

Policy guidelines for ethical behaviour in research activities at UASM

1. General considerations

Research activity is a fundamental part of academic work. Its scope and limits are inspired by and adhere to the values of intellectual work at the University, as an institution where the quintessential search for truth runs unrestricted in orders ranging from physical nature to the manifestations of art and culture in general. Research requires people and conditions to enable the commitment that underlies its practice: autonomy, freedom of thought and expression, and integrity (as an ethical requirement of the researcher, as the task of research requires and engenders probity). In this respect, ethical principles and requirements play a preventive and necessary role; on the one hand, to further various disciplines; and, on the other, as a mechanism to protect the participants in the research process and to increase public confidence in its results. Having ethical guidelines for the exercise of research at the School also provides support for analysis and decision making in cases that warrant it.

Rather than having a coercive instrument that operates on individuals and imposes itself from the outside, these guidelines are intended to explicitly state the principles, purposes, and behavioral guidelines that should govern the practice of research at the School, in the awareness that there is no better law than the law born from within. These guidelines will not be strong enough to guide the behavior of our academic community, if they are not the manifestation of a sense of ethics that motivates researchers' commitment to an "ethics of intelligence."

However, those situations that require an analysis of an ethical nature at the School can vary widely, without there being an ultimate tribunal that defines degrees of culpability. In analyzing such circumstances, one must consider whether there is sufficient knowledge of the facts, the degree of information available, the values and beliefs of those involved, and the perspective of the agents concerned. Thus, the exercise of judgment entails an evaluation (value judgment) that clearly manifests the discordance between the situation under consideration and the criterion of integrity that guides the judgment and serves as its foundation.

2. Principles for action

When we speak of principles that serve as a foundation for the rules of conduct, we allude to maxims that must guide the practice of research, beginning, on the one hand, with its conception as an exercise whose purpose is the production of new knowledge at the frontier of disciplines and, on the other, as the researcher's free choice whose deployment involves presuppositions, purpose, and meaning.

Research must respect the correct use of understanding (ethics of intelligence), the methodological canons of each field of knowledge (copyright, collection, and use of information), and the regulations established by the State. Thus integrity, rigor, respect for regulations and

justice constitute the fundamental principles that must guide the School's researchers' behavior. These principles must be considered in every research project, from its inception to the publication of results.

2.1. Integrity

Integrity as a value can be considered synonymous with probity/honesty. Otherwise, we can speak of misconduct, understood as: "any deliberate conduct, which is ethically contrary to more or less explicit rules that exist in a community of researchers, at a given time and in a particular place, concerning the behavior to be followed between the preparation of a research project and the publication of its results" (Cossette, 1992, p. 7). This author's definition clearly refers to situations in which researchers intentionally seek to mislead through false statements or by omitting important information about what has been done, the results obtained, the authorship of ideas, or in the presentation or dissemination of the results of a research project.¹ Actions related to data fabrication, suppression, or alteration, inappropriate citation of information, failure to disclose the authorship of ideas, appropriation of the work of others, and self-plagiarism also counter the integrity of research work.

2.2. Rigor

Rigor, as a guiding principle for the researcher's conduct, involves following and respecting the protocols of the method required by each discipline. It concerns aspects such as the correct use of sources of a theoretical nature, the proper handling of validation protocols, the correct use of the critical apparatus, the handling of information sources, the presentation of results, and author recognition, among others.

2.3. Compliance with regulations

Respect for the regulations consists of the researcher's obligation to comply with the rules established by the national government on copyright (Law 1915 of July 12, 2018), and Law 65-00 that protects copyright and safeguards the creations of the human spirit of a unique and highly personal nature (literary creations), among others.

¹ There is extensive literature on codes of ethics that regulate research activity in universities and governments have established legislation in this regard. In our case, we have drawn on the experience of other countries (United States and Canada, see [Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans – TCPS 2 \(2018\) \(ethics.gc.ca\)](#)), noting that the first concern of the legislation has to do with research related to humans and animals and, therefore, in the field of health sciences, epidemiology, genetics and biology, among others. In our case, we have considered the existing policy guidelines in the countries mentioned and other studies of a broader spectrum, including:

- La Follete, M. C. (1992). *Stealing into print: fraud, plagiarism, and misconduct in scientific publishing*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Latour, B. (1989), *La science in action*. Paris: Editions la Découverte.
- Cossette, P. (2007), *L'inconduite en recherche. Enquete en sciences de l'administration*. Quebec: Press de L'Université de Quebec.

2.4. Justice

Justice a virtue *par excellence* in the social order and consists of treating everyone equitably in the distribution of burdens and benefits, with particular attention to the degree of vulnerability resulting from possible limitations to people's access to social goods. Thus, its recognition entails accountability in the treatment of ethnic minorities, with forms of contracting, and with the use of power or implications derived from considering the points of view of those who participate in a study.

3. How to use these guidelines

These guidelines are an invitation for researchers to reflect on their research, as failure to anticipate some of the issues involved in their practice may lead to problems regarding the following:

a- People

- Consideration and respect for the rights of the individuals involved in the research.
- Inadequate consideration of those who collaborate with the research process as research subjects (their degree of possible vulnerability or considering the presence of insurmountable differences, among others).
- The existence of certain conflicts of interest.
- The diversion of research funds.

b- Research processes

- Information gathering (e.g., self-serving citation of authors not consulted).
- Carelessness in the process (e.g., are there any inabilities or incompatibilities for the execution of the research? is there undue exploitation of those involved in the research?).
- The effects of certain experimental exercises.
- Data storage (e.g., who owns the databases? are the data stored securely?).
- Compliance with validation protocols.

c- Research results

- Strategies and mechanisms used to publish results (respect for intellectual property or impact of results, among others).

In any case, these guidelines make it easier for researchers to take such ethical considerations into account in their research work. The considerations raised here are not an a priori ethical judgment on researcher's conduct; it is their individual consciousness that will be confronted with the implications of immoral behavior.

4. Processes and resources

The School's Ethics Committee reviews the ethical considerations of project applications for internal funding (e.g., FAPA), or external agencies' calls for proposals. These considerations include, among others, the vulnerability of the population to be analyzed in the study, the privacy and confidentiality of the information collected from the participants, the level of risk involved in participating in the study, data storage security, and the restrictions imposed by the funder on the publication of results.

Researchers are asked to fill out the University EC form (available [here](#)) in which they will be asked to present a summary of the project and discuss its ethical considerations. They also must attach the full text of the proposal and other documents relating to the project's ethics component. These include, for example, the informed consent form ([this](#) form can be used as a guide, and adjusted according to the practices of each disciplinary field), interview protocols, or survey questions that participants will be asked.

In order to guide researchers on the ethical issues to be considered, they may consult a list of possible questions available [here](#). Other resources that researchers can consult to analyze the ethical considerations of their projects include the following:

- Ministry of Health, 1993, Resolution 8430: Scientific, technical, and administrative norms for health research (see [here](#)).
- Ministry of Interior and Justice, 2010, Law 1403: [Copyright Law](#)
- [Universidad de los Andes Personal data processing policy manual](#)

Researchers must follow the process established by the Ethics Committee, as below:

1. Fill out the Ethics Committee - University form (available [here](#)).
2. Write a letter presenting the project (model letter available [here](#)).
3. Send the application (form with attachments, certificate of the CITI course in research ethics² and cover letter) to the Research Committee (ciadministracion@uniandes.edu.co). Please note that the Ethics Committee may take up to 10 working days to review proposals. This time should be counted as part of the time researchers have to submit their proposals.
4. Once the Ethics Committee reviews a proposal, it issues a concept, which the researchers must attach to their proposal.

² The university requires all its researchers to complete the CITI course. To do so, log on to www.citiprogram.org and take two modules: (1) Responsible conduct of Research, and (2) another module of your choice.