

Department of Film & Screen Media, University College Cork

RESEARCH ETHICS GUIDELINES

WHAT IS RESEARCH ETHICS?

- Research ethics addresses the requirement to ensure that certain basic ethical standards are met in your work. In alignment with the [European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity](#), the [UCC Code of Research Conduct](#) is the document that addresses research ethics in UCC, **including undergraduate and postgraduate student research**. As a student in the Department of Film and Screen Media, you are required to make yourself familiar with the UCC Code of Research Conduct and with these **departmental Guidelines**.
- The European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity specifies four basic principles that underpin good practice in carrying out research:
 - **Reliability** in ensuring the quality of research, reflected in the design, the methodology, the analysis and the use of resources.
 - **Honesty** in developing, undertaking, reviewing, reporting and communicating research in a transparent, fair, full and unbiased way.
 - **Respect** for colleagues, research participants, society, ecosystems, cultural heritage and the environment.
 - **Accountability** for the research from idea to publication, for its management and organisation, for training, supervision and mentoring and for its wider impacts.

All research conducted at UCC must be consistent with the foregoing principles and with Irish law and policy, including licensing requirements, and with the policies of the University.

WHEN IS ETHICS RELEVANT TO MY WORK AS A STUDENT AT UCC?

- **Moral principles and ethical standards** apply each time you carry out research for an assignment or dissertation, whether theory-based or practice-based.
- The **fair use of your sources** and of the work and ideas of others, the respect of [intellectual property](#) and [copyright](#), and the honesty with which you put together and communicate your research results are relevant to every piece of work you produce, whether oral, written, or audiovisual. Misconduct in these areas may involve, without being limited to:
 - **fabrication of data** i.e. making up results and recording them as if they were real;
 - **falsification of data** i.e. manipulating research materials, equipment or processes, or changing, omitting or suppressing data or results without justification; and
 - [plagiarism](#) i.e. using other people's work and ideas without giving proper credit to the original source, thus violating the rights of the original author(s) to their intellectual outputs.

HOW DO I COMPLY WITH ETHICS IN RELATION TO SUBJECTS?

When your research involves **subjects**, then, such as in some **practical filmmaking work**, but also in **interviews conducted for written or online projects**, other important aspects need to be considered, in relation to the respect for the **rights and dignity** of research participants. To comply with ethics, you must: **1) follow departmental procedures; 2) fulfil consent obligations; and 3) avoid all harm** to your participants.

1. FOLLOW DEPARTMENTAL PROCEDURES

- **For all filmmaking projects** you must familiarise yourself with the department's [Location Filming Practices and Procedures](#) and fill in a [Risk Assessment Form](#).

- **For all projects (written or practical) that involve people** you must also carry out an ethics self-assessment by filling in an [Ethics Review Form](#). The form must be submitted to your Lecturer or Supervisor, as appropriate. **Your project must start only after it has received approval.**
- **Fiction or experimental films** with actors are normally deemed “low risk”, unless actors are under 18 years of age or are considered “vulnerable people” (as defined in the UCC [Guidance for Researchers Conducting Research with Vulnerable People](#)). **Projects (written or practical) with subjects** – such as documentaries with interviews; observational films with subjects; written projects or essays involving interviews, questionnaires, or focus groups; audience research with subjects; films with under-18 or “[vulnerable](#)” actors – may be classified as “low” or “high risk”, and in some cases the Department may make recommendations or request amendments.
- If you are a **PhD student**, you must discuss the ethics requirements of your project/thesis with your Supervisor and, if required, apply for approval from [UCC Social Research Ethics Committee \(SREC\)](#).

2. FULFILL CONSENT OBLIGATIONS

- If your project involves subjects, you must obtain their **prior, informed, written consent**. When they are *the subject of your research* (e.g., as interviewees in a written, filmed or online project), you must prepare and distribute an **information sheet** to provide them with an outline of the project (you may use the [Film & Screen Media template Information Sheet](#)). Participants must be clearly informed about the **purpose, methods, and intended outcome and uses** of your project, and should not be placed under inappropriate pressure to participate. You must ensure that they:
 - **have the capacity to consent** (where the participant is legally incapable of providing consent or is a child, you must obtain consent from their legal guardian, as distinct from next of kin);
 - **are provided with all information** regarding the research/project that may affect their willingness to participate, in language they can understand;
 - **are aware that participation is voluntary and that they may withdraw** up to a specified point in time (for instance, two weeks after the collection of the data/interview).
- You must use departmental forms to **record written permissions**:
 - A [Release Form](#) to record permissions granted for all filmmaking projects.
 - A [Consent Form](#) to record consent in relation to subject participation in projects (i.e., when people are *the subjects of the research*).

You and the participant should both **retain a copy**. The University asks us to retain all such data for a **period of ten years**, after which it can be destroyed.

3. AVOID HARM AND PROTECT DATA

- **Harm to both human and non-human animal subjects must be avoided**; you must ensure that no subjects are exposed to unnecessary risks. Remember that harm can relate not only to **physical threats**, but also to the **misuse of personal data**.
- Research with human subjects can sometimes investigate **private or contentious matters** and involve gathering sensitive personal information (**data**) on such topics as an individual’s ethnicity, religious or political values, sexuality, or medical history. Even apparently less sensitive information such as names and contact details is personal data and must be protected. You are responsible for [data protection](#), in keeping with the [General Data Protection Regulation](#) (GDPR).
- Subjects should be told **how their data will be stored and for how long**. They should have the right to **withdraw data** relating to themselves at any point of the project, or up to a time that is agreed with them. When relevant, and asked for by the research subjects, the **confidentiality** of information they supply and their right to **anonymity** must be respected and secured.

QUESTIONS?

If you are in doubt or have a question about these Guidelines, you may ask **your Lecturer/Supervisor** or the Film & Screen Media **Research Officer, Prof. Laura Rascaroli** (email: l.rascaroli@ucc.ie).