



**STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES**  
**FACULTY OF HUMANTIES RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE**  
**2017**

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## 1. Name

The name of the committee is the Faculty of Humanities Research Ethics Committee and is hereafter referred to as the Faculty of Humanities REC, or the REC.

## 2. Terms of Reference that are adhered to:

### 2.1 University of Johannesburg:

The REC functions as a committee, in synergy with UJ statutes, Senate rules, UJ code of Academic Ethics, UJ general regulations, Faculty rules, regulations, policies and procedures.

### 2.2 Professional Boards and Councils

Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) Ethical Code of Conduct for Psychologists.

South African Council for Social Services Professions (SACSSP) Ethical Code of Conduct for Social Workers

### 2.3 National Legislation:

National Legislation is adhered to, as far as it is relevant to the social sciences and humanities:

#### 2.3.1 National Health Act, Act no. 61 of 2003

Specific sections of chapter 9 have direct relevance on the responsibility of ethics committees and research procedures. They are:

##### 2.3.1.1 Section 71 (a) & (b):

Research on or experimentation with human subjects:

Notwithstanding anything to the contrary in any other law, research or experimentation on a living person may only be conducted-

- a) in the prescribed manner; and
- b) with written consent of the person after he or she has been informed of the objectives of the research or experimentation and any possible positive or negative consequences on his or her health.

##### 2.3.1.2 Section 72 (1):

National Health Research Ethics Council (NHREC):

A council to be known as the National Health Research Council is hereby established.

Ethical guidelines and training opportunities: [www.nhrec.org.za](http://www.nhrec.org.za)

##### 2.3.1.3 Section 73: Health Research Ethics Committees

Every institution, health agency and health establishment at which health research is conducted, must establish or have access to a health research ethics committee, which is registered with the National Health Research Ethics Council.

2.3.2 The Constitution of SA Act no 108 of 1996. Chapter 2 Bill of Rights Section 12c  
Everyone has the right to bodily and psychological integrity, which includes the right not to be subjected to medical or scientific experiments without their informed consent.

### 2.3.3 Ethics in Health Research

Principles, Processes and Structures - Department of Health 2015

## 2.4 International Guidelines

The following International Guidelines are applicable:

2.4.1 The Helsinki Declaration (updated 2013).

2.4.2 Singapore Statement on Research Integrity

## 2.5 Disciplinary Structures and Conventions

The REC will also apply disciplinary conventions as appropriate in its ethical review processes. The SOP makes allowance and takes into consideration different disciplinary conventions.

## 3. Mission and purpose

The Faculty of Humanities REC is a standing committee of the Board of Faculty (BOF), and serves as an advisory and monitoring body with regard to research ethics in the Faculty (In accordance with UJ's vision, mission and core values, legal and management framework). The essential purpose of the REC is to protect the dignity, rights, safety, and well-being of all human participants in human subjects' research. The REC will do this through independent, prospective and ongoing ethics review of all social science and humanities research involving human participants, projects undertaken by members of staff, registered students and affiliates of UJ.

## 4. Functions

The functions of the Faculty of Humanities REC are, through review of research proposals:

- Maintenance of ethical standards of practice in research.
- Ensure that the researcher has the appropriate support in place for participants so that they are not harmed or exploited
- Ensuring compliance with the Constitution of South Africa with reference to the protection of fundamental human rights
- Preserving the research participants' rights.
- Providing reassurance to society that this is being done.
- Striving towards realisation of the University's and Faculty's vision, mission and core values, with specific reference to the protection of fundamental human rights of researchers and research participants
- Ensuring execution of the University's general regulations, policies and procedures related to research ethics
- Initiating, facilitating and managing faculty-specific research ethics policy development and implementation

- Developing the procedures for research ethics: application, review, feedback/communication, follow-up, documentation and archiving, in accordance with best practice guidelines, national legislation, policies and guidelines
- Dealing with research ethics matters referred by the BOF or the Dean
- Serving as the Faculty's research appeals committee with reference to research ethics complaints and/or appeals lodged by students
- Facilitate the review of ethical standards, selection criteria and procedures on a regular basis, and implement improvements to these.
- Apply the approved ethical standards to evaluate research projects submitted to the REC.
- Promote a culture of research ethics among staff, students and affiliates

*Scope of authority:* the Faculty of Humanities REC is mandated to make decisions pertaining to the ethics of research. Policy-related recommendations are considered by the BOF. The outcome of any research ethics appeal is ratified by the BOF.

## 5. Composition

The composition of the committee is in accordance with SA National Health Department guidelines – National Health Act 61 of 2003 s 72(2) as far as relevant to the social sciences and humanities. The Faculty of Humanities REC consists of a reasonable number of members who collectively have qualifications, research experience understanding of the social context of communities being researched, including:

- The Faculty chairperson and vice-chairperson of REC, who is elected by the committee and automatically also represents the department/unit that they are elected from
- At least one full time academic staff member of each Department or research unit/centre that is an active/established researcher and who is prepared to serve as a member of the committee. Such appointments are reviewed every three (3) years and are renewable
- Membership must be increasingly reflect diversity in terms of gender and race
- At least one member with knowledge and current experience in professional care, counselling and treatment of people (GP, psychologist, social worker, nurse, A Community member with a special portfolio in ethics and human rights etc.)
- Additional full time academic staff members may be appointed, in accordance with the capacity needs of the Faculty of Humanities REC
- Secretary / Administrator (a part time administrative officer may be appointed as secretary of the Faculty of Education REC)
- Co-opted or invited consultants/persons with knowledge and experience relevant to academic and research ethics, in accordance with the agenda items, provided that they may participate in the relevant discussions. These members do not have voting rights.

## 6. General prerequisites for committee membership

- Members need to be given a formal notice of appointment together with the assurance that the University of Johannesburg will provide legal protection in respect of liabilities that may occur in the course of their duties.

- Each member of the Committee signs a confidentiality agreement regarding meeting deliberations, applications and information on research participants.
- A member of the Committee, who has a possible conflict of personal interest in respect of a matter of the agenda, must disclose the nature of the interest to the Chairperson. The disclosure must be made immediately, prior to a discussion of the relevant agenda item and must be recorded in the minutes of the meeting.
- The REC must ensure each member should initially and continually be educated on research ethical issues. Formal ethics training should be renewed after every three years.
- An understanding that membership will be terminated after an absence from two meetings without apology or not providing evidence of completed formal training in ethics within 18 months of being on the REC.
- 60% of members constitutes a quorum

## 7. Code of conduct for research ethics committee members

- Respectful behaviour should be demonstrated
- Different viewpoints are important, with appropriate motivation of each viewpoint. Every committee member's voice should be heard.
- Research proposals allocated to committee members for assessment should be reviewed timeously.

## 8. Policy

- All research projects involving human participants should be submitted to the REC for evaluation and approval.
- All research projects involving human participants require ethical clearance.

## 9. Review procedure

- a) Applicants forward ethics documentation (see section 10) by e-mail to the Chairperson of the REC at [tguse@uj.ac.za](mailto:tguse@uj.ac.za) according to deadlines provided at the beginning of each year.
- b) Honours projects and minor dissertations must have been approved by a Departmental Research Committee or similar process before submission to the REC.
- c) Dissertations and theses must have been approved, or approved with minor revision required, by the HDC before submission to the REC
- d) The Chair appoints two reviewers from the members of the REC to review the documentation electronically using a comprehensive ethical checklist.
- e) Review documentation with comments are returned to the Chair electronically by the reviewers.
- f) All reviews are considered in the monthly meeting of the REC.
- g) The Chair determines whether corrections are required based on the two reviews. If there are major corrections the documents are returned to the applicant and the process starts again. If minimal corrections are required, specific recommendations are given. The researcher is informed on the outcome of the review via the supervisor's email.

- h) The Chair also provides a certificate of approval with the approval number to be included in all future communication via email. A copy of this document will be kept on file (electronically) for record purposes.
- i) The same documents and processes apply to staff projects and all other research conducted within the Faculty of Humanities.
- j) No retrospective approval will be granted

## 10. Ethics documents required for application

- a) Evidence of approval of research proposal ( see points b and c in section 9 above)
- b) Research proposal signed by supervisor and student or the researcher (in the case of staff research)
- c) Participant information sheet /letters
- d) A separate informed consent / assent form
- e) Questionnaires (if included in the study) may be required for specific proposals
- f) Examples of interview questions/themes (ie a general indication of areas of discussion to be covered) in the case of qualitative research

## 11 Review criteria

Review of the ethics application and supporting documents are done against the standards/criteria for research ethics of the Faculty. In making reviewing applications REC focuses in particular on actual or potential ethical risks related to research proposals and suggests measures to avoid or minimize these risks.

The following criteria will be considered:

- Approved by HOD / Department for Honours and Minor dissertations
- Approval requested BEFORE research is conducted, NOT retrospective approval
- Information and style of writing
- Scientific merit of the study
- Social value of the study
- Research relevance to the needs of the participants and/or community
- Purpose of proposed research is clear and easily understandable
- Supporting documentation provided for review (surveys, questionnaires etc as appropriate or necessary.)
- Expectation of participation clearly defined
- Respect for autonomy & respect for participants
- Consent/assent (voluntary, informed, written, or documented if verbal)
- Confirmation of confidentiality and privacy
- Full disclosure / no deception
- Strategies to provide participants access to results on completion of study.
- Non-maleficence (absence of harm). (Poor quality science is considered unethical. Harm could also be psychological, social, physical or economic).
- No coercion / No perverse or undue incentives to participate
- Suitable respect shown for participants
- No undue risk to researchers
- Selection, recruitment, exclusion and inclusion of participants is just and fair (procedural justice)

- Adequate protection of vulnerable participants/communities

As human research does not always take place in isolation or in clinical settings devoid from any animal or environmental interaction, these relationship dynamics in terms of the well-being, ethics and rights beyond just human interests/needs/wants, need to be considered in inter/trans/multi-disciplinary research as animals and the environment are also living systems affected by human action.

## 11. Committee Meetings

During meetings the Committee will:

- Sign a confidentiality clause
- Declare any conflict of interest
- Discuss and make recommendations of ethics applications
- Identify ethical issues that are relevant to the Faculty and that need to be reported at the next faculty Board Meeting.
- Seek assistance from experts when in doubt or need of a more informed opinion

## 12. Research involving children younger than 18 years of age

- A child participant is defined as any person younger than 18 years of age.
- A child participant 14 year and older provides assent with consent from one of their parents or legal guardian.
- An impartial adult, preferably the parent or legal guardian, who oversees the rights of a child, must be part of the research when the child participant:
  - is younger than 14 years of age;
  - is younger than 18 years of age and might be vulnerable<sup>1</sup>; and/or
  - is younger than 18 years of age and is part of a child-headed family

## 13. Decision-making

The REC takes the following into consideration when making decisions regarding applications for the ethical review of research:

- Conflicts of interest should be indicated to the Chair prior to the review of the application and recorded in the minutes;
- A decision is only taken when 2 (two) reviews have been received and when sufficient time has been allowed for discussion of an application, or if the quorum present ratify the decisions as presented on the agenda.
- Decisions can only be taken at meetings where a quorum (as stipulated in 15 above) is present;
- All members of the committee need to participate in the decision-taking process.
- There should be a predetermined method for arriving at a decision (e.g., by consensus, by vote). Consensus is recommended; where consensus appears unlikely, it is recommended that the REC vote.
- In cases of conditional decisions, clear suggestions for revision and the procedure for re-submitting the application for a second review should be specified;

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<sup>1</sup> Vulnerable children refer to individuals at risk of/exposed to harm (physical, mental, emotional and/or spiritual).



- A negative decision on an application should be supported by clearly stated reasons.
- Complaints related to the review process must be directed to the chair of the REC. If complaints are not resolved at this level, the case will be escalated to the Dean of the faculty.

## 15. Communicating a decision

A decision should be communicated in writing to the applicant, according to REC procedures, within two weeks of the REC meeting. The communication of the decision should include, but is not limited to, the following:

- The exact title of the research proposal reviewed;
- Clear identification of the protocol of the proposed research or amendment, date and version number (if applicable), on which the decision is based;
- The names and specific identification numbers (version numbers/dates) of the documents reviewed, including the potential research participant information sheet/material and informed consent form;
- The name and title of the applicant;
- The date and place of the decision;
- A clear statement of the decision reached;
- In the case of a conditional decision, any requirements by the REC, including suggestions for revision and the procedure for having the application re-submitted for review;
- In the case of a positive decision, the responsibilities of the applicant, are provided. For example:
  - If there are major revisions to the research proposal based on recommendations from the Faculty Higher Degrees Committee, a new application for ethical clearance must be submitted.
  - If the research question changes significantly so as to alter the nature of the study, a new application for ethical clearance must be submitted.
  - It remains the student's responsibility to ensure that all ethical forms and documents related to the research are kept in a safe and secure facility and are available on demand.
  - The reference number must be quoted in all subsequent communications and documents.
- The need to report serious and unexpected adverse events relating to the conduct of the study;
- The need to report unforeseen circumstances, the termination of the study, or significant decisions by other committees;
- In the case of a negative decision, clearly stated reason(s) for the negative decision.

## 16. Follow-up

The REC has a follow-up procedure for following the progress of all studies for which a positive decision has been reached, from the time of decision till the termination of the research. Random sampling of approved research proposals will be done to monitor the ethical principles applied in the research throughout the research process. The follow-up procedure takes the following into consideration:

- The quorum requirements, the review procedure, and the communication procedure for follow-up reviews, which may vary from the requirements and procedures for the initial decision on an application
- The REC has the responsibility to ensure that the conduct of all research approved by the committee is monitored

The following instances or adverse events require the follow-up review of a study:

- Any protocol amendment likely to affect the rights, safety, and/or well-being of the research participants or the conduct of the study
- Serious and unexpected adverse events relating to the conduct of the study or study product, and the response taken by investigators, sponsors, and regulatory agencies
- Any event or new information that may affect the benefit-risk ratio of the study

A decision of a follow-up review should be issued and communicated to the applicant, indicating a modification, suspension or termination of the REC's original decision or confirmation that the decision is still valid;

In the case of the premature suspension/termination of a study due to ethical reasons, the applicant should notify the REC of the reasons for suspension/termination

## 17. Documentation and archiving

A signed copy of the student's final approved ethics application must be submitted to the chairperson of the REC for archival purposes only once all recommendations made by the review board have been addressed. Honours projects and staff projects are also lodged with the chairperson of the REC. All documentation and communication of the REC will be dated, filed and archived electronically according to REC procedures.

Documents should be archived for a minimum of three years following completion of a study.

Electronic documents that should be filed and archived include but are not limited to:

- The terms of reference, written standard operating procedures of the REC, and regular (annual) reports;
- The curriculum vitae of all REC members;
- The published guidelines for submission established by the REC;
- The agenda of the REC meetings;
- The minutes of the REC meetings;
- One copy of all materials submitted by an applicant;
- A copy of the decision and any advice or requirements.

## 18. External reviews

If external applications are directed through the Faculty of Humanities REC a decision will be made by the Chairperson on whether or not fees may be charged. The rate for such services will be determined on an *ad-hoc* basis using the going rate as charged by neighboring RECs so as to align fees.

## 19. Timelines

The period that ethics approval remains valid is the *minimum period for completion of the study*, namely

- 1 year for Honours
- 3 years for Masters
- 4 years for a doctorate

Staff and external projects will be afforded the same time as a doctoral study (**4 Years**).

If a student over-runs the minimum time and has permission from the HDC to continue, research ethics approval will be extended, pending formal notification from the student to the REC that such permission has been obtained. .

If any fundamental changes are made to the study, a new application must be submitted to the REC

**Timelines for reviews** – Reviewers are requested to complete electronic reviews within 2 weeks.