



University of Fort Hare
Together in Excellence

TITLE: University Research Ethics Policy

POLICY AUTHOR(S): Dean of Research; Deputy Vice Chancellor: Academic Affairs

POLICY OWNER: Deputy Vice Chancellor: Academic Affairs

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POLICY COMPLIANCE OVERSIGHT BY: University Research Ethics Committee

POLICY TO BE READ IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE FOLLOWING POLICIES:

- University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) Terms of Reference;
- Inter-Faculty Research Ethics (IFREC) Terms of Reference
- UREC and IFREC Standard Operating Procedures

APPROVED BY:

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UNIVERSITY OF FORT HARE

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Date: 13 November 2019

PREAMBLE

The University of Fort Hare (UFH) is committed to the consistent pursuit of excellence in teaching, research and community engagement. The University strives to create and maintain an environment in which the South African Constitution and Bill of Rights values of human dignity, equality, non-discrimination, social justice and fairness is upheld. Research is essential for the attainment of qualitative outcomes that are ethically sound, while contributing to the growing body of global knowledge in human research.

All staff and students are enjoined to pursue truth, intellectual honesty and openness to ideas through the attainment of the highest professional and ethical standards in research. The Department of Health Charter of Ethics in Health Research Principles, Processes and Structures (2015) guides researchers, to undertake research that is aimed at the advancement of knowledge that is socially and ethically relevant and capable of application to the scientific, technological and socioeconomic development of South Africa, Africa and internationally. It is required that all research be guided by the highest standards of integrity, scientific rigour and accountability while protecting and promoting the constitutional principles of academic freedom and freedom of scientific research. This Policy seeks to ensure all research at the University complies with these standards.

SCOPE OF THE POLICY

The Policy, herein detailed, and adopted by the University are binding upon all University staff, including researchers, academics as well as registered student researchers. Primary responsibility for ensuring that these policies and procedures are adhered to rests with the Principal Investigator/s of the research project.

THE POLICY

The University employs a strict code of ethics in research, where committees are established to implement a rigorous ethics policy to ensure the safety and welfare of both the researcher and the participants. The University concerns itself with research involving animal and human participants, and where participants may be particularly vulnerable. The University ethical governance practices are aimed at ensuring research practices protect vulnerable human participants and animal subjects in a given research study from exploitation, duress, and harm.

UFH affiliates are obligated to conduct research only once it is approved by the ethics governing bodies of the institution, without exception. External researchers wanting to conduct research at the University (approved at an external institution), must first obtain approval in writing from the University Research Ethics Committee prior to conducting their study. For all researchers, adherence to a professional code of conduct does not override the obligation to observe the procedures set out by the University's ethics committees where they would normally apply.

GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT STRUCTURES FOR ETHICAL RESEARCH

The management and governance of ethical research should be conducted in accordance with the principles, practices, procedures and structures as set out in this Policy.

The University's research ethics governance structures consist of the following committees

- The University Research Ethics Committee (UREC)

- The Animal Research Ethics Committee (AREC)

- The Health Research Ethics Committee (HREC)

- The Inter- Faculty Ethics Committee (IFREC)

UREC is a Committee of Senate with overarching responsibility for promoting respect for human rights in research as well as ethical values and research integrity within the University. UREC monitors and ensures that all research conducted in the university has received ethical clearance before the research is conducted.

AREC and HREC are independent accredited committees that are registered by the National Health Research Ethics Council (NHREC). These committees submit reports on their research ethical clearance applications and approval to UREC for noting.

IFREC has delegated Senate authority as a sub-committee of UREC. Instead of individual faculty research ethics committees, IFREC is specifically set up to receive, review and approve all research ethics applications, excluding those submitted to AREC and HREC. IFREC ensures that it is adequately informed on all aspects of a research protocol, including its scientific validity, that are relevant to deciding whether a protocol is both acceptable on ethical grounds and conforms to the principles of this policy. IFREC comprises diverse senior/experienced researchers from the faculties who have research

ethics training and experience. IFREC has the responsibility to ensure that research in the Faculties of Humanities and Social Sciences; Law; Science and Agriculture; Education; and Management and Commerce, is conducted in accordance with national and international guidelines and standards for ethically responsible research. In making these decisions IFREC focuses in particular on:

- actual or potential ethical risks related to research proposals; and
- measures to avoid or minimize these risks.

Applications for research ethics clearance are submitted to an ethics administrator in the Govan Mbeki Research and Development Centre (GMRDC) for onward submission to IFREC for review and approval. IFREC submits reports on the ethics applications and approvals to UREC for noting. In addition, UREC reviews problem/difficult cases referred to it by IFREC; it considers appeals on decision made by IFREC; reviews requests for amendments to previously approved research protocols; and considers applications for ethical clearance from external researchers intending to conduct research in the University.

UREC is the accredited committee that is registered by NHREC for approval of ethical clearance applications for all research in the University that is not submitted to HREC and AREC.

As a standing Committee of Senate, UREC reports to Senate on the work of the various Research Ethics Committees in the University (IFREC; HREC; AREC); develops and reviews related policies and procedures; and undertakes any tasks on research ethics assigned to it by Senate.

DATA STORAGE AND RETENTION

Data (including electronic data) must be recorded in a durable and appropriately referenced format. Data management should comply with relevant privacy protocols, as stipulated by the Department of Health Charter of Ethics in Health Research Principles, Processes and Structures (2015). The Principal Investigator/s are responsible for data storage and retention and such should be stated within the research protocol.

POLICY REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed and revised by UREC every three years.

