



Code of Good Practice for the Conduct of Research

Introduction

The University of Ballarat commits to high standards of professional conduct in all research activities (broadly defined to include pure and applied research, contract research, research training etc.). This Code sets standards of conduct required of all those engaged in research at the University of Ballarat. The Code is derived, almost wholly and directly, from the ['Joint NHMRC/AVCC Statement and Guidelines on Research Practice' \(1997\)](#).

The broad principles that guide research have been long established. Central to these are the maintenance of high ethical standards, and validity and accuracy in the collection and reporting of data. The responsibility of the research community to the public and to itself is acknowledged. This responsibility is particularly important where professional practice or public policy may be defined or modified in the light of research findings.

The processes of research protect the truth. Communication between collaborators; maintenance and reference to research records; presentation and discussion of work at meetings of experts; publication of results, including the important element of peer review; and the possibility that investigations will be repeated or extended by other researchers, all contribute to the intrinsically self-correcting and ethical nature of research.

Competition in research can have a strong and positive influence, enhancing the quality and immediacy of the work produced. However, competitive pressures can act to distort sound research practice, if they encourage too-hasty preparation and submission of papers, the division of reports on substantial bodies of work into multiple small reports to enhance the 'publication count' of the author(s), or an undue emphasis on safe but mundane research at the expense of more creative and more innovative lines of study.

It is a requirement of the University that its researchers are committed to high standards of professional conduct. Researchers have a duty to ensure that their work enhances the good name of the University and the profession to which they belong.

Researchers should only participate in work which conforms to accepted ethical standards and which they are competent to perform. When in doubt they should seek assistance with their research from their colleagues or peers. Debate on, and criticism of, research work are essential parts of the research process.

The University and its researchers have a responsibility to ensure the safety of all those associated with the research. It is also essential that the design of projects takes account of any relevant ethical guidelines.

If data of a confidential nature are obtained, for example from individual patient records or from certain questionnaires, confidentiality must be observed and researchers must not use such information for their own personal advantage or that of a third party. Secrecy may also be necessary for a limited period in the case of contracted research or of non-contractual research which is under consideration for patent protection. In general, however, research results and methods should be open to scrutiny by colleagues within the institution and, through appropriate publication, by the profession at large.

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Page 1 of 6		Review Date:	13/12/2009



Data storage and retention

Data (including electronic data) must be recorded in a durable and appropriately referenced form. Data management should comply with relevant privacy protocols, such as the:

- [Commonwealth Privacy Act 1988](#).
- [Victorian Information Privacy Act 2000](#), and
- [University's Information Privacy Policy](#).

Schools must establish procedures for the retention of data and for the keeping of records of data held.

Data must be held for sufficient time to allow reference to it. For data that is published this may be for as long as interest and discussion persists following publication. It is recommended that the minimum period for retention is at least 5 years from the date of publication but for specific types of research, such as clinical research, 15 years may be more appropriate.

Wherever possible, original data must be retained in the School in which they were generated. Individual researchers should be able to hold copies of the data for their own use. Retention solely by the individual researcher provides little protection to the researcher or the institution in the event of an allegation of falsification of data.

Data related to publications must be available for discussion with any other researchers. Where confidentiality provisions apply (for example, where the researchers or institution have given undertakings to third parties, such as the subjects of the research), it is desirable for data to be kept in a way that reference to them by third parties can occur without breaching such confidentiality.

Confidentiality agreements to protect intellectual property rights may be agreed between the institution, the researcher and a sponsor of the research. Where such agreements limit free publication and discussion, limitations and restrictions must be explicitly agreed.

It is the obligation of the researcher to enquire whether confidentiality agreements apply and of the Head of School to inform researchers of their obligations with respect to these provisions.

All confidentiality agreements should be agreed to by the Head of School and the University at the beginning of the research project.

The establishment and ownership of and access to databases containing confidential information, and any limits on this must be in accordance with the University's Intellectual Property legislation ([Statute 8.2](#) and [Regulation 8.2](#)).

When data are obtained from limited access databases, or via a contractual arrangement, written indication of the location of the original data, or key information regarding the database from which it was collected, must be retained by the researcher or research unit.

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Researchers must be responsible for ensuring appropriate security for any confidential material, including that held in computing systems. Where computing systems are accessible through networks, particular attention to security of confidential data is required. Security and confidentiality must be assured in a way that copes with multiple researchers and the departure of individual researchers.

Authorship

Authorship is substantial participation, where all the following conditions are met:

- a) conception and design, or analysis and interpretation of data;
- b) drafting significant parts of the article or revising it critically for important intellectual content, and
- c) final approval of the version to be published.

Participation solely in the acquisition of funding or the collection of data does not justify authorship. General supervision of the research group is not sufficient for authorship.

Any part of an article critical to its main conclusion must be the responsibility of at least one author.

An author's role in a research output must be sufficient for that person to take public responsibility for at least that part of the output in that person's area of expertise.

No person who is an author, consistent with this definition, must be excluded as an author without their permission in writing.

Authorship of a research output is a matter that should be discussed between researchers at an early stage in a research project, and reviewed whenever there are changes in participation.

When there is more than one co-author of a research output, one co-author (by agreement amongst the authors) should be nominated as first or lead author for the whole research output, and should take responsibility for record keeping regarding the research output. Authors should also discuss and reach agreement on the order in which authors are listed.

Where any research is published, including electronically, all co-authors of a publication must acknowledge their authorship in writing in terms of, at least, the minimum acceptable definition above. This signed statement of authorship must specify that the signatories are the only authors according to this definition. It must state that the signatories have seen the version of the paper submitted for publication.

The signed statement of authorship must be placed on file in the School of the first or lead author, at the time of submission of the research output for publication, and must remain in safe keeping in that School.

If, for any reason, one or more co-authors are unavailable or otherwise unable to sign the statement of authorship, the Head of School may sign on their behalf, noting the reason for their unavailability.

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Authorised by:	Academic Board	Original Issue:	29/11/2007
Document Owner:	Chair, Academic Board	Current Version:	13/12/2007
Page 3 of 6		Review Date:	13/12/2009



Code of Good Practice for the Conduct of Research

continued.../

The authors must ensure that others who have contributed to the work are recognised in the research output. Courtesy demands that individuals and organisations providing facilities should also be acknowledged.

Research students will normally be primary authors of research publications arising from their thesis/portfolio work, subject to any particular protocols which may attach to particular disciplines and /or publisher guidelines

Publications arising from the work of a research postgraduate student will not usually be submitted for publication without prior consultation with the student's supervisor

The inclusion of a supervisor as a co-author on a research student's publication can only take place if the supervisor meets the criteria for authorship.

Should any disputes/conflicts arise in relation to authorship informal advice should first of all be sought from the Head of School. In instances where the matter cannot be resolved informally the author (staff or student) will refer it to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic & Research) who will hear the complaint.

Publication

Publication of multiple papers based on the same set(s) or subset(s) of data is not acceptable, except where there is full cross-referencing within the papers (for example, in a series of closely related work, or where a complete work grew out of a preliminary publication and this is fully acknowledged).

An author who submits substantially similar work to more than one publisher must disclose this to the publishers at the time of submission.

As a general principle research findings should not be reported in the public media before they have been reported to a research audience of experts in the field of research - preferably by publication in a peer-reviewed journal, except where there is a contractual arrangement.

It is acknowledged that where issues of public policy and concern make prior advice desirable, such advice must be tendered first to the public or professional authorities responsible, and the unreported status of the findings must be advised at the same time. Only where responsible authorities fail to act can prior reporting to the media be justified, and again the unpublished status of the findings must be reported at the same time.

Where there is private reporting of research that has not yet been exposed to open peer-review scrutiny, especially when it is reported to prospective financial supporters, researchers have an obligation to explain fully the status of the work and the peer-review mechanisms to which it will be subjected.

Publications must include information on the sources of financial support for the research. Financial sponsorship that carries an embargo on such naming of a sponsor should be avoided.

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Authorised by: Academic Board
Document Owner: Chair, Academic Board
Page 4 of 6

Original Issue: 29/11/2007
Current Version: 13/12/2007
Review Date: 13/12/2009



Code of Good Practice for the Conduct of Research

continued.../

Deliberate inclusion of inaccurate or misleading information relating to research activity in curriculum vitae, grant applications, job applications or public statements, or the failure to provide relevant information, is a form of research misconduct. Accuracy is essential in describing the state of publication (in preparation, submitted, accepted), research funding (applied for, granted, funding period), and awards conferred, and where any of these relate to more than one researcher.

All reasonable steps must be taken to ensure that published reports, statistics and public statements about research activities and performance are complete, accurate and unambiguous.

Supervision of students / research trainees

Researchers and research students must adhere to the [AVCC 'Guidelines for Maintaining and Monitoring Academic Quality and Standards in Higher Degrees'](#) contained in the University's [Higher Degrees by Research Handbook](#).

Disclosure of potential conflicts of interest

All researchers (staff and students) must comply with the University's [Conflict of Interest Policy](#) and [Procedure](#).

Potential interests, including the direct benefits such as sponsorship of the investigation or indirect benefits such as the provision of materials or facilities or the support of individuals such as provision of travel or accommodation expenses to attend conferences must be disclosed. Such disclosure should cover any situation in which the conflict of interest may, or may be perceived to; affect any decision regarding other people.

The procedures should require disclosure to editors of journals, to the readers of published work, and to external bodies from which funds are sought.

Researchers have an obligation to disclose at the time of reporting or proposing research (for example, in a grant application), any conflict of interest which has the potential to influence research and investigations, publication and media reports, grant applications, applications for appointment and promotion.

Research misconduct

Research Misconduct means fabrication, falsification, plagiarism, or other practices that seriously deviate from those that are commonly accepted within the scientific community for proposing, conducting, or reporting research. It includes the misleading ascription of authorship including the listing of authors without their permission, attributing work to others who have not in fact contributed to the research, and the lack of appropriate acknowledgment of work primarily produced by a research student/trainee or associate. It does not include honest errors or honest differences in interpretation or judgments of data.

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Authorised by: Academic Board
Document Owner: Chair, Academic Board
Page 5 of 6

Original Issue: 29/11/2007
Current Version: 13/12/2007
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Code of Good Practice for the Conduct of Research

continued.../

Examples of research misconduct include but are not limited to the following:

Misappropriation: A researcher or reviewer shall not intentionally or recklessly:

- i) plagiarise, which shall be understood to mean the presentation of the documented words or ideas of another as his or her own, without attribution appropriate for the medium of presentation;
- ii) make use of any information in breach of any duty of confidentiality associated with the review of any manuscript or grant application; or
- iii) intentionally omit reference to the relevant published work of others for the purpose of inferring personal discovery of new information.

Interference: A researcher or reviewer shall not intentionally and without authorisation take or sequester or materially damage any research-related property of another, including without limitation the apparatus, reagents, biological materials, writings, data, hardware, software, or any other substance or device used or produced in the conduct of research.

Misrepresentation: A researcher or reviewer shall not with intent to deceive, or in reckless disregard for the truth:

- i) state or present a material or significant falsehood; or
- ii) omit a fact so that what is stated or presented as a whole states or presents a material or significant falsehood.

Allegations of research misconduct will be dealt with in accordance with the provisions of the University's relevant industrial awards/agreements.

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Authorised by: Academic Board
Document Owner: Chair, Academic Board
Page 6 of 6

Original Issue: 29/11/2007
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