

COURSE DESCRIPTION (FIȘA DISCIPLINEI)

Ethical Foundations in Social Sciences

Fundamente etice ale cercetării în științele sociale
Academic Year 2026/2027

1. Programme Information

1.1. Higher Education Institution	Babes-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca
1.2. Faculty	Faculty of Sociology and Social Work
1.3. Department	Doctoral School of Sociology and Social Work
1.4. Field of Study	Sociology
1.5. Study Cycle	DOCTORAL STUDIES
1.6. Study Programme / Qualification	PhD in Sociology
1.7. Mode of Delivery	IF, IFR

2. Course Information

2.1. Course Title		Ethical Foundations in Social Sciences		Course Code SDR3131
2.2. Lecturer (Lectures)		PROF. DR. HABIL. DÉGI LÁSZLÓ CSABA		
2.3. Lecturer (Seminars)		PROF. DR. MARIA CARMEN PANTEA		
2.4. Year of Study	1	2.5. Sem.	2	2.6. Assessment: E 2.7. Status: Compulsory

3. Total Estimated Time (contact hours per semester)

3.1. Hours/week 4	3.2. Lecture 2	3.3. Seminar 2	3.4. Total contact hours 56	3.5. Lecture 28	3.6. Seminar 28
Distribution of individual study time (IS) and self-directed learning (SDL): 10x25=250					hours
Study of textbooks, lecture notes and bibliography (SDL)					60
Additional research in libraries, electronic databases and fieldwork					56
Preparation for seminars, assignments, papers and portfolios					56
Tutoring / academic advising					10
Examinations					2
Other activities					10
3.7. Total individual study hours (IS + SDL)					194
3.8. Total hours per semester					250
3.9. Number of credits					10

4. Prerequisites (where applicable)

4.1. Curriculum prerequisites	None required.
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4.2. Competence prerequisites	Basic knowledge of epistemology and research methodology in the social sciences is assumed.
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5. Conditions (where applicable)

5.1. Lecture delivery conditions	Multimedia classroom (computer, projector), internet access, access to online bibliographic databases (Web of Science, Scopus, etc.)
5.2. Seminar delivery conditions	Multimedia classroom (computer, projector), internet access, access to online bibliographic databases (Web of Science, Scopus, etc.)

6.1. Specific Competences Acquired

Professional / Essential Competences	CP2 - Ability to identify, formulate and creatively solve research problems
	CP10 - Understanding and applying the principles of research ethics
	CP3 - Mastery of advanced research methods and techniques
	CP4 - Knowledge and application of standards for dissemination and publication of research results
Transversal Competences	CT8 - Critical thinking and analysis of reasoning
	CT9 - Knowledge of legislation on intellectual property rights

6.2. Learning Outcomes

Competence Code	Knowledge	Skills	Responsibility and Autonomy
CP2	1. Knows methods and techniques for identifying and formulating original research problems. 2. Understands criteria of relevance and originality of scientific problems in sociology.	1. Formulates original problems and proposes creative solutions. 2. Applies innovative methods to solve identified research problems.	1. Takes responsibility for the quality and impact of research solutions. 2. Works autonomously in defining research directions.
CP10	1. Knows codes and regulations on research ethics (national and international). 2. Understands the ethical implications of research methodology and results in sociology.	1. Applies ethical principles at all stages of the research process. 2. Assesses ethical risks and proposes solutions for compliance.	1. Assumes responsibility for upholding ethical principles. 2. Works autonomously to prevent and manage integrity issues.
CT8	1. Knows the concepts of critical thinking and logical reasoning. 2. Understands methods of analysis and interpretation of data in sociology.	1. Critically analyses and interprets complex problems of ethics and integrity. 2. Formulates logical and well-argued reasoning on ethical dilemmas.	1. Works autonomously in the critical evaluation of research conduct. 2. Takes responsibility for justifying ethical decisions.
CT9	1. Knows legislation on intellectual property and copyright. 2. Understands national and international regulations	1. Applies intellectual property law in writing and publishing scholarly work.	1. Assumes responsibility for compliance with copyright legislation. 2. Works autonomously to protect research outcomes.

	applicable to sociological research.	2. Responsibly manages intellectual property rights.	
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7. Course Objectives (derived from the competence framework)

7.1. General Objective	The course aims to develop an ethically sound and academically responsible conduct at doctoral level, through a thorough understanding of the principles of research ethics in sociology, academic integrity standards, and the epistemological framework of social science research. The course combines a foundational perspective - engaging with the major problems of social epistemology and research methodology - with practical application of ethical standards to doctoral projects.
7.2. Specific Objectives	A. Cognitive Objectives 1. Explain and understand the distinction between scientific knowledge and everyday knowledge, and its relationship to other forms of knowing the social world. 2. Understand the major problems of social epistemology with methodological implications (qualitative/quantitative, nomothetic/idiographic, realism/constructivism, individualism/holism, etc.). 3. Know the codes and regulations governing research ethics (national and international) and the legal framework for intellectual property. B. Procedural Objectives 1. Design a research plan with a rigorous ethics section (informed consent, confidentiality, data storage and anonymisation) for the doctoral project. 2. Compare research methods regarding the advantages and limitations of different methodological approaches; critically evaluate data collection methods in sociology. 3. Apply current scholarly standards for writing and presenting academic work, including correct citation, paraphrasing, synthesis, and responsible use of generative artificial intelligence. C. Attitudinal Objectives 4. Uphold norms of deontology and research ethics; demonstrate a firm commitment to academic integrity throughout a research career. 5. Critically evaluate strategies and techniques used in one's own sociological research, with sensitivity to participants' vulnerabilities and the social impact of results.

8. Contents

8.1. Lectures	Teaching Methods	Notes
1. Science and scientific knowledge. The specificity of social science disciplines. Everyday knowledge vs. scientific knowledge. Types of science and interdisciplinarity in sociological research.	Interactive lecture; explanation; exemplification; heuristic discussion; case study analysis; moderated debate	
2. Major problems in social epistemology with methodological implications: explanation and understanding; qualitative and quantitative; nomothetic and idiographic; universal and contextual; macro and micro; realism and constructivism; individualism and holism; methodological monism and dualism.	Interactive lecture; explanation; exemplification; heuristic discussion; case study analysis; moderated debate	
3. Fundamental principles of ethics in sociological research. International frameworks (Declaration of Helsinki, Belmont Report) and national frameworks (Law no. 206/2004, UBB Code of Ethics). The virtues of the researcher.	Interactive lecture; explanation; exemplification; heuristic discussion; case study analysis; moderated debate	

4. Assessment of key data collection methods: survey, interview (individual and group), document analysis, observation, experiment - ethical implications of each method.	Interactive lecture; explanation; exemplification; heuristic discussion; case study analysis; moderated debate	
5. Informed consent: information, comprehension, voluntariness. Specific challenges: vulnerability, illiteracy, substituted consent. Specifics of online research.	Interactive lecture; explanation; exemplification; heuristic discussion; case study analysis; moderated debate	
6. Confidentiality and data anonymisation. Sensitive data in sociology (identity, political opinions, economic status). Re-identification risk; minimisation strategies. The GDPR framework.	Interactive lecture; explanation; exemplification; heuristic discussion; case study analysis; moderated debate	
7. Research ethics in Romania and internationally. Legal framework and the National Research, Development and Innovation Strategy. Ethics committees: complaint and resolution procedures.	Interactive lecture; explanation; exemplification; heuristic discussion; case study analysis; moderated debate	
8. Academic integrity: plagiarism, self-plagiarism, ghostwriting, data fabrication and falsification. Case studies. The importance of original research in doctoral dissertation writing.	Interactive lecture; explanation; exemplification; heuristic discussion; case study analysis; moderated debate	
9. New frontiers: generative artificial intelligence in writing and analysis. Responsible use: documenting AI's role, fact-checking, avoiding hallucinations and fabricated references.	Interactive lecture; explanation; exemplification; heuristic discussion; case study analysis; moderated debate	
10. Ethical publication, open access and intellectual property. Journal selection (impact factor, ARACIS/UEFISCDI lists); avoiding predatory journals. Peer review: roles and responsibilities.	Interactive lecture; explanation; exemplification; heuristic discussion; case study analysis; moderated debate	
11. Ethical considerations in different paradigms of sociological research: interpretive qualitative, participatory, evaluative and biographical research. Implications for validity and transferability.	Interactive lecture; explanation; exemplification; heuristic discussion; case study analysis; moderated debate	
12. Research with vulnerable populations in sociology. Marginalised communities, minorities, institutionalised persons. Multiple researcher-practitioner roles: tensions and solutions.	Interactive lecture; explanation; exemplification; heuristic discussion; case study analysis; moderated debate	
13. Responsible dissemination of results and researcher visibility. Responding to critical reviews; navigating the editorial process. Research metrics and their ethical use.	Interactive lecture; explanation; exemplification; heuristic discussion; case study analysis; moderated debate	
14. Review and synthesis. The profile of the researcher of integrity: from principles to practice. Open discussion on ethical dilemmas from doctoral projects.	Interactive lecture; explanation; exemplification; heuristic discussion; case study analysis; moderated debate	

Selected Bibliography:

Berger, P. L. & Luckmann, T. (1999). The Social Construction of Reality. London: Penguin.
 Blaikie, N. (2010). Designing Social Research (2nd ed.). Cambridge: Polity Press.
 Chelcea, S. (2007). Metodologia cercetarii sociologice. Bucuresti: Ed. Economica.
 Code of Ethics and Professional Deontology of UBB (2025). Cluj-Napoca: Babes-Bolyai University.

Creswell, J. W. & Plano Clark, V. L. (2011). Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research. London: Sage.

Documents on the activities of the UBB Ethics Committee and Research Ethics Sub-committee.

Durkheim, E. (1982). The Rules of Sociological Method. New York: Free Press.

Eaton, S. E. (ed.) (2024). Second Handbook of Academic Integrity. Cham: Springer. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-031-54144-5.

FAITH Project (2025). Guidelines on Developing Effective Academic Integrity Policies in Higher Education. European Network for Academic Integrity.

Glendinning, I. et al. (2022). General Guidelines for Academic Integrity. European Network for Academic Integrity.

Ilut, P. (1997). Abordarea calitativa a socioumanului. Iasi: Ed. Polirom.

Ilut, P. (2013). In cautare de principii. Epistemologie si metodologie sociala aplicata. Iasi: Polirom.

Israel, M. & Hay, I. (2021, 2nd ed.). Research Ethics and Integrity for Social Scientists: Beyond Regulatory Compliance. London: Sage.

Krueger, R. A. & Casey, M. A. (2005). Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research. London: Sage.

Macfarlane, B. (2009). Researching with Integrity. The Ethics of Academic Enquiry. London: Routledge.

Procedure of the UBB Scientific Council - HCA 247/13.01.2025.

Rotariu, T. (2016). Fundamente metodologice ale stiintelor sociale. Iasi: Ed. Polirom.

Rotariu, T. & Ilut, P. (2006). Ancheta sociologica si sondajul de opinie (2nd ed.). Iasi: Ed. Polirom.

Shamoo, A. & Resnik, D. (2015). Responsible Conduct of Research (3rd ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Silverman, D. (2011). Qualitative Research (3rd ed.). London: Sage.

Weber, M. (2011). Methodology of Social Sciences. New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers.

Yin, R. K. (2014). Case Study Research: Design and Methods. London: Sage.

8.2. Seminars / Laboratory	Teaching Methods	Notes
1. Science and scientific knowledge. Applied discussion: What constitutes original research in sociology? Criteria of relevance and novelty.	Problem-based discussion; exemplification; heuristic conversation; guided discovery; applied workshop; peer feedback	Students should prepare by reading the recommended bibliography before each seminar.
2. Problems of social epistemology: explanation vs. understanding; qualitative vs. quantitative; realism vs. constructivism - applied to each participant's doctoral project.	Problem-based discussion; exemplification; heuristic conversation; guided discovery; applied workshop; peer feedback	Students should prepare by reading the recommended bibliography before each seminar.
3. Research ethics in Romania and internationally. Case studies: real ethical dilemmas in sociological research. Identifying ethical risks in participants' own projects.	Problem-based discussion; exemplification; heuristic conversation; guided discovery; applied workshop; peer feedback	
4. Ethical conduct in research. Data fabrication and falsification: landmark case studies. Critical applied analysis.	Problem-based discussion; exemplification; heuristic conversation; guided discovery; applied workshop; peer feedback	
5. Informed consent - practical exercises: drafting the informed consent form for one's own doctoral project. Peer feedback.	Problem-based discussion; exemplification; heuristic conversation; guided discovery; applied workshop; peer feedback	
6. Confidentiality, anonymization and data management (GDPR). Workshop: drafting the data management plan for the doctoral project.	Problem-based discussion; exemplification; heuristic conversation; guided discovery; applied workshop; peer feedback	
7. Originality vs. plagiarism: correct citation practices, paraphrasing and synthesis. Interpreting similarity reports	Problem-based discussion; exemplification; heuristic conversation; guided	

(Turnitin/iThenticate) - limitations and best practices.	discovery; applied workshop; peer feedback	
8. Intellectual property and copyright in sociology. Case studies. Registration and protection of research outputs.	Problem-based discussion; exemplification; heuristic conversation; guided discovery; applied workshop; peer feedback	
9. Using artificial intelligence in social research: translation, bibliography management - ethical and technical risks, transparency.	Problem-based discussion; exemplification; heuristic conversation; guided discovery; applied workshop; peer feedback	
10. Scholarly dialogue and peer review: constructive feedback, working with editors and reviewers, drafting responses to critical reviews.	Problem-based discussion; exemplification; heuristic conversation; guided discovery; applied workshop; peer feedback	
11. Analysis of ethics sections from doctoral projects. Formative assessment and peer feedback on the draft ethics section / ethical approval application.	Problem-based discussion; exemplification; heuristic conversation; guided discovery; applied workshop; peer feedback	
12. Workshop: selecting appropriate scientific journals for dissemination. Identifying predatory journals. Drafting a response to reviewers.	Problem-based discussion; exemplification; heuristic conversation; guided discovery; applied workshop; peer feedback	
13. Final applied workshop (I): revising the data management plan and ethics section; identifying residual risks; collegial discussion.	Problem-based discussion; exemplification; heuristic conversation; guided discovery; applied workshop; peer feedback	
14. Final applied workshop (II): short presentations of doctoral projects - ethical challenges identified and proposed solutions. Collective feedback and conclusions.	Problem-based discussion; exemplification; heuristic conversation; guided discovery; applied workshop; peer feedback	
Selected Bibliography (same titles as lectures, with emphasis on:) European Commission. (2021). <i>Ethics in social science and humanities</i> (pp. 4–23). Directorate-General for Research and Innovation. Directorate-General for Research and Innovation. (2024). <i>Living guidelines on the responsible use of generative AI in research</i> (ERA Forum Stakeholders' document). Ilut, P. (2013). In cautare de principii. Epistemologie si metodologie sociala aplicata. Iasi: Polirom. Rotariu, T. & Ilut, P. (2006). Ancheta sociologica si sondajul de opinie. Iasi: Polirom. Israel, M. & Hay, I. (2021). Research Ethics and Integrity for Social Scientists. London: Sage. Eaton, S. E. (ed.) (2024). Second Handbook of Academic Integrity. Cham: Springer. Documents on the activities of the UBB Ethics Committee and Research Ethics Sub-committee. Procedure of the UBB Scientific Council - HCA 247/13.01.2025. Universitatea Babeş-Bolyai, Cluj Napoca. (2023). <i>Ghid de folosire a inteligenței artificiale</i> . FSAS. Universitatea Babeş-Bolyai, Cluj Napoca. (2024). <i>Recomandări de utilizare a inteligenței artificiale în scrierea academică</i> . Universitatea Babeş-Bolyai, Cluj Napoca. (2025). <i>Codul de etică și deontologie profesională al Universității Babeş-Bolyai</i> [PDF]. https://www.ubbcluj.ro/ro/despre/organizare/files/etica/Codul-etic-si-deontologie-profesionala_UBB_2025.pdf		

9. Alignment of Course Content with Expectations of the Epistemic Community, Professional Associations and Representative Employers

The proposed syllabus addresses the need for methodological rigour and integrity in planning and conducting research according to the criteria required for the award of the doctoral degree in Sociology.

The course is aligned with the expectations of the academic and professional community, which places integrity at the heart of research activity. Ethical standards, avoidance of plagiarism, responsible data management and the declaration of generative AI use are essential requirements of indexed journals (Web of Science, Scopus), professional associations in sociology (ISA, ESA) and research funding agencies (UEFISCDI, Horizon Europe).

Employers - universities, research institutes, international organisations, think tanks and major NGOs - regard integrity as a non-negotiable competence. This course provides foundational training for a credible, responsible and internationally competitive research career.

10. Assessment

Activity Type	10.1. Assessment Criteria	10.2. Assessment Methods	10.3. Weight in Final Grade
10.4. Lectures	Individual paper (with references) in the form of a reflexive analysis of the ethical challenges specific to the student's own doctoral project in sociology. Coherence of arguments, quality of ethical justification and clarity of the data management plan. Short oral presentation and defence of the paper in plenary (peer discussion).	Examination - oral presentation and defence of individual paper	50%
10.5. Seminars	Clarity of contributions; active participation in discussions; quality of peer feedback; completion of applied workshops (ethics section, data management plan).	Continuous assessment; participation in workshops	50%

10.6. Minimum Performance Standard

Minimum content of the examination paper:

- Brief description of the doctoral project (topic, population/ participants, method).
- Identification of at least two ethical principles in conflict within the research process (i.e. autonomy, non-maleficence, beneficence, justice, integrity, social responsibility)
- Identification of at least two types of ethical dilemma: one procedural (consent, confidentiality, multiple roles, recruitment) and one relating to content (sensitivity, stigmatisation, re-identification).
- Critical analysis of risks and ethical justification of methodological choices.
- Viable and well-argued solutions (procedures, protocols, adaptations).
- Reflection on the use of generative AI (where applicable) and explicit statement of how it was used.

For a passing grade:

- The doctoral student identifies the main ethical challenges of their own project and proposes coherent and well-argued solutions.
- Demonstrates understanding of the principles of informed consent, confidentiality and academic integrity.
- Minimum seminar attendance: 50%.

11. SDG Labels (Sustainable Development Goals / Obiective de Dezvoltare Durabila)

SDG 4 - Quality Education: promotion of academic integrity and ethical conduct in research as a foundation for quality doctoral education.

SDG 16 - Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions: respect for participants' rights, deontological norms and the legal framework.

SDG 17 - Partnerships for the Goals: promotion of ethical and transparent collaboration in research at national and international level.

Date of completion:	Signature of the Course Lecturer Prof. univ. habil. dr. Degi Laszlo Csaba 	Signature of the Seminar Lecturer Prof. univ. habil. dr. Maria Carmen Pantea 
Date of departmental approval:	Signature of the Head of Department Prof. univ. habil. dr. Degi Laszlo Csaba 	