

STUDENT GUIDELINES ON ETHICAL ISSUES

General

The following guidelines are intended to help you identify any potential ethical issues relating to project/research work you may be planning to undertake as part of your studies. Using these guidelines you should reflect upon how, and to what extent, your work may have ethical issues that require consideration and action. While these guidelines cannot solve the ethical issues for you, **you** need to use them, in collaboration with fellow students and/or tutors, to reflect upon the project/research work you plan to pursue. Obviously this thought and reflection must occur **prior to** starting the project/research work. If any ethical issues are identified, you may need to change, or even abandon, elements of your project. Additionally, you must continue to consider ethical issues **throughout** the duration of your project/research investigation including any analysis and/or writing up/photographic/video of your findings. In short, ethical considerations should be inherent in all aspects of the process, from first ideas to the final report or outcome of research/project.

The following principles should be applied to your project/practical work (including dissertations):

Principle 1 : Respect for Human Dignity

You should respect human and religious dignity at all times.

Principle 2 : Respect for Free and Informed Consent

In practical terms, this principle translates into ensuring that everybody who assists you with your project does so willingly and is aware of the purpose for the project, for example, if you are taking a photograph of a person, make sure they are agreeable.

Principle 3 : Respect for Vulnerable Persons

Children, institutionalized or other vulnerable persons are entitled to special protection against abuse, exploitation or discrimination. If you are researching a design brief and that involves asking children questions you must be aware that you need to treat them differently than when interviewing adults.

Principle 4 : Respect for Privacy and Confidentiality

Standards of privacy and confidentiality protect the access, control and dissemination of personal information. Nothing that has been told to you, for example during an interview situation, should be attributed to that individual in any publication unless they have specifically agreed.

Principle 5 : Respect for Justice and Inclusiveness

You should not exclude or discriminate against individuals or groups (religious, sexual etc.) who may benefit from advances in research.

Principle 6 : **Minimizing Harm**

You have a duty to avoid, prevent or minimize harm. Procedures and practices that might cause serious or lasting harm to a participant must not be used. You should also use the smallest number of participants and tests that will ensure a valid data outcome.

What sort of work requires ethical approval?

- On the basis of recent and previous discussions and investigations, the Faculty's Ethics Committee believes that the vast majority of teaching across the university is conducted within this university's Ethical Code of Practice. For example, ethical issues are considered by lecturers as part of the annual monitoring and evaluation process and the periodic programme review system. In addition many subjects have to operate within frameworks governed by external professional bodies who demand consideration of ethical issues, for example, architecture, landscape architecture and theatre .
- The Committee's position is that ethical approval need only be sought in instances when (a) the tutor(s) responsible for the project/research judges that a significant ethical issue is likely to occur and (b) the work is not covered by a previous application. In this case ethical approval must be sought from the Faculty's Ethics Committee.
- In terms of research/project work involving people, the Committee requires ethical approval to be sought for all studies by the person (normally the tutor) responsible for the study. *The only exemptions from review are certain questionnaires and interviews, as described below and in the university's Code of Practice.*
 - a) **Questionnaires**
 - The Faculty's Ethics Committee wishes to review questionnaires if people being asked to complete questionnaires are children, vulnerable adults or hospitalised patients. Tutors and students must review questionnaires and may have to be prepared to reconsider and or/remove questions that are sensitive or likely to significantly upset or disturb participants. Tutors and students must also ensure that individuals are prevented from: participating involuntarily; being intentionally misled; being identified; incriminating themselves.
 - b) **Interviews**
 - The interests of participants should be protected wherever possible. Acquiring *informed* consent from participants is normally a *condition* of implementing a planned interview. Where informed consent cannot be obtained, even by proxy consent, it should be taken as read that people are not consciously or willingly participating in the inquiry and the interview should *not* be undertaken.
 - The interviewer's work *must* avoid either direct or indirect harm to participants. Interviewers should try to *actively explore and anticipate* any harmful consequences their work might have for participants.

- The Faculty's Ethics Committee wishes to review interview questions if the persons being interviewed are children, vulnerable adults or hospitalised patients.
- Questions should not be sensitive and likely to significantly upset and/or disturb someone. They should, in the first instance, be checked by the tutor of the work who should use their professional judgement. If the tutor is unsure on this matter, then they should submit the questions to the Faculty's Ethics Committee for judgement.

c) Work with Babies, Children and Vulnerable Adults

- Any university employee or registered student whose university work will require them to work with children or vulnerable adults, will be required to undertake an enhanced criminal disclosure through the university's administration before the Faculty's Ethics Committee will consider their ethics application. Note that a Criminal Disclosure will take longer than one month.

Who should apply for ethics approval?

- The applicant should be the tutor/programme leader of the study as he/she retains responsibility for the content and conduct of the study. This should normally be a permanent employee of the university.
- If the tutor fails to apply, or the student fails to inform the tutor of the project they are undertaking then, in addition to the moral issue of being involved in unethical studies, there is an increased risk in legal actions being taken against the student and/or tutor by the general public for alleged misconduct.

A full Risk-assessment form must be attached to your application form even if the issues raised are considered to be of minor importance or irrelevant.

Data Protection Act (1998)

- In addition to the ethical considerations students/staff should be aware that information regarding any living person identifiable by data obtained in the university, for either, teaching, research or consultancy purposes, must be stored and used according to the (1998) Data Protection Act. This law makes those who hold this personal information/data, whether in a physical or electronic form, responsible for processing it in accordance with stated principles.
- One of these principles is that the personal information must be obtained fairly and lawfully, which includes informing the provider about the purposes for which the data will be used. Another is that you must not disclose the identity of any individual who has provided you with data unless the provider has given you written consent to do so prior to disclosure. In brief, you should:

- Always explain why, where and how data will be used
- Always obtain consent
- Sensitive personal data requires explicit written consent
- Never disclose personal information without permission
- Data subjects have the right of access to all data held on them
- Consent required for public displays of names/photographs
- Don't send personal data abroad without consent (this includes the Internet)
- All personal data must be kept and disposed of securely

Membership of the Committee:

Professor Maureen Wayman (Chair)

Professor David Crow

Mr Joe Jessop

Mrs Janet Bezzant

Dr Simon Faulkner

Mr John Hewitt

Any queries or questions relating to the Committee's work should be directed to Professor Maureen Wayman.

Guidelines approved by the Faculty Ethics Committee November 2004, Faculty Board December 2004.