



# ETHICS CLEARANCE AND PERMISSION TO ACCESS UCT STAFF OR STUDENTS AS RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

## Standard operating procedure

1. This Standard Operating Procedure deals with three process issues related to ethics clearance and permission to access staff or student target populations for research. They are
  - (i) which UCT ethics body should grant or refuse ethics approval;
  - (ii) who gives access to staff or student populations and, in particular, access to names and contact details of the target population(s); and
  - (iii) which process comes first: ethics approval or permission to access, given that these are independent decisions but that both are required.
2. No research into a UCT staff or student target population may be conducted by parties within or beyond UCT, without prior ethics clearance for the study proposal. In addition, researchers must comply with UCT processes for permission to access the targeted study population.
3. These provisions and processes apply to any proposed research into the UCT community, in whole or part, including research conducted or led by departments, divisions or units using staff and student cohorts of their own or collaborating UCT structures, whether the research is of a developmental nature or otherwise.
4. The intention of these provisions is to create a collaborative milieu seeking best practice in all research into the UCT community, to promote generation of knowledge, to protect the University and the participants from foreseeable harm, and to spread the burden of impacts upon researched persons, all in a transparent and publicly accountable manner.
5. Issues that must be addressed in dealing with a proposal to conduct research on UCT staff or student populations, include the following: what are the domains of University vulnerability if the research is conducted, and whether there is a favourable balance of possible risks of harm and potential benefits for the University as well as for participants.
6. **Permission to access targeted UCT populations**
  - 6.1 The University has assigned authority to
    - The **Executive Director: Human Resource** (currently Ms Miriam Hoosain) to grant or withhold permission to access a **staff population** for research purposes, after necessary consultation, which should include consultation with the staff representative body (or bodies) or trade union(s) concerned, if appropriate. Such permission to access is subject to ethics approval being granted; and
    - The **Executive Director: Student Affairs** (currently Dr Moonira Khan) to grant or withhold permission to access a **student population** for



research purposes, after necessary consultation, which should include consultation with the Student Representative Council, if appropriate. Such permission to access is subject to ethics approval being granted.

6.2 The person(s) considering granting permission to access must consider, *inter alia*

- The disruption, if any, to the participants;
- The costs of access and how these costs will be met; and
- The benefits to UCT or to society in general that might be realistically attributable to the research or to its prospective findings.

## 7. Ethics clearance

7.1 The University has assigned authority to

### **Faculty-level Research Ethics Committees.**

7.2 Any UCT Faculty-level Research Ethics Committee considering clearance or approval of the research proposal or protocol must give attention to, *inter alia*

- Is there a coherent research proposal (especially for a thesis study)?
- Why is a University population to be researched (pertinence/convenience)?
- Is the UCT University population a logical choice for the study?
- Is the University likely to benefit from it?
- What obligations have the researcher(s) envisaged they have to meet?
- How will confidentiality and anonymity of the participants be respected?
- Whether there are additional obligations the Committee wishes to specify for the study at UCT?
- How can UCT ensure that the researcher(s) meets the obligations throughout the study?

7.3 The Faculty-level Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty closest to the subject area of the researcher's intended work must do the ethics clearance process. This provision applies regardless of the faculty affiliation of the target population; for example, the Faculty of Health Sciences HREC Committee would consider proposals to research health conditions relating to staff or students across UCT and would not be limited to granting ethics approval for research with staff or students in the Faculty of Health Sciences only.

## 8. Interdisciplinary research

A Faculty-level Research Ethics Committee may decide that aspects of the research proposal require input from the Research Ethics Committee of another Faculty, especially in the case of interdisciplinary research. In such circumstances, the committee may refer the application in whole or part to its counterparts in one or more other Faculties, specifying the areas of concern for which particular expertise is sought. The final decision of the Faculty REC may incorporate provisions originating in the other Faculties consulted.



## 9. Sequence of processes

As the ethics clearance process necessarily involves rigorous consideration of the research proposal, the permission to access question must ordinarily be resolved first. There may be occasions where the responsible Executive Director(s) will ask for ethics clearance before finalising a matter (e.g. the 2007 study involving access to a sample of classes in class time would have involved futile consultation about the practicalities of access, if the proposal was to have been rejected on ethical grounds).

## 10. Role of Senate Ethics in Research Committee

The Senate Ethics in Research (EiR) Committee is involved in the ethics clearance process only if there is a dispute as to which Faculty REC is appropriate. In such case, the Senate EiRC will ordinarily resolve the matter by assigning the proposal to one Faculty-level REC. The EiR does not review proposals itself.

## 11. Summary:

Regarding all research that proposes to use UCT staff or student participants:

- Permission to access staff or student populations must be obtained from ED: HR for staff and ED: Student Affairs for students.
- This process is separate from the ethics clearance process.
- Ethics clearance must be sought from the Faculty-level Research Ethics Committee in the Faculty closest to the area of research proposed.
- The proposed research may proceed only when **both** permission to access and ethics clearance have been obtained.

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Destination: Research Handbook; Research Portal; Faculty RECs and Faculty Research Committees; URC and SEC/Senate for formal approval

Note: the document has been circulated to Faculty RECs and Faculty Research Committees to ensure standardised approaches