University of Fort Hare
Together in Excellence

TITLE: University of Fort Hare Research Ethics Policy

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POLICY COMPLIANCE OVERSIGHT BY: University of Fort Hare Research Ethics Committee

POLICY TO BE READ IN CONJUNCTION WITH THE FOLLOWING POLICIES:

- University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) Terms of Reference;
- UFH Inter-Faculty Research Ethics (IFREC) Terms of Reference
- UFH Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) Terms of Reference
- UFH Animal Research Ethics Committee (AREC) Terms of Reference

APPROVED BY:

Name: Prof L Ntsebeza

7 December 2023
Date

DESIGNATION: Chairperson of Council
UNIVERSITY OF FORT HARE

1. PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to provide a framework within which the University of Fort Hare (UFH) can ensure that research conducted on its platforms meet national and international ethical standards that enhance the protection of participants (humans or animals) and the environment. UFH is committed to consistent pursuit of excellence in high quality and innovative teaching and learning, high impact research and innovation and community engagement. The University strives to create and maintain an environment in which the Constitution of South Africa, 1996, values of human dignity, equality, non-discrimination, social justice and fairness are upheld. The University is committed to upholding the five freedoms of animals in research involving animals conducted on UFH platform. These include (i) freedom from hunger, thirsty and malnutrition, (ii) freedom from pain, injury and disease, (iii) freedom from fear and distress, (iv) freedom from discomfort, and (v) freedom to express normal behaviour.[1]

To ensure protection of people or animals who participate in research and or the environment, all research projects to be conducted at UFH, without exception, must be reviewed and approved by the relevant UFH Research Ethics Committee registered with the National Health Research Ethics Council of South Africa. Research is essential for the attainment of qualitative outcomes that are ethically sound, while contributing to the growing body of global knowledge in research. 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 that all research at the University complies with these standards. **All research projects to be conducted at the University of Fort Hare must be reviewed and approved by a relevant accredited UFH Research Ethics Committee and /or**

[1] Animal Humane Society. The Five Freedoms for animals. Available at: https://www.animalhumanesociety.org/health/five-freedoms-animals (Accessed on 23 August 2023).

accredited Biosafety Committee before implementation of the research commences.

2. INTRODUCTION

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 or later) 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.

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/animals/environments. The University concerns itself with research involving animal and human participants and takes extra precaution to ensure adequate protection of animals and vulnerable human participants who are not able to give valid and informed consent to participate in research. The University ethical governance practices are aimed at ensuring that all research activities conducted at the University of Fort Hare undergo ethical review and are approved by a duly registered Research Ethics Committee or Biosafety committee (in the case of research involving biohazards) before commencement of the research activities.

UFH affiliates are obligated to conduct any research only once it is approved by the relevant UFH Research Ethics Committee, without exception. External researchers wanting to conduct research at the University of Fort Hare (approved by a Research Ethics Committee of an external institution), must first obtain approval in writing from the Registrar's Office prior to collecting research data from UFH staff and/or students. 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 research ethics committees where they would normally apply.

3. SCOPE OF THE POLICY

The Policy, herein detailed, and adopted by the University is binding upon all University staff, including researchers, academics as well as registered student researchers. The primary responsibility for ensuring that these policies and procedures are adhered to rests with the Principal Investigator/s of the research project. All supervisors shall be responsible for ensuring that students under their supervision and mentorship adhere to relevant policies and procedures, since students, who are Principal Investigators of their own research projects, are being trained to become academic researchers.

4. ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

The University of Fort Hare recognises the use of the following ethical principles that underpin its Research Ethics Policy:

4.1 Non-maleficence: UFH researchers (staff and students) must not cause any physical nor psychological harm to human or animal participants during research process and must not cause adverse effects to the environment. Researchers must take steps to protect the physical and psychological well-being of human and animal participants during the research process.

4.2 Beneficence: The potential benefits of the research to be done must outweigh the risk of harm to participants or damage to the environment. Researchers must always seek to maximise potential benefits.

4.3 Autonomy: Research participants have a right to decide whether to take part in research or not. Researchers must provide details of research to be conducted, including any potential risks and potential benefits, to enable prospective participants to make informed decision before giving consent to participate in research. For prospective participants that include minors under the age of 18 and mentally ill people who are not able to exercise their right to autonomy, researchers must obtain written consent from their parents or legal guardians. In giving consent, participants or their parents or legal guardians retain the right to withdraw the consent at any point during the research project.

4.4 Distributive justice: Researchers must ensure that there is fairness in the selection and recruitment of research participants. There should be no bias, and all eligible prospective participants should have an equal chance of being selected. There should be fair sharing or distribution of potential risks of research and potential benefits of the research.

4.5 Privacy and confidentiality: Researchers are obliged to keep participants' information private and confidential. No personal information must be disclosed when research findings are disseminated. Information must be kept in safe and private location where only authorized persons can access. Obsolete information should be disposed of in a way that will not compromise its privacy and confidentiality.

4.6 Animals are living and sentient life forms: Animals are living and have feelings, can feel pain, can experience happiness, can experience various feelings that include fear, anxiety, distress, hunger, thirsty, etc.

4.7 The 5 Rs: To ensure that research involving animals is conducted ethically, the following principles of the 5 Rs should be upheld:

4.7.1 Replacement: In cases where it is possible, researchers should minimize cumulative harm by replacing animals with other something else that would enable the research questions to be answered, for example, computer models and simulations, cells, tissues, cadavers, lower invertebrates replacing vertebrates, etc.

4.7.2 Reduction: Researchers should aim to reduce the number of animals use in research to the minimum required to make the research scientifically sound.

4.7.3 Refinement: Methodological procedures should be refined to minimise harm and suffering of animals involved in research. For example, use of analgesia, anesthesia or euthanasia to minimise pain.

4.7.4 Responsibility: Researchers have a responsibility to ensure that animals involved in research are treated ethically, minimising unnecessary and avoidable harm.

4.7.5 Respect: As sentient beings some animals have an intrinsic value of life

and should be treated with dignity and respect.

5. THE POLICY

5.1 Governance and Management Structure for Research Ethics at UFH

The UFH's research ethics governance structure consists of an overarching governance committee set up by UFH Senate to ensure that research conducted at UFH meets high levels of national and international ethical standards. The review and approval of research shall be done by three independent Research Ethics Committees that should be accredited by the National Health Research Ethics Council (NHREC). The Research and Innovation Office shall provide overarching administrative support to the three independent committees. The roles and responsibilities of the Senate governance committee and the three research ethics committees shall be as follows:

5.1.1 UFH Research Ethics Committee (UREC): This is a committee of UFH Senate with overarching responsibility to promote ethical values and research integrity within the University. UREC provides governance oversight over the three UFH Research Ethics committees that review and approve research proposals. As a standing Committee of Senate, UREC reports to Senate on the work of the various Research Ethics committees (AREC, HREC and IFREC, which are explained in this policy in sections 5.1.2, 5.1.3 and 5.1.4, respectively) in the University and undertakes any tasks on research ethics assigned to it by Senate.

5.1.2 UFH Animal Research Ethics Committee (AREC): The Animal Research Ethics Committee is an independent committee responsible for reviewing, approving, and monitoring all research projects that involve animals or samples (cells, tissues, organs, etc.) from animals.

5.1.3 UFH Health Research Ethics Committee (HREC):

This is an independent committee responsible for reviewing, approving, and monitoring all health-related (clinical or medical) research projects that involve humans.

5.1.4 UFH Inter-Faculty Research Ethics Committee (IFREC):

- The Inter-Faculty Research Ethics Committee is an independent committee responsible for reviewing, approving, and monitoring all research projects that involve humans (except health-related /medical/clinical research), non-human materials (except biohazards), the environment, secondary data analysis or desktop research.
- The following are excluded from the mandate of IFREC: clinical/medical research, and research that involves biohazards (including genetically modified organisms (GMOs), release of GMOs into the environment, recombinant DNA (rDNA), RNA derived from rDNA, human pathogens requiring biosafety level (BSL) 2 labs or higher BSL, radioactive materials, etc.). Recombinant nucleic acids that do not pose any potential risks to humans or the environment (e.g. cloning of DNA from non-pathogenic micro-organisms for teaching or training purposes) are not considered to be biohazards.

5.1.5 Biosafety Committee: Pending the establishment of a Biosafety Committee at UFH, the UFH Research and Innovation Office shall facilitate submission of research proposals for research that should be reviewed by a Biosafety Committee to a duly registered Biosafety Committee at any South African institution. Research that should be reviewed and approved by a Biosafety Committee are for research that involves genetically modified organisms (GMOs), release of GMOs into the environment, recombinant DNA (rDNA), RNA derived from rDNA, human pathogens requiring biosafety level (BSL) 2 labs or higher BSL, radioactive materials, etc.

5.2 Vulnerable Groups Include:

5.2.1 Pregnant Women and unborn babies

5.2.2 Elderly people

5.2.3 Prisoners

5.2.4 Ethnic or racial minorities

5.2.5 Migrant workers

5.2.6 People with a cognitive or mental impairment/illness

5.2.7 People in dependent relationships

5.2.8 People with disabilities

5.2.9 People in the LGBTQIA community

5.2.10 Socio-economically disadvantaged people

5.2.11 Children under the age of 18

5.3 Non-therapeutic research involving minors – Ministerial statement and approval

In accordance with section 71(3)(a)(ii) of the National Health Act (NHA), non-therapeutic research that involves minors must be submitted to the Minister of Health for consideration for ministerial approval. The prescribed Form A for ministerial consideration should be completed by the researchers and submitted to the Ministry of Health. Informed consent of the parent or guardian of the child and assent of the minor (if the minor is capable of understanding) are still required after ministerial approval has been granted.

5.4 Ethical research conduct of researchers

5.4.1 **Permissible use of research funds**: Researchers must use research funding only for permissible purposes specified in their grant award.

5.4.2 **Safe and secure data management**: It is the responsibility of researchers to keep research data, including physical and visual data, in a safe and confidential space, for a minimum period of five years. Researchers should not compromise the privacy and confidentiality of research data when they disposal of it.

5.4.3 **Fabrication of data:** It is serious research misconduct to generate or make up research data or make use of fabricated data for analysis to answer research questions. Methodological procedures such as simulation, mathematical modeling, generation of random numbers for randomization of clinical trials or other randomized studies, and other scientifically accepted procedures of handling data are not fabrication of data.

5.4.4 **Falsification of data**: It is research misconduct that involves

manipulation of research processes and or equipment or changing or omitting certain data to have certain desired research results or findings.

5.4.5 Plagiarism: It is serious research misconduct to use other people's words, ideas and/or research findings without citing them correctly.

5.4.6 Authorship of publication:

5.4.6.1 Authorship must be earned: Authorship of a publication should be earned through active contribution to the actual writing and critical review of the manuscript. According to the Vancouver protocol for authorship, the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE)[2] and other professional bodies or journals, to qualify as an author, one must meet each of the following criteria:

(a) Made substantial contribution to the conceptualization of the research, data collection, and/or data analysis and interpretation.

(b) Participated in the actual writing of the manuscript through drafting the manuscript and/or reviewing it.

(c) Approved the final version of manuscript before it is submitted for publication.

Participation in the conceptualization and data collection alone without participation in the actual writing of a manuscript does not qualify as authorship. Such participation should be acknowledged in the manuscript. All co-authors of a manuscript must approve the final version to be published.

5.4.6.2 Responsibilities of co-authors: Each co-author is responsible for the accuracy and integrity of the content of a manuscript, including ensuring that there is no plagiarism.

[2] ICMJE (International Committee of Medical Journal Editors). 2015. Defining the Role of Authors and Contributors. Available at: https://www.icmje.org/recommendations/browse/roles-and-responsibilities/defining-the-role-of-authors-and-contributors.html (Accessed on 23 August 2023).

5.4.6.3 Sequence of co-authors: Sequence of co-authors must be agreed upon by the co-authors upfront.

5.4.6.4 Students have a right to publish their work as first authors: Students have the right to publish research findings emanating from their research projects as first authors.

5.5 Research Misconduct

If a researcher contravenes research ethics principles, ethical research conduct and best practices as espoused in this Policy, institutional disciplinary processes shall be followed using the University's disciplinary structures.

5.6 Disputes between researchers

Any disputes between researchers shall be resolved in accordance with the University's procedures and policies on dispute resolution, with guidance from the UFH Human Resources Department. In general, dispute resolution mechanisms such as mediation and arbitration must be resorted to prior to any litigation.

6. POLICY REVIEW

This policy shall be reviewed and revised by UREC every five years.