



RESEARCH ETHICS POLICY

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1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Botswana Open University (BOU) realises the value in developing an institutional research culture that promotes exceptional conduct as well as ethical responsibility in the quest for knowledge generation, conservation and transfer. The national and global concern that lack of research integrity destroys public trust is the bedrock for the development of this Policy. It strives to guide the protection of rights, dignity, safety and privacy of human and animal research participants, and the integrity of the environment. This document therefore sets out policy and responsibilities for research ethics management and review processes at BOU.
- 1.2 This Policy should be read in conjunction with other relevant University policy documents, such as the University Statutes, the Research and Innovation Policy and the Intellectual Property Policy. It also takes cognisance of the national regulations and processes governing ethical clearance for research projects and the role of professional bodies.

2. DEFINITIONS

For the purposes of this Policy the following terms are used as defined below:

- 2.1 *Autonomy and academic freedom* - refers to University staff being able to exercise their rights and independence within the law to question and test received wisdom and to put forward new ideas or controversial or unpopular opinions without placing themselves in jeopardy of losing their jobs or privileges.
- 2.2 *Ethics* – refers to the standards of behaviour in research that distinguishes between acceptable and unacceptable conduct.
- 2.3 *Unethical research practice* – refers to the conduct of research that contravenes ethical norms such as the protection of research participants, confidentiality, consent and option to take part or withdraw from a study at any time during the research process.
- 2.4 *Research misconduct* – refers to unethical behaviour, such as fabrication, falsification, or plagiarism and related misconduct, in generating research results or reports, as detailed below:

2.4.1 *Plagiarism*

Intentionally or carelessly taking credit for another person or source's work or ideas, stealing research results or methods, failure to acknowledge significant contribution(s) made by others and representing, without acknowledgement, another's ideas or product, including verbatim, paraphrasing, charts, figures, illustrations, mathematical or scientific solutions, or research work, without citing the source in the text and in reference lists.

2.4.2 *Falsification of Research*

The deliberate misrepresentation of research, including falsification of research progress, ignoring prior relevant research results in the literature and grossly overstated claims of the significance of research results constitute falsification of research.

2.4.3 *Data Fabrication*

This refers to dishonesty in reporting research results, including fabricating data, deliberate omission of data, gross negligence in data collection or analysis and tampering or manipulating data in order to concoct results.

2.4.4 *Misuse of Funds*

This includes, but is not limited to, failure to keep accurate financial records, spending money in ways that are inconsistent with or contrary to grant agreement, and fabricating or falsifying financial expenditure records.

2.4.5 *Abuse of Confidentiality*

Unauthorised release or disclosure of information obtained under confidentiality, including identities of participants and use of ideas from other researchers' grant proposals or manuscripts.

2.4.6 *Disclosure Failure*

This includes failure to provide participants with a copy of the results of the research, failure to report known incidents of research misconduct and covering up known serious research misconducts.

2.4.7 *Publication Dishonesty*

Wilful publication of information that mislead readers, including the misrepresentation of data and research progress, unauthorised exclusion or inclusion of names of co-authors and submitting for publication a previously published piece of work without full disclosure.

2.5 *Research Integrity* - refers to a commitment to intellectual honesty and personal responsibility for one's actions and to a range of practices that characterize responsible research conduct.

2.6 *Justice* – refers to the ethical principle of fair treatment of others, which requires researchers to weigh up and make judgements about competing claims and interests of those directly or indirectly involved in the research, regardless of the vested interests of researchers.

2.7 *Responsibility* – refers to the principle that researchers must be prepared to take responsibility and be held accountable for all aspects and consequences of their research activities.

2.8 *Scientific validity* - is the rigour applied in processes, procedures and methods to ensure that the study is well designed to test theory or to answer the research questions.

3. **PURPOSE**

The purpose of this Policy is to mandate staff, students and other researchers to take responsibility and adopt ethical conduct that adheres to the Botswana Open University ethical framework, expectations and legal requirements which relate to research ethics.

4. POLICY OBJECTIVES

The Research Ethics Policy objectives are to:

- 4.1 Protect the dignity, rights, safety and well-being of human participants and animals.
- 4.2 Explain the University's position on research ethics involving human participants and personal data.
- 4.3 Demonstrate an institutional commitment to high quality, transparent and accountable research ethics throughout the University, from senior management policy-making to the practicalities of individual staff and student research projects.
- 4.4 Inform the operation of the University's Ethics Review Procedure within Schools, Institutes, Research Centres and funding units.
- 4.5 Provide guidance on research ethics for all research staff and students.
- 4.6 Encourage an institutional research culture based upon acceptable standards of research practice.
- 4.6 Discourage unethical research practice and provide the basis for sanctions in the event of research misconduct.
- 4.7 Reduce risks to the University, Schools, Institutes, Research Centres and funding units and individual researchers.
- 4.8 Strengthen the eligibility and quality of University research funding applications.

5. SCOPE

The Policy covers all research activities and is applicable to all University full time and part-time staff, undergraduates, post graduates, including external partners and any individual not affiliated to the University but using University premises or facilities.

6. POLICY STATEMENT

The University shall invest in and promote the development of an institutional research culture that values the conduct of ethical research.

6.1 Policy Principles

The following basic principles and values apply to all forms of research ethics and must be considered as forming the foundation of the academic research enterprise at BOU:

- a. *Autonomy and academic freedom* of researchers in undertaking ethical research.
- b. *Ethical clearance* for all research involving human participants, animals or other living organisms.
- c. *Integrity*, honesty, competency and accountability in undertaking research.
- d. *Scientific validity* conceived as an essential part of research meant to improve and advance research and facilitate ethical research practice.
- e. *Justice* which requires researchers to weigh up and make judgements about competing claims and interests of those directly or indirectly involved in the research, regardless of the vested interests of researchers. It facilitates addressing competing interests at every stage of the research, including the decision of whether it should be carried out in the first place.
- f. *Informed Consent* which refers to the process of being free and knowing what it entails to participate in research by competent individuals who have the capacity to consent. Those involved in research whether as participants or researchers should be informed of the nature and purpose of research, and any potential benefits, risks, obligations or inconvenience associated with the research before they choose to participate.

6.2 Sanctions

The University is committed to the promotion of research integrity and will apply sanctions in the event of proven violations of research ethics. Such sanctions will be applied by the University Research Ethics Committee following the BOU Procedures for the Handling of Research Misconduct.

7. IMPLEMENTATION

The roles and responsibilities for implementation are as follows:

7.1 The University Research Ethics Committee

The Committee is provided for in the University Statutes as a sub-committee of the University Research and Innovation Committee, which will determine its composition. It has the following Terms of Reference, namely to:

- a. Provide written Guidelines on ethical issues in research, for use by staff and students of the University;
- b. Take a University overview of the Research Ethics Policy implementation and to recommend policy changes as necessary;
- c. Advise on any issues of an ethical nature referred to it by the Deans of the Schools or Directors of Research Institutes and Research Centres;
- d. Approve the terms of reference, membership, policies and procedures of the Research Ethics Committees of the Schools and Research Institutes and Research Centres;
- e. Act as an appeal body for the Research Ethics Committees of the Schools and Research Institutes and Research Centres;
- f. Monitor the activities of the Research Ethics Committees of the Schools and Research Institutes and Research Centres through the receipt of annual reports, minutes of all meetings and other reports as appropriate;
- g. Issue clear instructions and guidelines to the Research Ethics Committees of the Schools and Research Institutes and Research Centres on the standards of support and record keeping required.
- h. Apply sanctions on the event of proven research misconduct.

7.2 Research Ethics Committees of Schools, Research Institutes & Research Centres

Schools, Research Institutes and Research Centres are required to have a Research Ethics Committee which is responsible for ensuring that all research is appropriately scrutinised. It is the responsibility of these committees to develop their own terms of reference and procedural guidelines for approval by the University Research Ethics Committee.

7.3 Centre for Research and Innovation

The Centre provides the Secretariat of the University Research Ethics Committee. Its role is to guide, monitor and evaluate the quality and ethical integrity of research and innovation output and to provide capacity-building on the ethical conduct of research.

8.0 REVIEW

This Policy shall be reviewed every three years or earlier as necessary.