UniMAC
UNIVERSITY OF MEDIA, ARTS AND COMMUNICATION

BULLETIN

RESEARCH ETHICS POLICY

VOL. 2 ISSUE NO. 1.9

PUBLISHED BY AUTHORITY

SEPTEMBER, 2025

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Executive Summary

The Research Ethics Policy of the University of Media, Arts and Communication (UniMAC) affirms the University's commitment to conducting research at the highest ethical and professional standards. It establishes a framework for safeguarding the rights, dignity, and welfare of research participants, ensuring integrity in data collection, analysis, and dissemination, and promoting transparency, accountability, and inclusivity. The policy outlines guiding principles, ethical review processes, responsibilities of researchers, and measures to prevent and address research misconduct. It applies to all faculty, staff, students, and visiting researchers, aligning with national and international best practices. By embedding ethical considerations into all stages of the research lifecycle, UniMAC aims to foster a culture of integrity and responsible scholarship that enhances the credibility and impact of its research outputs.

Preamble

In pursuit of academic excellence and societal relevance, UniMAC recognises that the credibility of research depends on the highest standards of ethical conduct. This Research Ethics Policy reflects the University's resolve to integrate respect, fairness, and accountability into all research activities. It is informed by global best practices, legal frameworks, and the University's mission to produce impactful research that benefits communities locally and globally. By providing clear guidelines for ethical review, approval, and oversight, the policy ensures that research is conducted responsibly, transparently, and with full regard for the rights and welfare of all participants.

[1]For any research involving human health-related data or biological materials, including studies in health communication, media effects on health behaviours, or interdisciplinary collaborations, UniMAC will apply internationally accepted ethical standards for human research. These standards ensure respect for persons, beneficence, justice, and the protection of participants' rights, safety, and well-being, in line with globally recognised principles for biomedical and social science research.

[1] internationally accepted standards (e.g., Declaration of Helsinki, Council for International Organization of Medical Sciences)

List of Abbreviations

AI	-	Artificial Intelligence
DRID	-	Directorate of Research, Innovation and Development
RERB	-	Research Ethics Review Board
GDPR	-	General Data Protection Regulation
RERB	-	Research Ethics Review Board
SDGs	-	Sustainable Development Goals
UniMAC	-	University of Media, Arts and Communication

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The development of the Research Policy for the university was made possible through collaborative efforts of stakeholders across the university. We extend appreciation to the members of the Research and Ethics Draft Committee, University Management, and all who provided valuable insights during consultations. Their collective contributions have been instrumental in shaping a policy that reflects both global best practices and the research context of the university.

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1. Introduction

The University of Media, Arts, and Communication (UniMAC) is devoted to conducting research with the greatest ethical standards. Research integrity refers to both the scientific integrity of the research and the professional integrity of the researchers. This dedication to research integrity is inextricably linked to establishing a culture that encourages strong and transparent research ethical standards. This policy explains the concepts and processes that guide the University's ethical research practices, assuring integrity, respect, and responsibility throughout all research activities.

2. Vision of the policy

Establishing an academic environment that seamlessly integrates ethical principles into all research activities motivates researchers to achieve excellence while simultaneously upholding the highest respect for human dignity and societal values. UniMAC aspires to be acknowledged as a leader in promoting and maintaining ethical integrity in research, thereby positively impacting the global academic and scientific community by establishing a standard for ethical research practices.

3. Mission of the policy

The policy aims to maintain the highest levels of ethical conduct in research. Its goal is to protect the rights and welfare of research participants, preserve the reliability of study findings, and encourage responsible research across all disciplines within the university community by cultivating an environment of integrity, respect, and accountability.

4. Aim and objectives of the policy

Aim

The overarching goal of the Policy is to ensure that all research conducted under its auspices adheres to the highest ethical standards, safeguarding the integrity of the research process and the welfare of all participants involved.

Objectives of the policy

i. **Maintain Ethical Integrity in Research:** Encourage honesty, transparency, and responsibility in all research operations, assuring accurate and responsible data collection, analysis, and reporting.
ii. **Protect human participants:** Assure the rights, dignity, and well-being of study participants by ensuring informed consent, privacy, and confidentiality throughout the research process.
iii. **Promote Responsible Conduct:** Encourage researchers to maintain high professional standards and avoid inappropriate behaviour, such as fabrication, falsification, or plagiarism.

iv. **Improve Research Quality and Credibility:** Develop methods and protocols to ensure rigorous and ethical research, leading to more credible and reliable results.
v. **Ensure fairness and justice:** treating all participants equally, distributing benefits and burdens fairly, and selecting unbiased subjects.
vi. **Cultivate an Ethical Culture:** Educate and train all university community members on research ethics to promote ethical decision-making.

5. Scope

This policy applies to all University community members involved in research, including faculty, staff, students, and visiting researchers.

6. Guiding Principles

The policy aims to safeguard the interests and well-being of researchers, research participants (both human and non-human), the wider research community, the environment, and broader society throughout the research lifecycle and beyond. The overarching principles informing the university's research are:

a. Integrity and Transparency

Researchers must conduct their research honestly, accurately, and transparently. Data must be documented and reported accurately, and researchers must declare any potential conflicts of interest.

b. Respect for Persons

Researchers must respect all study participants' autonomy, privacy, and dignity. This includes gaining informed consent and maintaining confidentiality. Informed consent documents shall begin with a concise key information summary; broad consent may be used for the storage, maintenance, and secondary research use of identifiable private information; waiver or alteration of consent is permissible only under defined conditions; (sample consent and assent templates are provided in the Appendix).

c. Beneficence

Researchers must try to maximise advantages while minimising risk. The potential advantages of the study should outweigh the risks to the participants.

d. Justice

Researchers must ensure that the advantages and challenges of research are shared properly. This includes equitable participant selection and fair treatment of all study subjects.

e. Dignity and Respect

Researchers must respect the rights, autonomy, privacy, interests, values, and dignity of their colleagues and research subjects, which include humans, human tissue, and non-humans. Researchers must guarantee that participants are free to engage without compulsion or penalty for not participating and that their freedom to withdraw from the study is always properly expressed and defined. Throughout the study's lifespan and beyond, data will be handled to ensure confidentiality, security, and compliance with legal and ethical requirements by all individuals who have access to it.

f. Responsibility and Accountability

Researchers must accept responsibility for adhering to the ethical standards outlined in this policy and consider them in their actions and decisions throughout the study lifecycle and beyond. Researchers are also held accountable for their activities and decisions, which include encouraging ethical behaviour and protecting against research misconduct. Thus, researchers should evaluate the ethical consequences of their research for themselves, research participants, the larger research community, the environment, and society as a whole.

g. Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion

Researchers must incorporate diversity, equality, and inclusion into their research efforts and foster a positive environment that promotes fairness, opposes prejudice, and celebrates uniqueness. Researchers may also align their work with ethical norms established by research funders and/or professional or disciplinary bodies, as well as consideration for cultural contexts. In most circumstances, these extra principles will supplement the previously described concepts. When there is disagreement, researchers should reflect on the competing demands and explain how they intend to proceed and why they chose that path.

For research conducted in low and middle-income communities or with vulnerable groups, researchers must demonstrate meaningful community engagement, equitable collaboration with local partners, benefit sharing, and post-study feedback to participants and communities.

7. Ethical Review and Approval

a. Research Ethics Review Board (RERB)

The University shall establish an Ethics Review Committee responsible for reviewing and approving research proposals to ensure they meet ethical standards. The RERB will be housed at the Directorate of Research and Innovation Development (DRID). The RERB shall have an administrator who will deal with ethical issues from the various institutes under the University. The RERB shall comprise members from

both faculty and administration, at least one unaffiliated/independent member, and maintain diversity of gender and expertise. Quorum is a majority of voting members. Members with a conflict of interest shall recuse from deliberation and decision-making on related protocols.

b. Roles and responsibilities of the RERB

The roles and responsibilities of the RERB include, but are not limited to, the following:

i. Ensure that research adheres to ethical standards and regulations.
ii. Foster a culture of ethical research throughout the academic community.
iii. Review and revise university policy regarding research ethics.
iv. Ensure policies align with national and international ethical standards.
v. Train researchers on ethical issues and standards.
vi. Raise awareness of ethical considerations in research.
vii. Advise researchers on ethical issues.
viii. Review research proposals to guarantee ethical compliance.
ix. Approve, modify, or reject plans based on ethical considerations.
x. Ensure proper documentation of informed consent procedures.
xi. Perform regular audits and reviews of research operations.
xii. Resolve any ethical concerns or complaints raised during the research.
xiii. Review data management plans to guarantee ethical compliance.
xiv. Manage potential conflicts of research interest.
xv. Disclose any conflicts and address them accordingly.
xvi. Resolve objections about research ethics.
xvii. Collaborate with the various university committees, departments, and external bodies to maintain ethical monitoring.
xviii. Stay current on best practices and regulatory developments by engaging with national and international ethical bodies.
xix. Conduct regular reviews and improvements to the committee's methods and guidelines.
xx. Stay current on ethical problems and apply new understanding to committee operations.

The RERB is expected to perform the aforementioned roles and responsibilities within an appropriate timeframe to ensure the research of staff and students proceeds without unnecessary delays. Approval will be granted only if the protocol meets the following criteria: Risks are minimized; risks are reasonable in relation to benefits; participant selection is equitable; informed consent is adequate; data monitoring ensures safety; privacy and confidentiality are protected; safeguards are in place for vulnerable participants

c. Roles and Responsibilities of the University to support the policy

The University shall ensure that good practice in research forms an integral part of its research strategy and policies through the following measures:

The university shall:

i. Ensure all university researchers know and follow the policy when doing research.
ii. Provide researchers with the necessary training, resources, documents, including the ethical approval application form (see Appendix A), and assistance to ensure they are aware of and can comply with the policy.
iii. Monitor the policy and other university policies for applicability and effectiveness and review them regularly to ensure they meet worldwide standards.
iv. Provide a user-friendly, fit-for-purpose, commensurate to the risks involved, and streamlined application procedure for research ethics reviews. Researchers will be given access to template versions of information sheets, consent forms, invitation letters, recruitment materials, and other often-used documents.
v. Recognise and respond to complex and growing ethical concerns.

d. Roles and Responsibilities of University Staff in Adhering to Ethical Research Standards

Ethics is a cornerstone of research integrity, and the policies and procedures aim to support researchers in undertaking high-quality research. Researchers, therefore have a responsibility to ensure the following:

i. Observe all ethical principles and policies established by the University, including obtaining appropriate clearances from the Ethics Review Committee (ERC) before beginning any research operations.
ii. Ensure that all research participants offer informed consent, understand the nature, purpose, risks, and benefits of the study, and participate voluntarily. Consent must be properly documented, with participants signing a written consent form or providing similar proof of their participation agreement.
iii. Maintain research participants' safety and confidentiality by securely keeping data and using de-identified or anonymised information whenever possible.
iv. Conduct research with honesty and integrity, ensuring that data is accurately collected, analysed, and published and that any potential conflicts of interest are mentioned.
v. Take all essential procedures to keep participants safe and healthy throughout the research process.

vi. Engage in ongoing ethical thought and uphold ethical norms throughout the study lifecycle, including data collection, analysis, reporting, and dissemination of findings.
vii. Promptly report any ethical concerns, adverse events, or deviations from authorised study procedures to the ERC, and hold oneself accountable for upholding ethical standards in all research operations.
viii. Disclose any potential conflicts of interest that may impact their study.

e. Roles and Responsibilities of Student Researchers in Adhering to Research Ethics Standards

Students conducting research as part of their programme must follow ethical standards and procedures suitable to the type and level of their studies. Engagement with research ethics is recognised as a teaching and learning opportunity, and students will be guided and supervised by appropriate faculty supervisors (or equivalents) as they build their ethical practices. For students, failing to follow research ethical requirements may constitute research misconduct and lead to referral of the case for disciplinary action. Students must, therefore take note of the following:

i. Before beginning research, students should familiarise themselves with the University's research ethics policy, rules, and procedures to ensure a firm understanding of ethical norms.
ii. Students must obtain the required approvals from the Ethics Review Committee (ERC) or other applicable supervisory agencies.
iii. Ensure that all participants offer informed consent. Students are required to explicitly explain the nature, purpose, risks, and benefits of the research to all study participants and make their participation voluntary.
iv. Data should be securely stored and de-identified or anonymized whenever possible to protect the privacy and confidentiality of study participants.
v. Conduct research with integrity and honesty, record and report data precisely, and avoid fabrication, falsification, or plagiarism.
vi. Take all essential precautions to reduce potential dangers to participants and ensure their safety and well-being during the research process.
vii. Engage in continuing ethical thought and communication with supervisors and colleagues to resolve any ethical concerns during the study process.
viii. Be responsible for upholding ethical norms and promptly reporting any ethical issues, adverse events, or deviations from authorised study protocols to their supervisors.

Researchers must follow internationally recognised standards for authorship and contributorship, ensuring transparency, accountability, and fairness in the reporting of research. This includes applying clear authorship criteria, accurately crediting all

contributors, upholding publication ethics, safeguarding personal data in line with global data protection principles, and ensuring the protection of participants in accordance with internationally accepted ethical guidelines for human research[2].

8. Research Data Protection

All research data must be handled in line with applicable national data protection laws and internationally recognised data privacy principles[3]. This includes safeguards such as pseudonymisation, minimisation, lawfulness and fairness in processing, accuracy, and secure storage to protect the confidentiality and rights of data subjects. Retention should be at least five years after publication unless the discipline or funder requires longer. Researchers should follow the FAIR principles (Findable, Accessible, Interoperable, Reusable) for data sharing, using controlled access where appropriate.

9. Ethical use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in research

All research involving the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI), including generative AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT, Bard, Claude, Gemini), must comply with UniMAC's Plagiarism and AI policy. Researchers must: (a) transparently disclose any AI assistance in data analysis, drafting, or creative processes; (b) avoid submitting AI-generated content as original work without proper attribution; (c) ensure AI tools are not used to fabricate, falsify, or manipulate data; (d) refrain from inputting confidential, personal, or sensitive participant data into public AI platforms without explicit authority and secure safeguards; and (e) acknowledge limitations and potential biases of AI tools in the research methodology and reporting. Use of AI in research must uphold the ethical principles of integrity, transparency, accountability, and respect for participants, in line with both this Ethics Policy and the AI/Plagiarism Policy."

10. Research Misconduct

a. Definition

Examples of research misconduct are fabrication, falsification, plagiarism, and other acts that violate accepted ethical and professional standards.

b. Reporting Misconduct

The University community is encouraged to report any suspected research misconduct. Reports will be investigated promptly and confidentially, and appropriate action will be taken if misbehaviour is discovered.

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[2] Examples: International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE); Contributor Roles Taxonomy (CRediT taxonomy); Committee of Publication Ethics; General Data Protection Regulation

[3] Ghana Data Protection Act; European General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)

Investigations into alleged misconduct will follow a transparent process with defined stages and timelines, including an appeals process and protections for whistleblowers against retaliation.

11. Training and Education

The University will equip all research community members with training and instructional resources on research ethics. This includes mandated training for new researchers, as well as ongoing professional development opportunities. All researchers must complete a mandatory induction training on research ethics before protocol submission, with refresher training every three years. Training modules will include informed consent, data protection, working with vulnerable populations, community engagement, and emerging topics such as AI and algorithmic bias in research.

12. Policy Review

The ethical policy will be evaluated regularly to ensure that it stays relevant and effective. The feedback from the university community will be considered during the evaluation process. The Directorate of Research, Innovation and Development will publish an annual Research Integrity Statement summarizing training compliance, breaches addressed, and improvements made. The policy will undergo an external audit at least once every three years.

13. Compliance and Enforcement

All university researchers must comply with this policy. Noncompliance may lead to disciplinary proceedings, such as suspension or termination of research activities.

14. Contact Information

For questions or further information about this policy, please contact the Directorate of Research, Innovation and Development (DRID)

15. Conclusion

By adhering to this policy, the University demonstrates its commitment to ethical research procedures that advance knowledge while protecting the rights and welfare of all participants.

APPENDIX A

Appendix materials shall include research ethics application form, sample participant information sheets, consent and assent templates, parental permission forms, serious adverse event reporting forms, protocol amendment forms, and a data management plan template.

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Telephone: (+233) 302 228336 e-mail: drid@unimac.edu.gh

RESEARCH ETHICS REVIEW APPLICATION FORM

INSTRUCTION: Responses to the Questions Should be typed.

1. PARTICULARS OF APPLICANT(S)

A. PERSONAL PARTICULARS

(a) Name of Researcher(s)	
(b) Researcher(s)' e-mails:	
(d) Telephone number(s)	

B. PERSONAL PARTICULARS OF LEAD INVESTIGATOR

(a) Name:	
(b) Contact details:	
(c) Department:	

2. INFORMATION ON PROPOSED RESEARCH

A. TOPIC

B. STUDY PROBLEM/STUDY RATIONALE

C. OVERVIEW OF CONCEPTUAL/EMPIRICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

D. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

E. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

F. STUDY DESIGN

G. STUDY POPULATION AND SAMPLE

H. DATA COLLECTION METHOD(S) AND PROCEDURES

I. DATA ANALYSIS METHOD

J. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

K. JUSTIFICATION AND ASSESSMENT OF EXPECTED CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY

3. POTENTIAL RISK ASSESSMENT AND CATEGORIZATION OF RESEARCH

A. RISK ASSESSMENT TO RESPONDENT(S)/PARTICIPANT(S)

How should this study be characterised? (Please tick all appropriate boxes.)

Description	Yes	No
Personal and social information collected directly from participants		
Participants to undergo physical examination		
Participants to undergo psychometric testing		
Identifiable information to be collected about people from available records (e.g., medical records, staff records, student records, etc.)		

B. RISK ASSESSMENT

How should this study be characterised? (Please tick as appropriate)

Category 1: Negligible No direct human participant involvement.	
Category 2: Low risk Direct human participant involvement. The only foreseeable risk of harm is the potential for minor discomfort or inconvenience, thus research that would not pose a risk above the everyday norm.	
Category 3: Medium risk Direct human participant involvement. Research that poses a risk above the everyday norm, including physical, psychological and social risks. Steps can be taken to minimise the likelihood of the event occurring.	
Category 4: High risk Direct human participant involvement. A real or foreseeable risk of harm including physical, psychological and social risk that may lead to a serious adverse event if not managed responsibly.	

C. JUSTIFICATION AND ASSESSMENT OF POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF RESEARCH TO PARTICIPANTS

(a) Briefly justify your choice/classification in B above ✓
(b) In medium and high-risk research, indicate the potential benefits of the study for the research participants and/or other entities.

(c) In medium and high-risk research, indicate how the potential risks of harm will be mitigated by explaining the steps that will be taken to minimise the likelihood of the event occurring (e.g. referral for counselling, debriefing, etc.).

D. BRIEFLY DESCRIBE THE STEPS TO BE UNDERTAKEN IN CASE OF ADVERSE EFFECTS OR WHEN INJURY OR HARM IS EXPERIENCED BY POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS ATTRIBUTABLE TO THEIR PARTICIPATION IN THE PROPOSED STUDY.

E. AGE RANGE OF POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS FOR THE PROPOSED RESEARCH

F. If the potential participants are 18 years and older, is the participants' informed consent form attached?

Yes	No	Not applicable

G. If the proposed participants are younger than 18 years, are consent and assent forms attached? (In order for minors -younger than 18 years of age- to participate in a research study, parental or guardian permission must be obtained. For minors a youth assent form is required.)

Yes	No	Not applicable

H. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROCESS FOR OBTAINING PARTICIPANTS' INFORMED CONSENT (IF APPLICABLE)

I. DESCRIPTION AND/OR AMOUNTS OF COMPENSATION INCLUDING REIMBURSEMENTS, GIFTS OR SERVICES TO BE PROVIDED TO PARTICIPANTS (IF APPLICABLE) (Will potential participants incur financial costs by participating in the proposed study? Will there be any incentives to be given to potential participants for participation in this proposed study?)

J. DESCRIPTION FOR ARRANGEMENT FOR INDEMNITY (IF APPLICABLE)

K. PROJECT TIME FRAME

L. RESEARCHER'S/PRINCIPAL RESEARCHER'S DECLARATION ON AGREEMENT TO COMPLY WITH ETHICAL PRINCIPLES SET OUT IN THE GIJ POLICY ON ETHICS IN ACADEMIC RESEARCH

We, **.....**declare that we have read the Policy on Ethics in Academic Research of UniMAC and that this form is a true and accurate reflection of the methodological and ethical implications of the proposed study. We shall carry out the study in strict accordance with the approved proposal and Policy on Ethics in Academic Research of UniMAC. We shall maintain the confidentiality of all data collected from or about research participants

and/or institutions and maintain security procedures for the protection of privacy. We shall work in close collaboration with DRID and shall notify them in writing immediately if any change to the study is proposed or if any adverse event occurs or when injury or harm is experienced by the participants attributable to their participation in the study.

M. SIGNATURE(S) OF RESEARCHERS

I. Signature(s) of Lead Investigator:

Date:_____

OFFICIAL USE

1. Ethics clearance application is
a. Approved
b. Approved, subject to revisions
c. Rejected

2. If approved, subject to revisions, enumerate the suggested revisions

3. If rejected, provide reasons for rejection

Research Officer.....

Signature:.....

Date:.....

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