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UCT becomes first African university to adopt global ethics code

The University of Cape Town (UCT) Senate has adopted the Global Code of Conduct for Research in Resource-Poor Settings (GCC). The GCC aims to counter 'ethics dumping', broadly the practice of exporting sensitive research not ethically accepted in the global north to the global south and other resource-poor settings.

The practice has gained prominence with globalisation and increased researcher mobility; sometimes it is wilful exploitation, but it can result from a lack of knowledge. The GCC therefore also serves as an educational tool for researchers and research support systems.

UCT Associate Professor Rachel Wynberg, one of the code's authors shared: "Adoption of the code by UCT confirms the university's ongoing commitment to transforming research and promoting research practice that is ethical, engaged and relevant. It is entirely fitting that UCT is the first African institution to adopt the code, and I am delighted that we have decided to do so."

This makes UCT the third adopter of the Global Code, after the European Commission and the European & Developing Countries Clinical Trials Partnership, and the first adopter in the global south.

The UCT Senate said: "This is an important and necessary statement of principles and procedures with regard to research ethics to be followed when researchers from the global north engage in research in Africa and other 'resource poor settings'. The Global Code complements the policies already adopted by Senate to ensure that UCT researchers maintain the highest ethical standards. Senate supports the adoption of the Global Code subject to recognising that UCT researchers remain subject, first and foremost, to UCT's own research ethics policies."

“UCT is the top-ranking university on the African continent, and I am thrilled it is the first university globally to adopt the GCC,” writes Professor Doris Schroeder, director of the Centre for Professional Ethics at the University of Central Lancashire School of Health Sciences and lead author of the code. “We owe this to Rachel Wynberg. Her commitment to achieving the highest possible ethics standards in research is commendable.”

The code, which is directed at all research disciplines from bioscience to zoology, emphasises close collaboration between partners in the global north and south through all stages of research. It was developed over the past four years by TRUST, a collaborative EU-funded project, with UCT as a key partner.

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