



OP 80.01: Research Ethics Consultation for Students Participating In University -Sponsored Research

PURPOSE

The general purpose for this policy is to provide students at Mississippi State University (MSU) with a resource to help guide them in making responsible decisions when it comes to issues surrounding the responsible conduct of research (RCR). MSU strives to maintain the highest standards of honesty, integrity, and ethical behavior in conducting research. Despite the University's best efforts, the complex nature of research ethics makes it challenging for some students to identify and make the best decision when it comes to the responsible conduct of research. Not all students are willing to talk openly about dilemmas they are facing. This policy will provide a resource for students to confidentially discuss research issues of ethical concern.

This policy is not a substitution for the Mississippi State University Honor Code Procedure or the Ethics in Research and Other Scholarly Activities Policy (OP 80.02). Instead, this policy provides an additional means for students to identify issues that should be reported under these two policies as well as the "Whistleblower" Policy (OP 01.07).

POLICY

It is the policy of Mississippi State University that research and other scholarly activities supported by the university be carried out in a manner that is of the highest standards of honesty, integrity, and ethical behavior. Students conducting university-sponsored research should have available to them a Research Ethics Consultant who will discuss with the student confidentially on issues presenting potential ethical dilemmas. The advice given by the consultant is to better inform students when making decisions and is not a substitution for legal advice provided by an attorney.

DEFINITION FOR PURPOSES OF THIS POLICY

- **University-Sponsored Research** is defined as research conducted at Mississippi State University that is funded by a state or federal organization or through a private organization and/or under the supervision of an academic or research faculty member (thesis, dissertation, etc.). University-sponsored research does not include research conducted as part of an academic assignment for a traditional academic credit course.
- **Student**, for the purpose of this policy, refers to any individual, graduate or undergraduate, enrolled at Mississippi State University and participating in university sponsored research.
- **Research Ethics Consultant*** is a professional who provides confidential advice to students at Mississippi State University in the responsible conduct of research.

- **Consultation** is defined as a conference between the MSU student and the Consultant to consider a particular question regarding the responsible conduct of research.
- **Misconduct** is defined as fabrication, falsification, plagiarism or other serious deviation from accepted practices in proposing, carrying out, or reporting results from research or other scholarly activities.
- **Research Ethics Review Officer*** is the individual designated by the Vice President for Research and Economic Development to be responsible for the security of all documents relating to allegations, inquiries, and investigations of misconduct and to inform the Vice President of the status of inquiries and investigations of misconduct of research.
- **Investigation** is defined as a formal examination and evaluation of relevant facts to determine whether misconduct has taken place or, if misconduct already has been confirmed, to assess its extent and consequences or recommend appropriate action by the Research Ethics Review Officer.
- **Inquiry** is defined as information-gathering and preliminary fact-finding to determine whether an allegation or apparent instance of misconduct warrants an investigation by the Research Ethics Review Officer.

* A single individual cannot serve as both the Research Ethics Consultant and the Research Ethics Review Officer.

PROCEDURES

Eligibility for Consultation

Any student enrolled at Mississippi State University and participating in university-sponsored research who feels he or she is facing a potential ethical dilemma in research is eligible to request a confidential consultation with the Research Ethics Consultant. Currently, this service will only be available to students. Faculty and other personnel involved in university-sponsored research are encouraged to contact the Research Ethics Review Officer or the Office of Regulatory Compliance for guidance regarding issues related to the responsible conduct of research (IRB, IACUC, etc.).

Requesting Ethics Consultation

Any student having reason to believe he or she is facing a potential ethical dilemma while conducting research at Mississippi State University should submit a Request for Ethics Consultation to the Research Ethics Consultant. The request must be submitted online through a confidential process to the Consultant. After the request has been submitted, it will be reviewed by the Consultant, and the student will be contacted within two business days to schedule the confidential consultation.

Records

The Research Ethics Consultant is required to maintain confidential detailed records regarding each consultation with a student. These records are to remain in the Consultant's possession under lock and key for a minimum of three years. After three years, the materials will be destroyed by the Research Ethics Consultant if no further action is probable.

Should an allegation of ethical misconduct of research be reported to the Research Ethics Review Officer and the allegation moves to a full investigation by the Board of Inquiry as per OP 80.02, the Research Ethics Review Officer will submit a request to the Research Ethics Consultant for all records related to the individuals involved in the allegation. The submitted request must be authorized by Mississippi State University Legal Counsel.

Should an allegation of violation of the Mississippi State University Honor Code be filed against a student, the Honor Code Council Director will submit a request to the Research Ethics Consultant for all records related to the individuals involved in the allegation only after the case is decided to continue to a hearing panel. The submitted request must be authorized by Mississippi State University Legal Counsel.

Matters to Be Disclosed to Students Prior to Consultation

It is critical that students have all of the information regarding the consultation process prior to beginning a consultation. The Research Ethics Consultant is required to provide written disclosure to each student of the details listed below. The disclosure should be signed by the student and kept with the consultation records. The student should be provided a copy for his or her records.

Details to Be Disclosed

- If the matter being discussed is referred to a Board of Investigation Committee or an Honor Code Hearing Panel and the student's testimony is required, anonymity may no longer be guaranteed. Case numbers will be used in place of the student's name; however the nature of the situation may be too specific and therefore not able to protect the student's anonymity.
- Students are expected to cooperate with full investigations of research misconduct by the Ethics Review Officer per (OP 80.02) or by the Honor Code Council Director per the Honor Code.
- After the student has graduated from Mississippi State University, the situation requiring consultation may be modified to ensure anonymity and used as an educational tool for classes and/or training sessions in the responsible conduct of research.
- Students may end the consultation process at any time by submitting a written request. Information provided during the consultation process will remain on record and be available in accordance with this policy.
- Any names mentioned during the consultation process are kept on record and subject to release in accordance with this policy.

Responsibilities of the Research Ethics Consultant

Due to the nature of the work of the Research Ethics Consultant and the need to ensure student anonymity, the consultant is not bound by the mandatory reporting of ethical misconduct as per the Ethics in Research and Other Scholarly Activities policy (OP 80.02) except in the instance that public health and safety is compromised.

The Consultant will make all attempts to follow-up with students after consultations to determine if any actions were taken by the student, if in any way the student's confidentiality has been compromised, and if there are any additional ethical concerns that have arisen from the original situation. The student can make a request in writing not to be contacted by the Consultant after the original consultation.

The Research Ethics Consultant is required to maintain detailed confidential records on all requests for consultation as well as formal consultations. A confidential report will be submitted annually to the Provost & Executive Vice President and the Vice President for Research and Economic Development which provides a case number for each request, whether a consultation was provided, the general ethical issue being addressed, advice given, follow ups, and any known outcomes. The report should not contain identifying information beyond a case number.

Requirements for the Position of Research Ethics Consultant

The Provost & Executive Vice President and the Vice President for Research and Economic Development will designate an individual to serve as the Research Ethics Consultant. Preference should be given to individuals that have research ethics experience or teaching experience in university research ethics.

REVIEW

This policy and procedures statement will be reviewed every four years or as necessary by the Research Ethics Officer, Provost and Executive Vice President, Vice President for Research and Economic Development, Vice President, Division of Agriculture Forestry and Veterinary Medicine, and the Vice President for Student Affairs.

REVIEWED BY:

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Research Ethics Officer

09/23/2015
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10/26/2015
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