

UCT RESEARCH ETHICS CODE FOR RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN PARTICIPANTS

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A PREAMBLE

UCT sets itself the aim of doing research

- with scholarly integrity and excellence
- with social sensitivity and responsibility
- with respect for the dignity and self-esteem of the individual and for basic human rights
- with reference to clearly specified standards of conduct and procedures that ensure proper accountability

In the pursuit of this ideal, UCT subscribes to the interdependent principles of scholarly responsibility, integrity and honesty, of human dignity and of academic freedom and openness. In the research context, these principles manifest in the relationships between the researcher and

- the research community and its ethos
- research participants
- society as a whole
- sponsors of research

UCT affirms the requirement that all research involving human participants be subject to prior ethics review, according to faculty guidelines. Review might entail either the approval of research proposals or appropriate deliberative procedures for researchers.

B RESEARCHERS AND THE RESEARCH COMMUNITY

- a. Research should be carried out in a scholarly and responsible manner. Researchers must recognize their responsibility for
 - The design, methodology and execution of their research;
 - Planning so that the findings have a high degree of validity;
 - Indicating where appropriate the possibility of alternative interpretations;
 - Reporting findings, and their limitations, to ensure accessibility and opportunities for peer-review.
- b. No single research paradigm is preferred. Researchers have the right to research from a variety of paradigms and to use a range of methods and techniques.
- c. In reporting findings, researchers should adhere to the principles of honesty, clarity, comprehensiveness, accountability and openness to public scrutiny.
- d. Discipline-specific codes of ethics should be acknowledged and honoured when conducting research in those disciplines.
- e. Ethics clearance is linked to a particular Principal Investigator and falls away when the Principal Investigator leaves the project before it is completed. Standard Operating Procedures must address this point and ensure that an application for an amendment to the proposal is made if a new Principal Investigator is to be appointed.

C THE RESEARCH PROCESS

- a. When planning research, researchers should consider and articulate the ethical acceptability and foreseeable consequences of their research in the research proposal.
- b. Researchers should keep in mind the requirement of prior research ethics review and clearance when planning the timeframes for their research.
- c. Research participants should not be harmed in the course of or as a consequence of research, except in those cases in which the research participants have no moral claim not to be harmed in the ways that the research may harm them. Researchers wishing undertake research that may harm participants must demonstrate that, according to faculty guidelines, the participants have no moral claim not to be harmed in the relevant ways.
- d. Research participants should give informed, voluntary consent, when appropriate, to participation in research. Researchers should provide information that explains the aims and implications of the research project, the nature of participation and any other considerations that might reasonably be expected to influence their willingness to participate. This information must be provided in language that is understandable to the potential participants. Note: this point does not preclude research that uses observation or deception as part of its methodology but such research must comply with best practice ethics codes within the specific discipline.
- e. Researchers should respect the right of individuals to refuse to participate or, having agreed to participate, to withdraw their consent at any stage without prejudice.
- f. Researchers must minimise or avoid exposure of participants to foreseeable legal, physical, psychological, or social harm or suffering that might be experienced in the course of research. The risk of harm and the likelihood of direct benefit to participants must be discussed as part of the consent process. Researchers should be especially sensitive to the interests and rights of vulnerable populations such as minors, elderly persons, very poor and/or illiterate persons.
- g. The privacy and confidentiality interests of participants must be taken into account in the research process. Subject to c. above, information that may identify individual persons should not be used in research findings unless the person has expressly agreed to its release, having had the opportunity to consider the implications of such release.

D CODES FOR RESEARCH ETHICS

UCT is committed to upholding this Code, but recognises that research is a human endeavour and, as such, is dependent also on discretionary decisions for which individual researchers must accept ethical and scholarly responsibility. The scholarly and ethical standards of researchers are central to the research endeavour and efforts to sustain and develop these standards are integral components of research at UCT. This Code and the more detailed discipline-specific versions aim to be educative rather than coercive in raising awareness of the standards and ethos that imbue research at UCT. However, researchers are expected to comply with the various codes and policies. Breaches or violations of the codes policies are dealt with in accordance with the Research Misconduct procedures.

Minimum procedural standards (or Standard Operating Procedures) are required in each discipline-specific code. Note: before research may be conducted using UCT students or staff members, both ethics clearance and permission to access contact details must be obtained: see *Ethics Clearance and Permission to Access: Standard Operating Procedure*.

Ethical reasoning requires thought, insight, sensitivity and familiarity with various research ethics codes. As with scholarly work, peer-review is important. Ethics peer-review includes

the larger intellectual community, society at large, and research participants. Seeking ethics clearance should be seen as an opportunity for informed ethical reflection and discussion with peers who are familiar with the relevant ethics codes.

In this spirit, ethics review is required in terms of the principles of this Code, as supplemented by discipline-specific codes, for

- research undertaken by staff and students of the university that involve participation by humans;
- research undertaken by researchers external to the university that involve members of the university as participants.

Note: research that proposes to use current students and/or staff as participants must undergo ethics clearance procedures. In addition, as a separate process, permission to access contact details of students and/or staff members must be obtained. In the case of students, application should be made to the Executive Director (ED) of Student Affairs; for staff members, application should be made to the ED of Human Resources.

The Faculty-level Research Ethics Committees are charged with responsibility for processing ethics clearance and for reporting to the Senate-level Ethics in Research Committee.

Faculty-level committees may devolve this responsibility to department-level committees.

E RESEARCHERS AND SOCIETY AS A WHOLE

The university is committed to conducting research that will contribute to health and quality of life and that strives to serve humanity and South African society as a whole rather than any sectional interest, unless otherwise justified.

The University of Cape Town recognises society's right of timely access to research findings and to open debate on their implications. Consequently, UCT is committed to upholding the principle that research findings should be made responsibly and freely available to the public and not be unreasonably withheld.

F RESEARCHERS AND THE ENVIRONMENT

The University is committed to conducting ethical research while being mindful of its responsibilities towards the environment.

G CONTRACT RESEARCH

Contract research is subject to this policy, the codes for research ethics and UCT's contract research policies. Any remuneration for researchers must be specified in research contracts. All conflicts of interest must be declared.