

**DHOFAR UNIVERSITY
UNIVERSITY RESEARCH BOARD**

CODE OF CONDUCT FOR RESEARCH

Approved by DU Council on April 20, 2008.

1. INTRODUCTION

The University Research Board (URB) at Dhofar University (The University) has adopted a Code of Conduct for Research (the Code) that provides guidelines for responsible and ethical practices in research and procedures for dealing with cases of misconduct in research. All faculty members and staff are required to adhere to the Code and to ensure that their students and assistants adopt it as a standard practice. The University expects all its members to be committed to high standards of professional conduct and to ensure that their work enhances the reputation and standing of the University as well as their profession.

The aim of the Code is to provide a clear and public statement of the University's research policies and practices. If a researcher is in doubt about the applicability of provisions of the Code, or about the appropriate course of action to be adopted in relation to it, he/she should seek advice from the URB, who should provide this advice on a confidential basis, and in writing if requested.

Researchers must familiarize themselves with the Code and ensure that its provisions are observed. For the purposes of the Code, a researcher is any person who is engaged in research activities and is a member of the academic staff of the University, a student of the University, an external supervisor of a student of the University, or a visiting researcher conducting research within the University.

2. PRINCIPLES OF THE CODE

Researchers should, in all aspects of their research, demonstrate integrity and professionalism, observe fairness and equity, avoid conflicts of interest, ensure the safety of those associated with research and uphold the rights and dignity of subjects involved in their research. The Code prescribes standards of work performance and ethical conduct expected of all persons engaged in research in the University. Research should be conducted within the legislative frameworks which apply to it, and research methods and results should be open to scrutiny and debate.

3. SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS

3.1 Ethics and Biosafety

Research activities are to be conducted in a manner that preserves the rights and liberties of others, and seriously accounts for the safety, rights and dignity of the subjects of the research. The main requirements/guidelines include, but are not restricted to the following:

- a. Research activities must comply with the provisions of the Code, and the relevant University rules and regulations and the legislation of the Sultanate of Oman.
- b. Where research could expose human subjects to procedures which could infringe the safety, rights or dignity of those subjects it must be submitted for the prior approval of the URB's Research Ethics and Biosafety Committee (REBC), see section 6.
- c. Research involving animal subjects can only be conducted by staff and students who have the prior approval of the REBC.
- d. All research must be conducted in a manner which observes the highest possible standards of safety for the researchers and subjects.
- e. All laboratory work must be carried out in accordance with the declared code of practice of the laboratory being used.

3.2 Research Data

Research data must be recorded in a durable form with appropriate references. Data must be retained intact for a period of at least three years from the date of any publication which is based upon it. Storing and retention of data is the responsibility of the researcher and his/her team. Data from publications is to be made available for discussion with other researchers, except where confidentiality provisions prevail.

3.3 Publications

The following provisions are stressed:

- a. Published articles must contain appropriate reference to the contributions made by all participants in the relevant research and acknowledge any use of previously published work in the area. Any person who has participated in a substantial way in conceiving, executing or interpreting at least part of the relevant research should be included as an author of a publication derived from that research.
- b. Any person who has assisted or helped in conceiving, executing or interpreting at least part of the relevant research may be acknowledged in other ways within the article.
- c. The main author must ensure that the work of research students, research assistants and technical officers is recognized in a publication derived from research to which they have made a contribution.
- d. Where applicable, a researcher who submits substantially similar work to more than one publisher should disclose that fact to the publishers at the time of submission.

3.4 Supervision of Students

Each research unit, department or faculty must adopt and implement guidelines for supervision of research students which meet the requirements prescribed by the URB. A supervisor must observe and undertake the responsibilities set out in these guidelines.

3.5 Conflict of Interest

Conflict of interest means any affiliation or financial involvement with any organization sponsoring or providing financial support for a project undertaken by a researcher. A researcher must make full disclosure of a conflict of interest in research. Financial involvement includes direct financial interest, provision of benefits (such as travel and accommodation) and provision of material or facilities, but does not include support given by a university or other research

organization in pursuit of its overall research objectives. This disclosure of a conflict of interest in research should be made in any application for University funding for a project.

4. MISCONDUCT

Misconduct in research is the failure to comply with the provisions of the Code or by a breach of the relevant University rules and regulations and, without limiting the generality of the following, include:

- a. The use of another person's ideas, work or data without appropriate acknowledgement and permission.
- b. The fabrication or falsification of data.
- c. Exposure of subjects to procedures which could infringe the safety, rights or dignity of those subjects without the prior approval of the REBC.
- d. Exposing others to dangers through action or inaction.
- e. Failure to disclose a conflict of interest.

Failure to comply with the provisions of the Code may lead to a disciplinary action under the procedures in respect of serious misconduct specified in the terms of the contracts or the conditions covering staff employment and student discipline at the University.

5. PROCEDURES FOR DEALING WITH MISCONDUCT CASES

5.1 Complaints Procedures

- a. Any person concerned about any aspect of the ethics of research being conducted by academic staff or students of the University may raise the matter in confidence with any member of the URB.
- b. The URB member shall first attempt to resolve the matter through discussion with the person raising the matter and, if necessary, the researcher(s).
- c. If the matter cannot be resolved to the satisfaction of all parties, the URB member or any of the parties involved may take it to the URB, who will consider the matter in confidence in a special meeting, and may dismiss it, or resolve to deal with it as a formal complaint.
- d. In the meeting, the URB shall give both the complainant and the researchers the opportunity to present their cases either orally or in writing.
- e. The URB will not deal with anonymous complaints. If the complainant at any stage does not wish to proceed with the matter, the URB may terminate it.
- f. The URB shall attempt to resolve the complaint to the satisfaction of all parties. If the URB is unable to do so, it may:
 - i. require the researcher(s) to make specified changes in their procedures;
 - ii. dismiss the complaint;
 - iii. find that there is a case that the conduct of the research considered as misconduct as defined in Section 4 above, and refer the matter to the Vice-Chancellor (VC) for action.
- g. If the URB recommends changes to research procedures, it shall monitor the changes. Failure to comply with this requirement shall constitute misconduct, and be referred to the VC for appropriate action as above.

- h. If, in the URB's opinion a complaint involves allegations of gross misconduct, the Board may continue consideration of the complaint even if the researcher ceases to be associated with the University.
- i. If three complaints from the same complainant(s) have been judged to be without foundation, the URB may refuse to consider further complaints from the same persons(s), or refer the matter to the VC.

5.2 Referral to the Vice-Chancellor

The URB must inform the VC of the circumstance of a case of misconduct as soon as practicable, and provide him with all available information, together with a recommendation for action.

- a. When the VC receives a complaint as indicated above, he will inform the person against whom the complaint is made of the nature and basis of that complaint.
- b. If the VC is satisfied that a received complaint constitutes an allegation of serious misconduct, he must deal with the allegation in accordance with the rules and conditions covering academics and staff employment at the University.
- c. If the VC believes that a complaint does not constitute an allegation of serious misconduct under the employment conditions but does constitute an allegation of misconduct, he must appoint a panel of one or more independent persons with appropriate qualifications and experience to undertake an inquiry into the complaint.
- d. If the VC is satisfied that a complaint cannot be sustained, he must dismiss the complaint and accordingly inform the person making the complaint and the person against whom the complaint is made.
- e. If the VC is satisfied that there is no reasonable basis for the complaint and that the intent of the complaint is unethical, he must determine whether it is appropriate to take disciplinary action against the person making the complaint.

5.3 Inquiry Panel

- a. The panel of inquiry established under Clause 5.2.c of this Code must complete its deliberations as expeditiously as possible and with such confidentiality as the circumstances of the complaint permit.
- b. The VC must inform in writing the person against whom the complaint is made that an inquiry is to be conducted and give the composition of the panel.
- c. The person who is the subject of the complaint must be given the opportunity to respond in writing within thirty days of notification of the inquiry and to make oral submissions to the panel either personally or through a representative who is a member of the University staff other than a qualified legal practitioner during the hearing of the complaint.
- d. The panel must advise the VC whether, in its opinion, the person who is the subject of the complaint has committed an act of misconduct against the Code and the VC must advise those findings in writing to the person making the complaint and the person against whom the complaint is made.
- e. If the panel decides that an act of misconduct against the Code has occurred, the VC must determine whether it is appropriate to take disciplinary action against the person who has committed that act of misconduct. Such disciplinary action may include counseling of the staff member, censure of the staff member or a formal warning that repetition of such misconduct may be treated as serious misconduct.

- f. If the panel is satisfied that the complaint is without foundation the VC may, if appropriate, take disciplinary action against the person making the complaint.

6. RESEARCH ETHICS AND BIOSAFETY COMMITTEE (REBC)

6.1. REBC Tasks

The tasks of the Research Ethics and Biosafety Committee include:

- a. Considering the ethical implications of proposed research projects involving human subjects and to certify with respect to those projects whether they satisfy ethical standards and codes in terms of safeguards for the well-being of the subjects of the experiments, taking into considerations the general principles.
- b. Ensuring that proper arrangements are made for the security and disposal of confidential data, including signed consent forms, collected in the course of research projects involving human subjects.
- c. Establishing procedures for the evaluation and certification of all proposals for the conduct of research involving human and/or animal subjects.

6.2. REBC Composition

The REBC is an ad-hoc committee that will be composed of the URB Chairperson as a Chair, and at least five persons appointed by the VC, 2 of whom could be chosen from URB members. The REBC will appoint, from among its members, a Deputy Chair who will have the authority to act for the Chair in his/her absence. Members are required to observe any conditions of confidentiality imposed by the Committee.

References and Useful Links

1. Code of Conduct for Research, The Stowers Institute for Medical Research, <http://research.stowers-institute.org/simr-arc/SIMR-ARC1.htm>.
2. Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research, <http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/synopses>.
3. Research Code of Conduct, Warwick University, UK, <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/services/rss/services/ethics/governance/codeofconduct/>
4. Research Code of Conduct, The University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB), <http://main.uab.edu>.
5. The Griffith University Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research, <http://www.griffith.edu.au/research/research-support/introduction-griffith-university-code-responsible-conduct-research>.
6. Guidelines on Research Ethics and Research Conduct, The University of Western Australia, http://www.research.uwa.edu.au/policies3/guidelines_on_research_ethics_and_research_conduct.