

## RHODES UNIVERSITY ETHICAL STANDARDS COMMITTEE (RUESC)

### GUIDELINES ON THE ETHICAL USE OF STUDENT DATA IN TEACHING AND LEARNING

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#### 1. GENERAL PRINCIPLES

It is important that all student data collected by staff and students at Rhodes University follow the guidelines for ethical research practice involving human subjects as outlined in the RUESC handbook (which is in accordance with Rhodes University Policy and national requirements).

Thus, in using student data, all staff and students should adhere to the principles of respect, dignity, transparency, accountability and integrity.

In practical terms, these principles translate into:

- 1) Information to participants as to the purpose of the data collection
- 2) Informed consent by participants
- 3) A right to withdraw from the collection without any adverse consequences to the participant involved.

In addition to adhering to the general principles set out above, staff and students are alerted to the need to apply to departmental/faculty ethics committees and/or RUESC for the collection of student data where student data is used for research purposes as set out in para 2.2 below.

Where student data is used for internal processes & strategic objectives only (as per para 2.1 below), there is no need to apply to an ethics committee.

#### 2. USE OF STUDENT DATA

Data is collected from students for two reasons

##### 2.1 Internal processes and strategy objectives of an academic department or Faculty

Primarily for the use of the lecturer and/or department or Faculty in *evaluating teaching and courses* to contribute to improving teaching and curricula. Data collected in this way is *not shared outside of the university* and is essentially part of reflective teaching practice.

In accordance with the general principles above:

1. It is required that students be given information about what the data will be used for, how it will be reported and told that participation is voluntary with no adverse consequences arising from non-participation.
2. When this data is used in portfolios for probationary and promotion purposes, it must be used in ethically sound ways.

See the Rhodes University Policy on the Evaluation of Teaching and Courses and CHERTL's Brief Guide on the Evaluation of Teaching and courses for further guidelines.

Often, difficulties arise when student data is initially collected for evaluative purposes as set out above, but the lecturer and/or department or Faculty later wish to use it for research purposes. It is recommended that whenever there is a chance that such collection may be used later for research purposes (i.e. published outside of the university), that ethical clearance from an ethics committee be obtained. This accords with the general principle in research ethics that clearance cannot be obtained retrospectively.

## 2.2 Research on teaching and learning

Primarily for purposes of conducting *research on teaching and learning* which will be made available *outside of the university* e.g. as Masters and PhD theses, journal articles, books, book chapters, presentations. This also includes any lecturer/employee of Rhodes taking an external course requiring evaluation of their context through means of surveys, interviews, focus groups etc.

1. An important principle of ethical research involving human subjects is informed consent. Informed consent means that participants must be made aware of what the data will be used for, their rights (e.g. to withdraw at any time) and the way they may be identified (anonymous, confidential, by class etc.).
2. Ethical clearance for research on teaching and learning for any type of course requirement, be it **certificate, diploma or degree purposes** must be obtained from the relevant accredited department or faculty ethics committee **prior to commencement of the data being collected.**
3. Ethical clearance for research on teaching and learning for publications, etc. must be obtained from accredited departmental or faculty ethics committees **prior to the data being collected.**
4. Additional approval from RUESC will be required should the research involve vulnerable participants (RUESC Handbook Chapter II, section 3.3).
5. Use of existing (archival) data collected by Rhodes at a central level for research purposes requires ethical clearance via departmental or faculty research committees before access will be granted by the Registrar.

It is essential that academics intending to undertake research on any aspect of teaching and learning consult the RUESC Policy and Handbook (<http://ruconnected.ru.ac.za/course/view.php?id=5399>).

## 3. EXAMPLES

Do I need ethics approval?	Ethics Approval Required	
	Yes	No
1) I am evaluating my teaching using course evaluations for my own purposes. I will never publish the results or present them outside RU.		X
2) I am evaluating my teaching using course evaluations for my teaching portfolio, which will be submitted for personal promotion only (not published or as part of a degree or diploma).		X
3) I am collecting student data as part of a degree or diploma course which may be externally examined.	X	
4) I am considering using information derived from course evaluations for a publication/conference presentation.	X	



5) I may consider publishing my teaching portfolio or part thereof.	X	
6) I wish to collate several years of course evaluations for a publication. Only depersonalised and/or archival data will be used.	Will be dealt with on a case by case basis.	
7) I am not in an Academic department but am taking a diploma course which requires me to survey my colleagues.	X	
8) I plan to use my teaching portfolio/course evaluations for other external purposes not mentioned above.	X	

#### 4. GRAPHICAL REPRESENTATION

