitted by this date, the seminar version is graded.
- An examiner and a co-grader independently read the thesis and discuss the thesis on the grading criteria. The examiner sends an a grading letter including feedback on the thesis, and reports the grade to the student and the expedition. The grading is completed withing three weeks from submission of the final thesis.
- After receiving your grade, do not forget to register your final master thesis in DiVA yourself. We recommend that you submit the master thesis in full text as a pdf. Information on how to register your thesis can be found under Education -> Study information -> Thesis archiving: http://www.psychology.su.se/utbildning/studieinformation/uppsatsarkivering-1.27046

COURSE INSTRUCTORS, TEACHERS AND LITERATURE

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Guidelines on how to write in line with APA is presented at Athena, see resources in the course. The template also includes some instructions on formatting etcetera.

Silvia, Paul J. (2018). *How to write a lot: A practical guide to productive academic writing*. Washington, DC. American Psychological Association (a link to an electronic version is published on Athena).

EXAMINATION SEMINARS – THESIS DEFENSE

The thesis should be presented and discussed in an examination seminar where a discussant will present and discuss the content of the thesis. Being a discussant means reviewing, evaluating, discussing and providing feedback on the content similar to the peer-review process that precedes scientific publishing. The discussant's task is to be critical and constructive; the discussant should help the author to be able to make the thesis even better if possible.

An examination seminar follows a strict schedule. The examiner's presents the work's title, the discussant, the thesis author and supervisor. The thesis author is given the opportunity to make important corrections, so – called errata (changes should not be justified or discussed). The discussant presents a summary of the thesis, and the thesis author confirms whether they are satisfied with the summary. The discussant provides comments and criticisms and leads the discussion with the thesis author. When the discussant comments on the thesis and presents critical views, the thesis author must comment and respond to these questions. It is important that the discussion is a dialogue where the discussant asks questions and the thesis author clarifies, explains, and defends their thoughts and decisions in the thesis work. As the thesis author, you are advised to distance yourself from your own

work and try to look at the text from the reader's (discussant's) perspective - because it enables discoveries that can further improve the quality of the thesis.

GUIDELINES FOR THESIS DEFENSE

The thesis should be presented and discussed in an examination seminar where the discussant will present and discuss the content of the thesis. Being a discussant means reviewing, evaluating, discussing and providing feedback on the content similar to the peer-review process that precedes scientific publishing. The discussant's task is to be critical and constructive; the discussant should help the author to be able to make the thesis even better if possible.

An examination seminar follows this schedule: (a) summary: The examiner's presents the work's title, the discussant, the thesis author and supervisor. (b) The thesis author is given the opportunity to make important corrections, so – called errata (changes should not be justified or discussed). (c) The discussant presents a **summary** of the thesis, and the thesis author confirms whether they are satisfied with the summary. (d) The discussant provides comments and criticisms and leads the **discussion** with the thesis author. When the discussant comments on the thesis and presents critical views, the thesis author must comment and respond to these questions. It is important that the discussion is a dialogue where the discussant asks questions and the thesis author clarifies, explains, and defends their thoughts and decisions in the thesis work. As the thesis author, you are advised to distance yourself from your own work and try to look at the text from the reader's (discussant's) perspective - because it enables discoveries that can further improve the quality of the thesis. (e) the examinator asks some questions (f) if there is an audience, they are given the possibility to ask questions. (g) the examinator declares the ending of the seminar

GUIDELINES FOR THESIS DEFENSE

The **discussant** has the main part of the work during a thesis defense. The thesis are downloaded from Athena. The discussant has seven days to prepare. The discussant should read the thesis as soon as possible for the first time (making overall notes about the thesis and aspects that seems to be relevant to elaborate upon). The discussant is responsible for reviewing the thesis. The discussant should distinguish between views on form and views on content, but they should touch on both aspects in their discussion.

Summary. The discussant presents the thesis in an overview (10-15 minutes). The research questions and the rational should be described. The summary should be concise, and sufficiently detailed so that listeners who have not read the thesis get a picture of the work. Feel free to use a ppt for the presentation (but do not flip through the thesis when presenting). After the summary, the author is given the opportunity to point out shortcomings of the discussant presentation and make corrections that they deem necessary for further understanding.

Discussion. Preferably, start the discussion with a general assessment of the thesis and a short and concrete account of what has been appreciated in the work. Thereafter, the critical discussion follows which should be the main point of a thesis defense. The discussant reviews the work by **asking questions and making comments**. The thesis author explains and clarifies their positions. The questions and comments from the discussant can apply to all parts of the work, theory choice, common thread/logical structure, literature, methods, analysis and the presentation (form, structure, wording, layout) itself. Make sure the entire thesis **is covered in the allocated time**, and that the discussion is supposed to **be a dialogue**. Spelling errors and other formalities do not need to be mentioned, instead comments regarding these points but can be given to the respondent in writing. Authors are grateful for having written feedback and comments in their thesis.

Below are questions that the discussant could ask when reading and evaluating the thesis and which may be interesting for the discussant to address at the seminar. The questions relate to the criteria for grading the theses (see previous pages). Note that these are only examples, the discussant themself assesses what is most relevant to the current thesis. These questions are based on review processes in academic work (e.g., review of papers)

Thesis as a whole

- Is there a common thread in the thesis that is easy to follow? Do the different parts of the thesis form a logically coherent unit?
- Is the thesis clearly written with emphasis on what is relevant? How does the language flow? Is the thesis stylistically reasonably cohesive? How are quotes used? APA-instructions?
- Does the title reflect the central theme of the thesis? Is it specific enough?
- Does the research question seem to be topical and/or of high relevance?

Introduction and aims

- Does the summary give a clear picture of the content of the thesis?
- Does the introduction present the central theme of the thesis in its broader context?
- Is the theoretical introduction relevant to the purpose/research question? Are references accurate and updated?
- What are the central theories in the thesis?
- Are all relevant concepts and terms clearly defined and contextualized in relation to the research question?

Aim and hypothesis

- Does the introduction logically lead to the formulation of the specific research questions (hypotheses)?
- Are the research questions (hypotheses) sufficiently specific and researchable?
- Are all hypothesis included. Are directions specified?

Method

- What does the choice of study participants look like,
    - Quantitative: how does the sample relate to the population? How has power been calculated?
    - Qualitative: what considerations have been made for the selection?
- What are the ethical considerations?
- Is the chosen method reasonable in relation to the research aim and questions?
- Are the chosen analyses reasonable in relation to the hypothesis and quality of the data?
- Is the method described so that it can easily be replicated?
    - Quantitative studies: Is each variable operationalized? Is design and procedure reported clearly?
    - Qualitative studies: how does the interview guide correspond to the research questions? Has the author declared their pre knowledge and position in relation to the research group?

Results

- Have adequate data processing and analysis methods been used?
- Are the results been presented in a clear and concise manner? Are there better alternatives?
- Do tables and figures (if existing) have clear captions?
- Are the results structured in the same order as research questions and hypotheses?
- Is it clear what are the central analyses and the peripheral analyses (eg., prerequisite testing).

Discussion

- Does the discussion start with the research question and the main findings.

- Are the results interpreted in a reasonable way? Are the conclusions well-founded?
- Are research findings of the thesis integrated with previous research and theory?
- Is there a limitation section discussion method and results
- Are any further interesting studies suggested? Are the proposals reasonable?
- Is there a clear conclusion?

You do not have to spend time on proofreading errors and formalities during the seminar, but the thesis author is mostly grateful to receive the discussant's complete notes afterwards. It is important that the discussion flows as a dialogue between the parties and is not only an indication of shortcomings that the thesis author receives passively.