

A Guide to Ethics Applications for the Department of Marketing

1 Introduction

This guide has been written to help you satisfy the University's requirements for ethical research. Its purpose is to remind you of the issues you should consider when completing your ethics applications. It is suggested that you read this alongside your Category B application, and use it to ensure you have considered all the issues under each section of the application.

2 The University's ethics policy

The following principles are consistent with the University's obligations to maintain the highest ethical standards in the exercise of academic freedom. They apply to teaching and research proposals that require ethical approval.

There must be:

- Research or teaching merit;
- Participants' informed consent which is given free from any form of coercion;
- Respect for participants' rights of privacy and confidentiality;
- Minimisation of the risk of harm to participants;
- Special care for vulnerable participants;
- Limitation of, and justification for, any deception;
- Appropriately qualified supervision;
- Avoidance of any conflict of interest;
- Respect for societies and cultures of participants;
- Freedom to publish the results of research, without breaching any confidentiality that has been agreed to.

The University's policies develop from these principles and the University expects researchers and, where applicable, teachers to comply with them.

3 Category A or B?

The University of Otago Human Ethics Committee has two categories of application; Category A and Category B.

Category A applications are considered by the Human Ethics Committee at one of its monthly meetings, whereas Category B Reporting Sheets are audited by the Committee after having been approved by the Head of Department on the Committee's behalf. The Human Ethics Committee has delegated authority to Heads of Department to approve low risk research involving human participants. Research falling under Category B is considered to be approved once the relevant Head of Department has signed it but should be sent to the Ethics Committee after the Head of Department approves it, but before research commences. The Committee normally does not comment on Category B Reporting Sheets unless it sees a misunderstanding of the criteria between Category A and Category B or there is a point of clarification or query about the research.

A research or teaching proposal is within Category A if it involves any of the following:

- Personal information — any information about an individual who may be identifiable from the data once it has been recorded in some lasting and usable format, or from any completed research (Note: this does not include information such as names, addresses, telephone numbers, or other contact details needed for a limited time for practical purposes but which is unlinked from research data and destroyed once the details are no longer needed);
- The taking or handling of any form of tissue or fluid sample from humans or cadavers;
- Any form of physical or psychological stress;
- Situations which might place the safety of participants or researchers at any risk;
- The administration or restriction of food, fluid or a drug to a participant;
- A potential conflict between the applicant's activities as a researcher, clinician or teacher and their interests as a professional or private individual;
- The participation of minors or other vulnerable individuals (This is interpreted in the wider sense);
- Any form of deception which might threaten an individual's emotional or psychological well-being;
- The research is being undertaken overseas by students (this does not include PhD qualified staff researching overseas).

3.1 Consulting studies, case studies and other business-centered research

When students undertake research for MART355, MBus or any research on behalf of an organisation there are several entities requiring protection:

- the student
- the client organisation
- the subjects interviewed/surveyed for the research
- the University of Otago

Care must be taken to ensure that none of these entities are made vulnerable by the research.

It must be made clear to subjects that the data is being collected for the benefit of the client organisation (as well as the student completing the project) and what form the information will be in when given to the client.

It can also be particularly difficult to ensure anonymity when dealing with a client organisation. MBus, MCom and PhDs are all deposited in the library and are 'publicly available' impacting on confidentiality of results. MART355 are not deposited in the library.

A Category B application may be possible, but please discuss it with the Ethics contact at the soonest possible opportunity and consider how you are going to deal with the competing needs/rights of the individuals and organisations.

Please note, the consent form, information sheet and any materials given to subjects may not have any organisation's logo on it. The research is being completed by a University of Otago staff/student not the organisation.

3.2 Key informants

There is limited opportunity for Category B approval when key informants speak "on the record" and are identified by name, organisation, position, etc. If you wish to pursue this option, discuss it with the Ethics contact in the department early in the process.

3.3 Research involving students' work that is part of assessment

This is an awkward situation and particular care must be taken to ensure that the impression could not be felt, that students who don't take part in research could in any way be disadvantaged in their course. While as professionals we know that this will not be the case, it must be clear to the prospective subjects that there is no way that the grader can identify whether they have agreed to take part in the research or not.

3.4 Videography and photography

The secretary of the ethics committee has indicated that at this point in time, all videography, that might lead to a video publication (web/conference/dvd/etc.) should be considered via the Category A application form. Similarly any photography that might form part of a publication or dissertation arising from the research, that includes images of identifiable individuals, should be considered via the Category A application form.

When video or photography is used to record interviews, observations, etc. that will not be included in the final publication, and informed consent is given by all those appearing in the images, a Category B application is generally appropriate.

3.5 The application forms

Category A & B application forms are available at:

<http://www.otago.ac.nz/administration/committees/otago000864.html>

If you wish to proceed with a Category A application, you may wish to discuss your application with the Ethics Contact.

4 How long does it take?

The normal expectation is that Category B Ethics Applications considered at Department level will be processed in two weeks, not including resubmissions or amendments.

Category A applications are processed once a month with the deadline for paper submissions ten days before the meeting. Note you must take seventeen copies, plus the signed original to Gary Witte in Office G26 on the Ground Floor of the Clocktower Building, Ext: 8256 by 5pm on the day of the deadline.

Generally, applicants are notified of their success, or otherwise, within a couple of days. The schedule of meetings and deadlines is available at:

<http://www.otago.ac.nz/administration/committees/otago000864.html>

5 Filling in the Category B form

You must attach your interview guide/survey/etc. to your application as well as your information sheet and/or consent form. It is possible to combine the information sheet and consent form, as long as all the points are covered.

5.1 Staff member responsible for project

This is the lead researcher — always a University of Otago staff member, not a student — and person responsible for the project.

5.2 Projected start date of project

This is never before the date of approval. Your research projected start date should be two weeks after your application form is submitted, or later. There is no opportunity for retrospective ethics applications.

5.3 Names of other investigators or instructors

A list of all other staff and students involved in the research, with their status (staff/student including qualification or paper) in brackets.

5.4 Brief description of the aims

This should be a brief description of the aims of the research avoiding technical terms. It will be reviewed in the Department, but also outside of the Department by researchers not familiar with the area.

5.5 Brief description of the method

This section is interested in data collection techniques rather than your method of analysis and should consider:

- who your participants are
- how they are recruited
- what they are asked to do
- whether you are interviewing/surveying/observing/etc. your subjects

5.6 Details of ethical issues involved

If you are researching with people there are always ethical issues to be addressed. Every application should cover:

- anonymity and confidentiality
- informed consent, including a contact to allow further questions
- voluntary participation
- freedom to withdraw at any stage without penalty
- data storage
- purpose of research, particularly if it is for a client organisation
- any conflict of interest
- potential discomfort (including emotional) to subjects
- ethnic data collection, which also requires Maori consultation, if it is staff research: <http://www.otago.ac.nz/research/maoriconsultation/>
- any danger to the researcher — in a wider sense
- any alcohol involved in the research — typically a category A application would be required for research involving consumption of alcohol or alcohol as compensation
- any close (family or friend) relationship with subjects should be noted. Particular care must be taken with any research involving relatives of staff.

Or include a brief statement outlining how these issues have been addressed.

5.7 The information sheet and consent form

You should adapt the template provided to suit your needs. Please:

- remove the notes throughout the form in brackets
- add the date that the data collection will start
- the title of the project, etc.
- you may wish to use a combined information and consent form, when appropriate

5.7.1 The information sheet

The Information Sheet and Consent Form should not include the statement “This proposal has been reviewed and approved by the University of Otago Human Ethics Committee” as this is inappropriate for Category B proposals. A statement such as “This proposal has been reviewed and approved by the Department of Marketing, University of Otago” should be used.

Things that must be addressed in the information/consent form:

- the aim of the project, in lay terms
- who is being sought to participate, including who is excluded from participation
- what participants will be asked to do
- the freedom to withdraw at any stage without penalty
- anonymity — whether there is or not. You must not “ensure” (or guarantee) anonymity. You should include the phrase “every attempt will be made to preserve my anonymity” if anonymity is being offered.
- confidentiality
- data storage and how it will be used; will it be published and publicly available?
- who will have access to the data

The information sheet template includes “At the end of the project any personal information will be destroyed immediately except that, as required by the University’s research policy, any raw data on which the results of the project depend will be retained in secure storage for five years, after which it will be destroyed.” Personal information generally refers to the information the researcher may hold on the participants, such as contact details and audio or video files after they have been transcribed.

There is a section about email transfer of data, you should delete this if there is no email communication as part of your data collection.

The phrase regarding open-ended techniques, which is at the bottom of the template, should only be included if you are using a semi- or unstructured interview technique. If you include this section you must change “University of Otago Human Ethics Committee” to “Marketing Department Ethics Contact”.

5.8 The case of online research

What do we do with online questionnaires? Subjects are still entitled to be in a position to give their full informed consent. It is suggested that the first page of any online survey is the combined information/consent form covering all the information usually required but not necessarily using the usual headings/structure, and that a phrase is included that the subject acknowledges the information and consents by clicking the “progress to questionnaire” button. The “progress to questionnaire” button should not be above the information/consent material.