

# **HO TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY**



**FINAL DRAFT**

## **RESEARCH ETHICS POLICY**

**September 2022**

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## **1.0 INTRODUCTION**

Following historical antecedents of harm and loss of life to research participants, ethics has become imperative in the conduct of research. Ethics highlights moral choices with implications on decisions and standards of behaviour. Ethics in research concerns the dilemmas and conflicts that arise over the proper conduct of research. Research ethics sets the standards for the protection of human and animal subjects in the planning, conduct and reporting of research.

Ho Technical University (HTU) is committed to promoting and upholding the highest standards of ethical integrity and probity in the conduct of research. Consequently, ethical values shall be central to the structures and practices of research governance. The HTU Research Ethics Policy provides the general principles and guidelines that underpin the University's approach to ethical issues in research that must be adhered to by staff, students and affiliates of the University.

## **2.0 PURPOSE**

This Policy provides an overarching framework that sets out standards, principles and values to ensure that faculty and student research activities adhere to the highest research ethical standards. The Policy seeks to:

1. ensure HTU staff, students and affiliates guarantee ethical standards and commit to the protection of human and non-human research participants; and
2. ensure that research activities in the University comply with national and international regulations, conventions and guidelines on responsible conduct of research.

## **3.0 OBJECTIVES**

The objectives of the Policy are to:

1. develop research framework that guarantees acceptable ethical standards in the conduct of research;
2. commit to transparency, accountability and high ethical standards towards research in the University;
3. regulate and strengthen research activities involving human and non-human participants for and/or with the University.

4. safeguard the dignity, rights and well-being of human participants and honour the trust of researchers and in the conduct of research;
5. ensure the protection of research records and assets and
6. prevent unethical research practices thereby reducing any risk to the University and individual researchers.

#### **4.0 SCOPE**

The Policy applies to the following:

1. Staff and students of the University engaged in research;
2. Any individual who is neither staff nor student of the University but is undertaking research using the University's resources including but not limited to premises and facilities;
3. Any individual who is neither staff nor student of the University but undertakes research in the name of the University; and
4. Research involving human and non-human participants and any other type of research that might raise ethical issues or concerns.

#### **5.0 DEFINITION OF TERMS**

**Confidentiality:** The duty of an individual not to disclose research information obtained on another person to a third party without the express consent of the research participant.

**Ethical Conduct:** Conduct oneself in accordance with this policy and behaving in consonance with what men and society believe are good values.

**Human Participants:** The human beings that partake or are involved in a research process that entails answering a specific question including but not limited to data collection and analysis. The process could entail the use of questionnaires, interviews, focus groups or observation of participants.

**Informed Consent:** The approval granted by an individual with adequate reasoning abilities to participate in research after being schooled to understand the facts, implications, benefits and future consequences of their decision to participate.

**Non-Human Participants:** Animals and other inanimate objects that partake or are involved in a research process that entails answering a specific question including but not limited to data collection and analysis.

**Research:** It is a systematic inquiry aimed at the discovery of knowledge, creative cultural and conceptual expressions or innovative scholarships that may contribute to the development and extending the frontiers of human understandings.

**Researcher:** An individual who undertakes a systematic inquiry.

**Research Ethics:** The safeguarding of human and non-human participants in the planning, conduct and reporting of research.

**Research Misconduct:** All acts including fabrications, falsification, plagiarism, or other serious deviation from commonly accepted practices in the relevant scientific community for proposing, performing, or reviewing research, or in reporting research results. Research misconduct does not include honest error or differences in opinion.

**Risk:** A potentially negative or adverse consequence of a research activity.

**Vulnerable Persons/People/Population:** A person or group of people that has a reduced capacity or ability to give informed consent, or may have special legal protections and higher risk of negative outcomes due to their participation in a research study.

## 6.0 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The guiding principles includes the following:

1. **Autonomy:** Each research participant is considered an independent individual capable of making rational decisions about his/her personal choices. He/She will be treated with respect for their self-determination capabilities.
2. **Consent:** Participation should be freely given, specific and be based on informed consent. Coercion and undue influence of people in the name of research should be avoided, as these conflict with autonomy. Participants may withdraw their consent as and when they deem fit and proper.
3. **Care and Safety:** Research participants shall be protected from any form of harm.
4. **Integrity, Transparency and Accountability:** The conduct of research should be honest and transparent. Researchers should be honest about their own limitations, competence, belief systems, values and needs. The contribution of other researchers or members of the research team should be properly acknowledged. Researchers should not abuse their positions or knowledge for personal power or gain.
5. **Relevance:** It should be clearly demonstrated that the research is essential to the pursuit of knowledge and/or the public good.

6. **Beneficence:** Commitment to minimise the potential risk and maximise the potential benefit associated with research. Risks could be economical, psychological, physical and social.
7. **Non-Maleficence:** It is necessary to ensure that the conduct of the research does not cause harm to research participants. Participants are free to withdraw from a study at any time without penalty.
8. **Justice:** The ethical obligations to treat each participant in accordance with what is right and proper and to give each person what is due them.
9. **Maximisation of Public Interest:** Research should be carried out for the benefit of society and with the motive of maximising public interest and ensuring social justice. It is recommended that research works be published and publicised timeously and appropriately.
10. **Competence and Commitment:** Researchers should be qualified and committed to undertaking the research activity.
11. **Protection of the Rights and Interests of Stakeholders:** Researchers should respect and protect the dignity, privacy and confidentiality of participants and institutions, where applicable, and should never expose them to procedures or risks not directly associated to the research projects or its methodology.
12. **Respect for Cultural Differences:** Researchers should respect what is sacred and secret by tradition. It is paramount to obtain consent from the appropriate authorities prior to the conduct of any research activity in communities.
13. **Fairness and Objectivity:** The criteria and process of selecting research participants should be equitable but scientific. Easily accessible individuals or groups should not be inordinately burdened with participation in research processes.
14. **Risk Minimisation:** Researchers should ensure that the actual benefits derived by the participants or society from the research outweigh possible risks, and that participants are subjected to only those risks that are necessary for the conduct of the research. Researchers should ensure that the risks are assessed and that adequate precautions are taken to minimise and mitigate the risks.
15. **Non-Exploitation:** There should be benefit to the community in which research is conducted. As far as possible, communities should receive feedback on research carried out on them.

## **7.0 POLICY STATEMENT**

Researchers of the University shall strictly adhere to acceptable ethical standards in order to protect the dignity, rights and welfare of research participants. These principles serve as a framework to guide the process of research and the researcher.

### **7.1 Responsibilities of the Researcher**

Researchers for and on behalf of the University shall:

1. be fully responsible for protecting the rights of human and non-human participants in all research;
2. ensure that they are qualified and adequately trained or supervised to carry out any research activity;
3. adhere to applicable ethical research standards and principles in the conduct of research;
4. comply with institutionally approved procedures in conducting ethical research;
5. provide regular updates on research to the Research Ethics Committee;
6. participate and cooperate with all research quality assurance reviews;
7. publish and/or publicise all research; and
8. respect the privacy of research subjects and protect their confidential information.

### **7.2 Responsibilities of the University**

The University shall:

1. provide an enabling environment for research activities;
2. provide opportunities for continuous education and training of researchers in research ethics;
3. ensure that staff and students engaged in research activities are suitably qualified and supervised;
4. provide an enabling environment in which the rights and dignity of researchers and participants are respected and are not exposed to harm;
5. adequately resource and empower the Resource Ethics Committee to be autonomous in the performance of its duties; and
6. create an environment in which the independence and academic freedom of researchers are respected.

## **7.3 Research Ethics Committee**

### **7.3.1 Composition**

1. The Research Ethics Committee shall be composed of the following:
  - a. Pro-Vice-Chancellor - Chairperson
  - b. University Librarian
  - c. All Academic Deans
  - d. Director of Research and Innovation
  - e. Director of Planning & Quality Assurance
  - f. Legal Officer
  - g. Senior/Assistant Registrar - Secretary
2. The Committee may, where necessary, co-opt such relevant Officers in executing its functions.
3. The Committee shall meet as and when necessary.
4. Quorum for meetings shall be five (5) members including Chairperson and the Director of Research and Innovation.

### **7.3.2 Functions**

The Committee shall:

1. develop procedures and requirements for ethical approval and clearance for all research activities;
2. be responsible for the review and approval of research prior to commencement;
3. serve as an administrative body to protect the welfare of human and non-human research participants in all research activities within and/or on behalf of the university;
4. serve as the body to ensure full implementation of ethical issues in research of the University and may receive periodic reports;
5. maximise the benefits associated with research whilst reducing risks;
6. determine or discontinue any previously approved protocols and/or ethical clearance, where needed; and
7. ensure adherence to globally accepted ethical guidelines and standards on research.

#### 7.4 Research Misconduct

All research works in the University are expected to comply with basic ethical standards as may be approved by relevant authorities and in accordance with this Policy. The University shall not condone research misconduct or unethical behaviour in the research activities of staff or students. Any form of breach shall be dealt with in accordance with the University's Statutes and Policies. Importantly, research misconduct includes but not limited to the following:

1. **Fabrication:** making up data or results and recording and/or reporting them.
2. **Falsification:** manipulating research materials, equipment, or processes, or changing or omitting data or results such that the research is not accurately represented in the research record.
3. **Plagiarism:** the appropriation of another person's ideas, processes, results, or words without giving appropriate credit.
4. Serious deviations from accepted practices: this includes but not limited to:
  - i. *Abusing confidentiality, including the use of ideas and preliminary data gained from:*
    - *Access to privileged information through the opportunity for editorial review of manuscripts submitted to journals; and*
    - *Peer review of proposals being considered for funding by agency panels or by internal committees.*
  - ii. Stealing, destroying, or damaging the research property of others with the intent to alter the research records:
  - iii. Directing, encouraging, or knowingly allowing others to engage in fabrication, falsification, or plagiarism; and
  - iv. Granting or accepting guest, gift, or ghost authorship.
5. Failure to acknowledge sources of funding especially for publications emanating from research in the name of the University.
6. Failure of staff, students or agents of the University to disclose their research affiliations to the University.

## **8.0 RESPONSIBILITIES**

1. Research Ethics Committee
2. Directorate of Research and Innovation

## **9.0 REGULATORY FRAMEWORK**

Research shall be conducted in consonance with already established standards, relevant codes, guidelines and legislation outlining research ethics. These include but not limited to the following:

1. Relevant laws of Ghana
2. The Statutes of Ho Technical University
3. Declaration on Science and the Use of Scientific Knowledge and the Science Agenda-Framework for Action (1999)
4. Principles for Ethical Research Involving Humans: Ethical Professional Practice in Impact Assessment Part I (2012)
5. Declaration of Helsinki (1996)
6. International Conference on Harmonisation
7. Good Clinical Practice [ICH GCP (E6)] Guidelines
8. Council for International Organisations of Medical Sciences (CIOMS)
9. Belmont Report

## **10.0 MONITORING AND REVIEW**

This Policy shall be monitored and reviewed by the Directorate of Research and Innovation periodically based on emerging trends to ensure its relevance to the University. The Policy shall be reviewed, when necessary, through the appropriate channel.

## **11.0 AUTHORISATION**

This Policy was approved by the University Council on the **30th day of September, 2022**.

## **REFERENCES**

Resources for Research Ethics Education, 2016.

University of Ghana Research Ethics Policy, December 2013

University of Health and Allied Sciences, Ho, Research Ethics Policy, August 2017