

POLICY ON QUALITY IN RESEARCH PRACTICE

1. Preamble

- 1.1 Research as an important function of the University** An important function of a University is to create and disseminate new knowledge and constructions of knowledge through its programs of research and education. Southern Cross University recognises, in its Research Management Plan, that research is of fundamental importance to the University and to its institutional goals: research forms an essential interrelationship with scholarship, teaching and learning.
- 1.2 Commitment to cultural and intellectual diversity** The University is committed to cultural and intellectual diversity. In its Mission Statement, the University is committed, through excellence in scholarship and research, to “partnership, regionalism, globalism, cultural diversity and a learning society”. In addition, the current University Plan includes the objective of exposing all students to a variety of cultural perspectives through the teaching and research at the University.
- 1.3 Purpose of a *Policy on Quality in Research Practice*** With research forming an essential component of the core function of the University, University policy commitments require the *Policy on Quality in Research Practice* (hereafter referred to as the *Policy*) to reflect and articulate commitments to cultural and intellectual diversity. The practice of research at Southern Cross University reflects these commitments to cultural and intellectual diversity as well as an overall ethical responsibility for the actions of the University and its members, and will enhance the scholarship demanded of an intellectually pluralistic University.
- 1.4 Intention of the *Policy*** The intention of this *Policy* is to guide research practices that reflect disciplinary and professional differences and diversity, and ensure inclusivity and flexibility. The *Policy* does not prescribe specific ethical behaviour, but provides the context for behaviour which lies within the accepted ethical norms of the relevant academic profession, discipline or field of study within which specific research is being conducted. In this way, the *Policy* promotes best practice in research. Furthermore, statements within the *Policy* reflect the intention to not prescribe bureaucratic restrictions and an overly bureaucratic structure, but to provide guidance towards the development and maintenance of a culture of quality practice in research within the University.
- 1.5 Implementation of the *Policy*** Responsibility for the implementation of this *Policy* lies with the Graduate Research Committee on behalf of the Academic Board. This *Policy* does not extend the powers of statutory committees such as human and animal research ethics committees beyond their statutory remits.

2. Principles

- 2.1 Definition of research** The University defines research as “the systematic pursuit of creative and critical activities, with the aim of increasing human knowledge and understanding”. Research ranges from scientific experimental studies to creation of artistic pieces (SCU Research Management Plan 1997 - 1999).

- 2.2 Intellectual context of research** The University recognises the diversity of research approaches. The practice of research, from initial planning through to the completion of output, will be guided foremost by the relevant intellectual position(s) of the academic profession, discipline or field of study within which the research is being conducted. Where institutional practice is in conflict with the intellectual positions of the academic profession, discipline or field of study, the profession's, discipline's or field of study's position should take precedence.
- 2.3 Maintenance of standards** Researchers are obliged to achieve and maintain the highest standards of intellectual honesty and appropriate standards of rigour in the conduct of their research. Members of the University engaged in research should be committed to the highest standards of ethical and professional conduct.
- 2.4 Professional ethical standards and practice** Researchers should only participate in research that conforms to acceptable and established ethical standards within their academic profession, discipline or field of research. Researchers should be competent, through prior experience and/or appropriate training, to perform the research they undertake. The practices of the maintenance of research records, the retention and publication of data, the management of intellectual property, the training of research personnel, and the management of confidentiality and conflict-of-interest issues, shall be conducted within accepted professional and ethical practice(s) of the academic profession, discipline or field of research within which the research is being conducted.
- 2.5 Cultural ethical standards** Researchers should be culturally sensitive, and should work within the cultural conventions of their academic profession, discipline or field of research. In particular, researchers should consult appropriate individuals and communities who are involved in, or affected by, the research.
- 2.6 Personal ethical standards** Researchers must adhere to ethical principles of justice and veracity, and of respect for people and their privacy and the avoidance of harm to them. Research must be conducted in such a manner as to ensure the respect of the dignity and worth of people and communities and the welfare of research participants. This respect shall take precedence over self-interest of researchers or the interests of the institution, employers, clients, colleagues or groups.
- 2.7 Personal confidentiality** Where research involves personal or community information of a confidential nature, confidentiality must be observed and researchers must not use such information for their own personal advantage or that of a third party.
- 2.8 Contractual confidentiality** Secrecy may be necessary for a limited period in the case of contracted research or of non-contractual research which is under consideration for patent protection. In general, however, research results and methods should be open to scrutiny by colleagues through appropriate publication.
- 2.9 Researcher responsibility** Principal researchers are responsible for the ethical conduct and practical standards of all researchers involved in the study. This responsibility includes ensuring that all members of a research group are adequately supervised appropriate to their level of competence. There is a reciprocal responsibility among all members of a research group, and between the research group and the University, to ensure that appropriate ethical conduct and

practical standards are maintained.

2.10 Conflict of interest Any potential conflict of interest that affects the practice of research must be disclosed to the appropriate Head of School, Centre or College.

2.11 Dissent from conventional (disciplinary) practices Research and scholarship thrive on debate, critical analysis and, in some cases, the questioning of conventional disciplinary or professional practices. A researcher who chooses to dissent from conventional disciplinary or professional practices should inform and seek advice from the appropriate School, Centre or College Director of Postgraduate Studies and Research at the earliest opportunity. In all cases, a researcher must conform to established codes of ethical practice and legal obligations.

3. Code of conduct for quality in research

3.1 General matters of practice

3.1.1 University policies on research The Policy must operate within the Policies and Rules of the University, and specifically within those on research, especially as articulated through the University Research Management Plan. The Policy should encourage and foster all staff at the University to meet the University's goals and objectives, to support the recognition that research is of fundamental importance, and to ensure the interrelationship between research, scholarship, teaching and learning.

3.1.2 Defining research The Policy reflects the disciplinary diversity encompassed within the University's academic and scholarly community. The Policy recognises the intellectual, disciplinary and professional contexts within which the appropriate ethical standards are adopted and maintained.

3.1.3 Standards The Policy should be taken as the framework for the highest level of professional activity, and should not be used to hinder its achievement. The Policy ensures that all researchers are aware of, and adhere to, the relevant disciplinary and professional ethical and practice guidelines within their field. In particular, the University, through its *Policy on Quality in Research Practice* and through other relevant policies and practices, forbids and discourages fraudulent research practice.

3.1.4 Institutional management of quality in research practice The Graduate Research College shall, on behalf of the University, coordinate the management of administrative systems to support best practice in research in the University, including: the coordination of training and development to engender best practice in research within the academic community of the University; information transfer to staff and students regarding appropriate best practice in research, including practices in the supervision of research students; and the maintenance of reporting and archival systems for use, where appropriate, as indicated in this *Policy*. The Human Research Ethics Committee and the Animal Care and Ethics Committee shall, on behalf of the University, review and monitor ethics proposals for research.

3.1.5 Discipline-specific guidance The Director of Postgraduate Studies and Research of each School, College or Centre, and the Chairs of the University Ethics Committees shall be available to advise staff and students on integrity, quality and ethical practice in research. The task of the

Directors of Postgraduate Studies and Research and the Chairs includes the provision of advice, where appropriate in confidence, to staff and students about what constitutes best practice in research, research misconduct, and the procedures for conducting best practice in research and for dealing with allegations of research misconduct within the University.

3.2 Planning research

3.2.1 Appropriate practice All research planning should follow practice and guidelines appropriate to the academic profession, discipline or field of study within which the research is being conducted. Specifically, researchers should be fully aware of, and be able to demonstrate their adherence to, relevant codes of ethics and professional practice.

3.2.2 Confidentiality Researchers should be fully aware of any social or personal confidentiality issues related to their proposed research, and should plan their research in the light of the potential effects of such confidentiality issues.

3.2.3 Ethics approval Researchers should be fully aware of the ethics approval process at Southern Cross University, and should submit an application for ethics approval, where appropriate, at the planning stage of any research.

3.2.4 Contractual confidentiality Researchers should be fully aware, of and comply with, all contractual obligations relating to their research and may not enter into contracts, arrangements or understandings with third parties or the University which may limit the research or research rights of their colleagues or the University. Researchers should plan their research in the light of the potential effects of such obligations.

3.2.5 Disclosure of conflict of interest Researchers have an obligation to disclose, normally at the time of proposing and planning the research, but also throughout the life of the research as situations arise, any conflict of interest which has the potential to influence the research and its publication, grant applications, and applications for appointment and promotion. Researchers have an obligation to disclose any affiliation with, or financial involvement in, any organisation or entity with a direct interest in the subject matter or material of research. Disclosure of conflict of interest must be made, in line with existing University policy on disclosure of interest, to the appropriate Head of School, Centre or College.

3.2.6 Grant applications Applications for grants to support research should be produced to the highest standard, and researchers are encouraged to seek peer review prior to submission. Applications for grant support should include explicit statements of ethics approval requirements and action, and of any confidentiality or contractual considerations.

3.3 Research implementation and data acquisition

3.3.1 Appropriate practice All research implementation and data acquisition should follow practice and guidelines appropriate to the academic profession, discipline or field of research within which the research is being conducted. Specifically, researchers should be fully aware of, and be able to demonstrate their adherence to, relevant codes of ethics and professional practice. This is especially important where funding is tied to specific sources requiring specific types of practice, and where matters of ethical practice, especially in relation to community and

individual consultation and observation, are relevant.

3.4 Data retention and storage

3.4.1 Appropriate practice All research data storage and retention should follow practice and guidelines appropriate to the academic profession, discipline or field of study within which the research is being conducted. Specifically, researchers should be fully aware of, and be able to demonstrate their adherence to, relevant codes of ethics and professional practice.

3.4.2 Retention of original data All original information should be retained, except in specific circumstances where retention of original information is culturally or ethically inappropriate. Where research protocol allows the retention of original information, the individual researcher or the research group must retain copy of all original data, indicating through publication, the location and availability of public access to these data.

3.4.3 Storage of original data Where appropriate, copy of original research information should be archived at the University in a durable and appropriate form. The University will be responsible for the management and maintenance of a suitable archive.

3.4.4 Duration of data retention Original data must be held for sufficient time to allow appropriate external access and study. For data that is published this may be for as long as interest and discussion persists following publication. It is recommended that the minimum period for retention be at least 5 years from the date of publication. However, a longer period may be required as recommended by other relevant guidelines, and it is the researcher's duty to know these.

3.4.5 Confidentiality agreements Confidentiality agreements to protect intellectual property rights may be agreed between the University, the researcher, a sponsor of the research and the subjects of the research. Where such agreements limit free publication and discussion, limitations and restrictions must be explicitly agreed. Researchers must be responsible for ensuring appropriate security for any confidential material, including that held in computing systems. Where computing systems are accessible through networks, particular attention to security of confidential data is required. Security and confidentiality must be assured in a way that copes with multiple researchers and the departure of individual researchers from the research team or the University.

3.4.6 Reporting on data retention Details of data retention should be submitted with publication. The authors of research publications must submit to the Head of School, Centre or College, written indication of confidentiality agreements and, where appropriate, arrangements for the retention of original information.

3.5 Authorship and publication

3.5.1 Appropriate practice The authorship and publication of all research output should follow practice and guidelines appropriate to the academic profession, discipline or field of study within which the research is being conducted. Specifically, researchers should be fully aware of, and be able to demonstrate their adherence to, relevant codes of ethics and professional practice regarding authorship and publication.

3.5.2 Definition of authorship Where appropriate to the academic profession, discipline or field of research, authorship is ascribed to participants of research output, where the author or authors have contributed substantially to one or more of the following: (i) the conception and design of the research; (ii) the collection, analysis and interpretation of data; and (iii) the writing of the publication. An author's role in a research output must be sufficient for that person to take public responsibility for at least that part of the output in that person's area of expertise. No person who is an author, consistent with this definition, must be excluded as an author without his or her permission in writing. When there is more than one co-author of a research output, one co-author (by agreement amongst the authors) should be nominated as executive author for the whole research output, and should take responsibility for record-keeping regarding the research output.

3.5.3 Negotiation of authorship Authorship of a research output is a matter that should be discussed between researchers at an early stage in a research project, and reviewed whenever there are changes in participation. If there are conflicts arising through disputes about authorship, the usual channels of dispute resolution within the University should be followed.

3.5.4 Certification of authorship Where the research is published, including electronically, all co-authors of a publication must acknowledge their authorship in writing in terms of the definition as above. A signed statement of authorship must specify that the signatories are the only authors according to the above definition, and that the signatories have seen the version of the paper submitted for publication. The signed statement must be placed on file in the School, College, Centre or Research Centre of the executive author, at the time of submission of the research output for publication, and must remain in safe keeping in that School, College or Centre. If, for any reason, one or more co-authors are unavailable or otherwise unable to sign the statement, the Head of School, College or Centre may sign on their behalf, noting the reason for their unavailability.

3.5.5 Acknowledgement of contribution Researchers must ensure that others who have contributed to the work are recognised in the research output. Courtesy demands that individuals and organisations providing facilities should also be acknowledged. Publications must also include information on the sources of financial support for the research, in a format or style agreed to by the financial sponsor of the research. Publications involving a student or a staff member of the University may acknowledge that the work was carried out at the University by using the University by-line.

3.5.6 Public reporting of research output As a general principle research findings should not be reported to the public media before they have been reported appropriately within the field of research.

3.5.7 Accuracy of reporting All reasonable steps must be taken to ensure that published reports, statistics and public statements about research activities and performance are complete, accurate and unambiguous.

3.6 Supervision of research students

3.6.1 University responsibilities The Academic Board, through the Graduate Research Committee, shall ensure that the supervision of each research student (Masters by Research and PhD

candidates) is assigned to a specific, responsible and appropriately qualified supervisor; parallel responsibility for supervision of Honours candidates lies with the Schools, Centres and Colleges. Responsibility of supervision of other research trainees lies with the relevant Head of School, College or Centre in which that trainee is based. The Academic Board, through the Graduate Research Committee, shall assure effective intellectual interaction and oversight of the research. The Graduate Research College shall, on behalf of the Academic Board, ensure that each research student has been advised with written material on applicable government and University policies and guidelines for the best practice conduct of research, including those covering ethical requirements for studies on human subjects or animals, requirements for confidentiality, and occupational health and safety matters.

3.6.2 Supervisor responsibilities The supervisor is obliged to provide each research student guidance in the research practice specific to the academic profession, discipline or field-of-study within which the research is being conducted. The supervisor must ensure, as far as possible, the validity of research data and information obtained by a student under his or her supervision. Guidance in these regards is enhanced by the example of the supervisor's adoption of best practice in the conduct of research. Reciprocal responsibility exists between the principal supervisor and the student, to ensure that appropriate ethical conduct and practical standards are maintained.

3.6.3 Student responsibilities The research student must be considered as a researcher within the context of this *Policy*, and will be expected to adhere to the same research responsibilities, obligations, standards and practices as any other academic member of the University. Reciprocal responsibility exists between the student and the principal supervisor, to ensure that appropriate ethical conduct and practical standards are maintained.

4. Allegations of misconduct

4.1 Definition of misconduct in research Misconduct in research includes misappropriation of information, interference in the practice of another researcher's work, and the misrepresentation of research practice and outputs. Misconduct does not include honest errors or honest differences in interpretation or judgments of data. Specific definitions of misconduct must be judged against the norms and conventions of the academic profession, discipline or field of study within which the research is being conducted. Misconduct in research may occur by one or more of the following.

- The fabrication of data: claiming results where none have been obtained.
- The falsification of data, including changing records.
- Plagiarism: the presentation of the documented words or ideas of another person as one's own, without attribution appropriate for the medium of presentation.
- Misrepresentation: the statement or presentation of a material or significant falsehood, and the omission of a fact so that what is stated or presented as a whole states or presents a material or significant falsehood.
- Interference: the intentional and un-authorised use of, or damage to, any research-related property of another researcher.
- Misleading ascription of authorship: the listing of authors without their permission, the attribution of work to others who have not contributed to the research, or the lack of appropriate

acknowledgment of work produced by a research student/trainee or other research associate.

- Other practices that seriously deviate from those that are commonly accepted for the proposing, conducting, or reporting of research within the academic profession, discipline or field-of-study norms of behaviour of the relevant research community.
- Intentional infringements of University policy, such as ethics, occupational health and safety, or equity policies, which guides practice in research.
- Undisclosed conflict of interest, or uncontrolled practice of conflict of interest following disclosure.

4.2 Protection of interested parties The protection of interested parties demands that allegations of research misconduct require careful handling. When an allegation is made, fair dealing must be exercised to protect the interests of all interested parties, including persons making allegations in good faith and persons accused of misconduct. Interested parties may include: the person bringing the allegation; the person against whom the allegation is made; staff and students working with persons making an allegation or with persons against whom an allegation is made; publishers, journals and other media reporting research subject to suspected, alleged, or demonstrated research misconduct; funding bodies supporting persons or research involved; the University; and the public. Adequate protection of the complainant and the accused demands absolute confidentiality and reasonable speed in the early stages of investigation. On the other hand, the protection of other parties may involve some disclosure. Assessment of the degree of acceptable disclosure should be made by the Vice-Chancellor. An anonymous complaint shall not normally be the basis for a formal proceeding.

4.3 Complaints procedure The Graduate Research College will, on behalf of the University, maintain and manage a reporting mechanism and complaints procedure whereby allegations of research misconduct against either a student or a staff member may be made. Allegations of research misconduct about staff coming from outside the University should be referred to, and dealt with initially, by the Vice-Chancellor.

4.4 Allegation of research misconduct made against a student Allegations of research misconduct by students must be investigated in accordance with the relevant University Rules on Student Discipline and by the designated authority within these rules.

4.5 Allegation of research misconduct made against a staff member All allegations of research misconduct by staff members must be investigated in accordance with the relevant University Rules on Unsatisfactory Performance/Misconduct Procedures as detailed in the Southern Cross University Human Resource Policy and Procedures Manual.

Appendix: Ethical and professional guidelines and other relevant documents

The appendix is to be compiled, and is expected to change in content as appropriate statements, guidelines and other relevant documents become available. The appendix will comprise a comprehensive collection of statements of ethical and professional guidelines and other relevant documents. These will be collected from across the University, and represent a pool of guidelines and rules appropriate to the academic professions, disciplines or fields of study in which research is conducted by members of Southern Cross University. The process of compilation and management of this collection will be the responsibility of the Graduate Research College on behalf of the University, and will be conducted by consultation with every School, College and Centre, and with relevant

University Committees (such as the ethics, occupational health and safety and equity committees). Provision will be required for a continuing review and update of this collection of documents.

Approved by Academic Board on 8th March, 2001 and by Council on 6th April, 2001