

Research Integrity in Social Science Research at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

René Bekkers, May 5, 2020

At the Faculty of Social Sciences (FSS) of the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, research integrity is governed by seven policies:

1. The Netherlands Code of Conduct for Research Integrity adopted by the Royal Academy of Arts & Sciences (KNAW), the Netherlands Association of Universities (VSNU), the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO) and other organizations;
<http://www.vsnu.nl/files/documents/Netherlands%20Code%20of%20Conduct%20for%20Research%20Integrity%202018.pdf>
2. The code of ethics for research in the social and behavioural sciences, adopted by the Deans of the Social Sciences (DSW);
<http://www.nethics.nl/.cm4all/iproc.php/Gedragcode/CODE%20OF%20ETHICS%20FOR%20RESEARCH%20IN%20THE%20SOCIAL%20AND%20BEHAVIOURAL%20SCIENCES%20v2%20230518.pdf?cdp=a>
3. The FSS procedures for ethics review; https://fsw.vu.nl/nl/Images/RERC-Regulations-Feb18_tcm249-880617.pdf
4. The FSS data management policy,
https://fsw.vu.nl/nl/Images/VU_FSW_Datamanagementbeleid_2019_tcm249-867378.pdf
5. The doctorate regulations ('promotiereglement') of Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam:
https://vunet.login.vu.nl/_layouts/SharePoint.Tridion.WebParts/download.aspx?cid=tcm%3a165-874737-16;
6. Graduate school policies: see <https://fsw.vu.nl/en/research/graduate-school/> under 'Important Documents': the 'go/no-go product',
https://fsw.vu.nl/en/Images/191212gonogo-assessment_tcm250-815260.docx.

Throughout the cycle of empirical research, researchers and students at the Faculty of Social Sciences should act in line with the principles and guidelines expressed in the above codes of conduct and policies.

The policies employ four instruments to encourage research integrity.

1. Personal responsibility – your own conscience and internalized norms of good research and ethical standards.
2. Transparency – the openness you give about the procedures you have followed in your research.
3. Peer review – the scrutiny of your work by others: supervisors, colleagues, critics.
4. Complaint procedures – violations of norms of good research and ethical standards may be punished by the Board of the Faculty of Social Sciences, the academic integrity committee at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, and ultimately by the Netherlands office of research integrity (LOWI).

Note: The Faculty of Social Sciences does **not** have audits of research projects.

Planning your research

When you are planning research, check whether your study requires ethics review by the FSS Research Ethics Review Board (RERC). Make sure you complete the checklist well ahead of the start of the data collection. In case the research plans raise ethics issues, you may need three months to complete the entire ethics review process.

1. Do the FSS ethics review self-check at https://vuletteren.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6hCj2czlWzboW6V. Save the pdf you get. If the result is that your research does not need further review, you can start with your research. If the result is that your research needs further review, go to step 2.
2. Discuss the risks with your supervisor and your department's representative on the FSS Research Ethics Review Committee (RERC), <https://fsw.vu.nl/nl/over-de-faculteit/commissies/research-ethics-review-committee>. Revise your research plan to reduce and tackle risks. Go back to step 1: complete the self-check again based on the revised plan. If the result is still that full ethics review is necessary, proceed to step 3.
3. Prepare a full ethics review. With your research team, create 1. A short description of the research questions, the societal and scientific relevance of the research, and the research design (max. 1 A4); 2. the information for participants; 3. the consent form; 4. the research materials (manipulations, questionnaire, topic list); 5. the anonymization procedure; and 6. the data management plan. You can find examples of these materials under "Documents" on the RERC website, <https://fsw.vu.nl/nl/onderzoek/research-ethics-review>. If you have everything (i.e., six documents), go to step 4.
4. Complete the online Ethics Review Application Form at https://vuass.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_9tBjPqFq6bxv2Sx and upload the required documents. Note that only research project leaders can submit an application for ethics review. If you are a PhD candidate, ask your supervisor to submit the materials.

Data collection

Before you start the data collection, write a data management plan describing when, how, and where you will store the data, and who has access to the data during the data collection period, and how you will eventually make the data available to the public. Store the plan in the folder for Data Management Plans at the G:\ drive of your department. When you conduct research, update the data management plan when things change.

Analysis & write-up

During the preparation of your research report, discuss the analysis strategy and the findings with your supervisors and other colleagues. Prepare a working paper that you share with discussants. Present your research at an internal research seminar. Post a working paper in a public repository and invite the academic community to review it and suggest improvements. Present your working paper at conferences. Based on the comments you received from peers, revise the working paper before submitting it to a journal, book editor, or to the funders of your research.

Publication

When you submit research reports based on the data you have collected for peer review to a journal or to book editors, also submit the data you have analyzed and the code you have used to produce the results you report.

Archive the data without information that could identify specific persons in a public repository, such as Dataverse <https://dataverse.nl/dataverse/vuamsterdam> or on the Open Science Framework, <https://osf.io/>. Have a DOI assigned to your data so others can cite the data you have collected.

Review

When you are invited to review the work of others, check whether the authors have made the data and the code available that they have used to produce the results they report. If not, you can request them or the editors of the journal that invites you to review to do so. With the data and code, you can verify whether the data and code produce the results and you can conduct robustness analyses.

When you review research reports by others, do so in a constructive way. Abide by the guidelines for peer review of the Committee of Publication Ethics, https://publicationethics.org/files/Ethical_Guidelines_For_Peer_Reviewers_2.pdf

Getting advice on ethics and integrity issues

When you are planning your research and have questions on ethical dilemmas, ask the FSS Research Ethics Review Committee (RERC) for advice. When you have questions on dilemmas during your research, ask colleagues and supervisors for advice. When you find errors in your own research after you published it, write to the journal or book editors to notify them of the error. In case of a minor problem, prepare a correction. When you no longer support the publication as a whole, ask for a retraction.

When you have questions about the integrity of research of others, consult <https://vu.nl/en/about-vu-amsterdam/academic-integrity>. Step 1 is to talk to one of the confidential counsellors for integrity (vertrouwenspersoon integriteit), <https://vu.nl/en/about-vu-amsterdam/academic-integrity/confidential-counsellor>. When you have good reasons to believe that others have violated norms of good science or ethical standards, you can submit a complaint to the executive board of the university, which can forward it to the Academic Integrity Committee (CWI). <https://vu.nl/en/about-vu-amsterdam/academic-integrity/complaint>.