

Lunchtime Seminar
Preparation of Ethics Applications

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Outline

- Research ethics
- Research principles
- Research and teaching activities that do require ethical approval
- Research and teaching activities that do not require ethical approval
- Common issues and oversight
- New procedures
 - Masters theses
 - Students' research projects, e.g. EPSY 516
 - Visiting academics



The cherry on the cake?

- Ethics as an after thought or a vital theme throughout the research? (Alderson, 2004, p. 101)
- Ethical standards are evolving not fixed. They are grounded in our best current understanding of the fundamental rights, responsibilities and interrelationships of human beings.



Three key research principles

- These documents consistently foregrounded three key research ethical principles: autonomy, beneficence and justice
 - Research participants must be well informed and free from any controlling influences
 - Researchers should do no harm and their overall influence should be beneficial
 - Research should be for the good of society as a whole, not just one 'elite' (Aryan) group (Gallagher, 2009)
- A principle is generally taken to mean something all interested parties would agree to.



VUW Human Ethics Policy

- This Policy is administered primarily by the Victoria University Human Ethics Committee (HEC), established by the University Council in 1990.
- The Faculty of Education Ethics Committee is a subcommittee that acts under delegated responsibility to the VUW HEC.
- The delegated authority carries the responsibility for compliance with this Policy by staff and students within the faculty, school or group.
- The purpose of the VUW HE policy is to ensure that all university research and relevant teaching activities involving human participants conform to ethical standards.



Research principles in the VUW Human Ethics Policy

1. Respect and care for persons
2. Acknowledgement of the Treaty of Waitangi
3. Respect and care for social and cultural contexts
4. Respect and care for the natural environment
5. Research and teaching merit
6. Managing of dual and multiple roles/relationships and conflicts of interest

2. In Aotearoa/NZ: Principles of the Treaty of Waitangi (1840)

- As researchers in Aotearoa New Zealand, the Treaty principles of partnership, protection and participation should underpin our research relationships with each other.
- To these principles, Victoria University of Wellington has added the principle of practice.
- For research involving Maori, researchers should provide space for Maori research practices; the use of te reo Maori, Maori methodologies, Maori ways of knowing and being.

6. Managing of dual and multiple roles/relationships and conflicts of interest

- Researchers must ensure that their roles and relationships with potential participants do not compromise participants' ability to freely consent or decline to take part in the research.
- Researchers should be aware that their personal or professional interests (e.g. financial) may conflict- or lead others to perceive a conflict

6. Managing of dual and multiple roles/relationships and conflicts of interest

- Researchers should not be in a position where their activities as a researcher/teacher could:
 - (a) conflict with other professional or personal interests
 - (b) lead them to recruit participants with whom they have pre-existing personal or professional relationships in which participants could view themselves as being dependent on the researcher in any way (material, emotional, financial, etc.)
- Researchers should avoid wherever practicable recruiting participants with whom they have an existing relationship.

1. Respect and care for persons

- Informed consent free of coercion
- Minimisation of harm to participants, groups or communities
- Limitation of deception
- Special care of potentially vulnerable participants
- Respect for property rights, including intellectual property
- Minimisation of harm to researcher
- Minimisation of harm to the University

Informed Consent

- Informed consent is considered to be the keystone to ethical practice
- Some argue that the focus on obtaining consent obscures other equally important ethical issues
- Consent needs to be checked or negotiated throughout the research process

Consent when children are involved in research

- Children, however old, do need to actively give or communicate consent. This may be communicated through body language.
- Parents need to be informed that their children are being invited to participate in research, regardless of whether parental consent is sought.
- At the same time, it may be that different cultural groups will have different protocols for negotiating consent. For example, the researcher may need to engage with elders of Iwi or Pacific Island communities to negotiate the process of researching with children.

Consent when children are involved in research

- In NZ there is no legal requirement for parents to consent for their children's participation in research.
- However, common practice requires parental consent up to the ages of 14 – 16, and possibly even 18, depending on the nature of the investigation.
- Parental consent is usually sought up to the age of 14. If the research is sensitive or departs from what children are usually involved in at school, then parental consent may be required up to the age of 18.

Forms of Consent

- Informed Consent
 - Active agreement of participant to take part under conditions stated and about which they are fully informed.
- Dissent
 - Providing a genuine option of declining to participate.
- Verbal consent
 - In some situations, for example where people are fearful that their signatures may be misused, it is appropriate to accept other ways of recording consent.
- Passive parental consent
 - Parents are informed about the research and requested to return a consent form only if they do not wish their children to be invited to participate in the research. We are only approving passive consent in low risk research.

Consent forms

- Consent forms should list the conditions under which the research will be conducted, and clearly state what is being asked of participants.
- This should reflect information on the information sheets.
- Tick boxes should now only be used where there is a clear choice between different options e.g. focus group or individual interview.
- There needs to be a concluding statement, with tick boxes or yes/no, where participants communicate whether or not they agree to take part in the research.

4. Respect and care for the natural environment

- Researchers have a responsibility to consider the environmental impact of their work
- And ensure that their research results in no harm to future generations, our shared commons (water, air sunshine etc) non-human species or ecosystems.
- Researchers have a responsibility to ensure that their research complies with the principles set out in the University Environmental Policy, including a commitment to sustainability.

Research that **does** require ethical approval

- Except for certain exceptions to follow, all research involving human participants, or otherwise involving people's privacy, rights, and freedom needs ethical approval.
- NB questionnaires and surveys conducted within and outside the university including those where the participants are anonymous do require approval.

Research that **does not** require ethical approval

- Exploratory research
- Research in which the researcher is the sole participant of their own research, and no hazardous procedures are involved, and there is no reference to any other participants or third parties
- Some interviews which seek non-sensitive factual information
- Research involving publicly available documents or information

Teaching activities that **do** require ethical approval

- Teaching activities which involve access to personal identifying information not already publicly available.
- Teaching activities affecting people's privacy, rights and freedoms.
- If the teaching activity involves questionnaires or surveys.
- It's the responsibility of course organisers to ensure that ethical approval has been obtained.

Teaching activities that **do not** require ethical approval

- Informal class discussions with colleagues, families and friends as a contribution to a class project where no formal publication of the data is intended.
- Teaching activities involving students doing research in which the student is the sole participant of their own research, and no hazardous procedures are involved, and there is no reference to any other participants or third parties.



Common issues and oversight

- The need for people to *be invited* to participate in the research
- Lack of ‘space’ in procedures around negotiating consent
- Lack of recognition that agreeing to participate in research may go beyond what is expected of the normal relationship you may have with the person
- Conflict of interest - especially being aware when a person may feel coerced into giving consent

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- Information sheets need to be tailored for each group of participants
- Children need to be fully informed about research and give their consent
- The right to withdraw – n.b. ‘at any time’ does not recognise the rights of the researcher
- Lack of recognition of the need for people to ‘release’ their data to you



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- Respective use of ‘anonymity’ and ‘confidentiality’
- Overstating the ability to protect identity of participants
- Special consideration needs to be given to the circulation and on-going use of visual images

New procedures

- As a result of the new procedures and timeframes for Masters' theses and EPSY 516, we are trialling fast tracking of these applications for ethical approval.
- In order for this trial to be successful we need:
 - Supervisors to be very involved in ensuring that ethical applications are well developed and consistent with the policy
 - Supervisors to be involved in overseeing required amendments
- Every other ethics application will be treated in the normal fashion, therefore please do not expect any prioritising of individual submissions. The three week processing remains standard procedure and is consistent with what happens elsewhere in the university.
- Visiting academics in the FOE: Ethical applications can now be submitted by visiting academics to the FOE Ethics Committee.

New wordings for information sheets

- The statement directing any ethical concerns about the research should be to Dr Kirkman (not Judith and Sue) and should read:
 - *If you have any ethical concerns about the research, you should contact Dr. Allison Kirkman, Chair of the Victoria University of Wellington Human Ethics Committee
allison.kirkman@vuw.ac.nz*
- The approval statement should now read:
 - *The research has been approved by the Faculty of Education Human Ethics Sub-committee under delegated authority from the Victoria University Human Ethics Committee.*