UDC Code of Research Ethics

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Preamble

Research is the attempt to discover and understand the world we live in by widening our perspective on society and nature. Research is, moreover, a socially agreed cooperative activity in the pursuit of knowledge. That pursuit is the general good that gives research meaning and legitimacy, and is complemented by the specific goods associated with individual areas of inquiry such as health, justice and efficiency.

In addition to these primary goods, researchers may and do legitimately pursue external or secondary goods deriving from the pursuit and achievement of knowledge, such as prestige, recognition, a respectable salary and professional advancement.

Research is one of the defining characteristics of the work done by universities and an essential part of their basic functions: to create, develop, communicate and critically evaluate knowledge, method and culture; to equip researchers with the knowledge and skills necessary to advance professionally; and to communicate and transfer knowledge in the interests of culture, quality of life and economic development.

Accordingly, UDC should seek to promote research, establish the personal, material and institutional conditions necessary to ensure that the research produced is of a high standard, and help to consolidate an ethical culture in all aspects of research practice.

The UDC Code of Research Ethics provides researchers with a guide to responsible research practice, as encapsulated by the value, principle and virtue of research integrity.

1. Professionalism

Professionalism is the ability of a person to work ably, responsibly, diligently and to a high standard in order to achieve their goals and objectives.

Professionalism combines technical competence (knowledge and skills in a particular area or discipline) and ethical competence (ability to use knowledge and skills to achieve the goals of the research activity without undermining other possible goods).

Professionalism is the aspiration to excellence in one’s chosen field: having the ambition to improve and refusing to settle for mediocrity.
2. Freedom

Freedom is the ability to act according to one’s own volition and decision (positive liberty), and independence from or the absence of undue personal, institutional, economic, social or political pressure (negative liberty).

Freedom of thought, research, expression, communication and conscience enables researchers to critically assess the current situation and state of knowledge in their area of research, and protects them in that endeavour, allowing them to design their research, formulate hypotheses, define their methodology and objectives, select their research team, etc.

3. Accountability

Research freedom is not absolute but must comply with certain obligations, such as respect for the freedom of other people. Nor is it an arbitrary or indiscriminate freedom, but one which must be exercised responsibly by experts in their field of research.

Accountability in research means taking responsibility for one’s decisions and actions, and being answerable to one’s research group, one’s home or host university or research institution, other organisations and funding bodies involved in the research, the rest of the scientific community, society as a whole, and oneself.

Accountability also means ensuring that all resources are put to effective, efficient use, and taking into consideration the possible consequences of one’s research.

4. Inventiveness

Research involves challenging what we already know in pursuit of new knowledge and understanding. Inventiveness is the ability to create new ideas, concepts, meanings and applications that challenge, revise or expand our existing knowledge, and, as such, requires skill, curiosity, imagination and courage.

5. Honesty

Honesty is a commitment by researchers to be truthful and sincere in all their research activities.

Researchers are expected and required to work objectively to formulate hypotheses and theories that challenge the status quo and create new, unbiased, generalisable knowledge, and should protect the integrity of their work by declaring any conflicts of interest.
Honesty is directly related to openness, yet goes beyond transparency: it is not just a question of making research more visible or providing greater access, but of acting with honesty at every stage of the research process.

6. Respect

Respect means showing consideration for other people, objects and institutions involved in the research.

In the first place, research should respect people: research participants, fellow researchers and collaborators, members of the scientific community, and members of society. Likewise, it should respect non-human living beings, such as animals used for experimentation purposes.

In view of the overarching importance of the principle of respect for human beings, researchers should be prepared to interrupt their work or modify the original research design if necessary in order to guarantee the safety and integrity of all those involved.

Respect also refers to the responsible administration of material resources: proportionate use of materials as necessary and appropriate; rejection of abusive or incorrect uses; and actions to ensure the conservation, improvement and sustainability of the natural and social environment in which the research is conducted.

Finally, researchers are expected to comply with the legal, ethical, professional and institutional norms and standards required by regulatory authorities, employers, funders and other stakeholders. Compliance should not, however, preclude researchers from raising reasonable concerns over research regulations, or proposing alternative interpretations or suggestions to improve them.

7. Fairness

Fairness is about giving each individual his or her due. As such, it requires not just respect, but a combination of equality, non-discrimination, and differential treatment of difference.

Fairness should be a guiding principle in all relationships between researchers and research participants, fellow researchers, research institutions, funding bodies, members of society, etc. and should be understood on at least two levels: as recognition of each person’s contribution, and as the fair distribution of benefits and burdens, preferably based on merit.

8. Loyalty
Loyalty refers to researchers’ awareness and recognition of the role of institutional support for their work.

Loyalty demands that researchers acknowledge the institutional framework in which the cooperative, teamwork activity of their research is carried out; this includes the university, other sources of personal and financial support, and the people involved in the project. It also demands the commitment of all those involved in the research process to work for the common good, and not just for personal or individual gain.

9. Common good

Researchers should work for the benefit of society and the common good, rather than their own personal interests.

Guaranteeing the public good goes beyond social responsibility insofar as it requires researchers to contribute to the improvement of society. Research should aim to minimise harm and maximise public benefit, promoting individual attitudes and institutional practices that improve the well-being of society as a whole.

10. Trustworthiness

Science and research, like all cooperative endeavours, require trust. Trust is not an automatic consequence of social or professional status, but a confidence that must be earned and maintained by our decisions and actions. Researchers demonstrate that they are worthy of trust by conducting themselves in an honest, professional and conscientious way.

11. Security

Security is a state of protection against possible risks or loss that provides researchers with the stability and peace of mind necessary to plan their research.

Researchers should be guaranteed personal security (elimination or reduction of risks during research), professional security (availability of resources necessary to carry out research) and employment security (stable working conditions, duration of contract, salary, etc.).