Discussion 1 (7.2 The teacher):

“The role of teacher carries special responsibilities, towards the students and towards the department offering the courses. An academic teacher may be obliged to teach on a broad spectrum of courses. Students have a right to set high standards for their teachers to be competent and to stay informed on developments within their field. To uphold good quality, a teacher must not only maintain his or her knowledge and skills, but also seek to broaden them. Teaching staff should not – at least not without declaring their limitations – address problems in their lectures and classes which do not fall within their field of expertise.”

- How much of this also applies to the teaching assistants, who might not be lecturing but still in a position of authority for the course? Departments without enough PhD students in a certain area may need them to cover courses outside their field, is it ethical to do so? How can we weigh the ethics of acting as assistant on a course we are less knowledgeable about against potentially leaving a course under-staffed?

“It is important to be aware that the teacher is in a position of power in relation to the students; a position which must not be abused. Certain departments and other course providers have special ethical rules for teachers. In addition, the Swedish Association of University Teachers (SULF) has adopted ethical guidelines for university teaching staff (Etiska riktlinjer för universitetslärare, 2005). Those working as teachers should be familiar with and seek to comply with such documents.”

- Is this prioritised by departments in practice with regards to teaching assistants, or are PhD students encouraged to teach as soon as possible? What are the ethical responsibilities of the PhD student, director of studies and department head in this scenario?

- Do universities as a whole have a greater responsibility to prioritise teaching courses for PhD students? Is there an ethical concern over PhD students having to wait long periods of time to take a teaching course, when they are expected to act as teaching assistants from their first or second semester?

- Is it ethical for PhD students to gain teaching experience prior to a teaching course to help with that course, when said experience is effectively coming at the expense of undergraduate and master students?

Discussion 2 (7.1.4 Responsibility for ethical and legal compliance):

“As the leader of the specific research project on which the doctoral student is working, the supervisor is responsible for ensuring that the necessary approvals have been obtained and that the project complies with the ethical standards relevant to the type of research involved….

The supervisor should discuss the relevant documents with the doctoral student, and try to create an awareness of what their application entails in specific situations and, in particular, in the student’s own research…..

Since the responsibility for the ethical aspects of the doctoral student’s project rests with the supervisor, it is the supervisor who has to ensure, for instance, that experiments in medical research are terminated if patients or healthy subjects suffer unexpected harm. The same applies if the ratio of risk to benefit is not consistent with the risk-benefit assessment arrived at when the research was planned and approved by the regional ethics review board, or if other undesirable complications are reported.

- What responsibility do we as PhD students actually have then?

- Is it our responsibility to report to our supervisor if we observe any ethically questionable behaviour in the lab? (e.g. if one of the other PhD students is not following certain guidelines?)

- What if our supervisor is pushing us to do something ethically questionable (e.g. hide negative results for a proposed method in order to increase the chances of paper
acceptance)? Is it then our responsibility to report this to e.g. our head of department? What could/should we do in a situation like that?

Discussion 3 (7.4 Reviewing manuscripts for publication):
“Another important reason why the peer review system has been questioned is that the volume of manuscripts submitted to journals is now so great that it can be difficult to find willing and competent reviewers. There is good reason to consider awarding greater merit than is given today for the arduous work of reviewing texts...

For the system of peer review to continue working, at least three criteria must be met: (1) reviewers must submit their reports as quickly as possible, (2) they must not use information in the manuscript for their own purposes without referring to the source – and if they do wish to use it, they must first contact the author and ask whether he or she has any objection – (3) and they must be guided only by objective reasons in deciding whether or not to recommend publication.”

- What should be done if at the end of a review period, on the last day, you think that you discover who the authors are in a double-blind review? Should you reject the review assignment, thus delaying the review process?