



SENATE ETHICS IN RESEARCH COMMITTEE (EiRC)

Serviced by the Office of Research Integrity

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RE: Obtaining Ethics approval prior to commencing research activities

Dear Faculty Deans,

I am writing on behalf of the Senate Ethics in Research Committee (EiRC), to bring to your attention an important matter concerning research ethics review and approval. As you are aware, ethics review and approval are critical components of the research process, and they must be taken seriously to ensure the safety, well-being, and dignity of research participants.

In some cases, research has commenced (and even concluded) before making an application for ethics review and approval. This practice can have serious consequences for both the research participants and the researchers themselves, including loss of degrees, rejection of theses by examiners and rejection of research submitted for publication by journals. Not only is it contrary to ethical principles and institutional policies, but it also may undermine the credibility of the research and its results. The institutional policy on the [Responsible Conduct of Research](#) states: "UCT affirms the requirement that research involving human participants or animal use for research or teaching must undergo ethics review, according to faculty-specific guidelines that comply with UCT and relevant applicable external policy, norms and standards" (2.6).


Therefore, we strongly recommend that all researchers obtain ethics approval, as per their Faculty practices and policies, **before** commencing any research. This will ensure that the research is conducted in an ethical and responsible manner and that the interests of research participants are protected. It will also help to avoid any delays or complications that may arise if ethics approval is sought after the research has already begun. Retrospective ethics review and approval of research projects is not permitted at UCT as per Section F in the post graduate MOU. Although this document is written for students UCT RCR policy requires coherence in ethical standards applied to all research endeavours and this stance is unanimously supported by the EiRC. We encourage researchers to plan their research activities carefully to ensure that ethics approval can be obtained in a timely manner.

Many Faculties have already transitioned onto the [electronic Research Administration \(eRA\) system](#). The ethics workflows in the system have provisioned a pre-screening questionnaire (PSQ), which enables students and researchers to ascertain whether (or not) a full ethics application is necessary.

The PSQ also generates an outcome letter confirming the assessment of the application, which, in the case of an outcome that ethics review and approval is *not* required, can be used as proof of ethics exemption. The Faculties which are not yet on the eRA system are currently in the process of being brought online.

We urge all Deans to communicate this message to their and staff (both PASS and academic) and students and, to ensure that appropriate measures are in place to support ethical research practices. Thank you for your attention on this matter.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M. Blockman', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Prof Marc Blockman
Chair: Senate Ethics in Research Committee
University of Cape Town

CC Faculty Ethics Committee Chairs
ED Research
DVC Research