POLICY ON RESEARCH

POLICY REFERENCE: SEN/011

Office responsible:	DVC: Academic		
Approved by:	Senate		
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1.   Preamble

Sol Plaatje University has been established as a "Comprehensive University" in the South African taxonomy of higher education institutions. We take this to mean that an important part of the focus of our academic activities at SPU will be to ensure the provision of high quality undergraduate programmes. At SPU, the well-educated graduate is also one who is suitably prepared for further intellectual enquiry in the world of work as well as postgraduate study, either at SPU or at any national or global

research-intensive university. This necessarily means that our academic staff must themselves be research-active in order to properly educate and intellectually stimulate our students. Furthermore, while postgraduate enrolments will be a relatively smaller part of our student body, our academic staff are expected to be competent to offer research-based postgraduate programmes up to the doctoral level as well as to initiate and undertake academic research projects. This policy is intended to provide a framework that will guide research activities at SPU in a manner that encourages the highest quality of research, guided by globally acceptable ethical standards and practices and aligned with the institutional principles of our University.

2. Terms and definitions

The following terms and definitions generally apply throughout this Policy:

"Research" means intellectually driven, diligent and systematic inquiry, which is based on clearly formulated questions on a particular subject, together with evaluation of existing knowledge and/or appropriate gathering and analysis of observations in order to discover or revise understanding, theories or application of knowledge.

"Scholarship" means the publicly accessible dissemination of the outcomes of research in a form that is reviewed and approved by our disciplinary academic peers before publication or presentation and may take the form of conventional academic writing in books for specialists, journal and conference publications or creative outputs such as novels, plays, drama, music or artwork.

"**The University**" means Sol Plaatje University, as duly constituted in terms of the provisions of the Higher Education Act, 1997 (Act No. 101 of 1997), as amended.

3. Introduction

In considering our role and activities in the area of research, SPU accepts as a principle, that its academic character is to be built and sustained on three interrelated areas of academic and scholarly activity:

- Teaching
- Research

- Academic citizenship

These activities are interrelated in the sense that academic engagement in each activity is expected to inform and to draw from the other two areas. For the purposes of this Policy, the inter-relationship expects that community-based research will both draw from and inform our teaching and academic citizenship activities. Furthermore, it is important that SPU encourages, supports and sustains an active research engagement to develop its academics in their teaching and research capacity, to contribute to the development of new knowledge and understanding in South Africa and globally and to present the university as a competent knowledge partner to sustainable development in the greater Northern Cape region.

SPU also recognises the need to ensure that its research activities are undertaken at a level of quality that is benchmarked against the best of local and international standards. This includes the quality of our research formulations and outputs as well as the observance of high ethical standards of responsible research. In this regard, we will rely on the opinions of internal policy and regulatory structures and the judgement of our institutional and disciplinary peers.

This policy is aimed at providing a framework that establishes the principles that are to guide research development and implementation at SPU. It is intended to make explicit, the expectations and responsibilities of individual academic researchers as well as the role of the University in supporting its academic staff to develop their research activities.

4.   Scope of application

This policy is applicable to all SPU staff, students and visitors/associates who undertake research at SPU. This policy necessarily has a strong focus on the research activities of academic staff at SPU because students undertake their research under the guidance of academic staff. However, in their independent engagement with research or research-related matters, applies equally to students and administrative staff.

5.   Purpose

The purpose of this Policy is to provide a guiding framework for research at SPU, to ensure quality and good practice in research, and to provide information and guidelines on the research expectations of staff and students, as well as the institutional support for the research enterprise at SPU.

6.   Policy Statement

The University records:

(i)   that it is committed to ensuring that the highest possible academic standards and quality are maintained in the way that its staff and students undertake research,

(ii)   that it is committed to ensuring that all research activities are aligned with the values of the University, particularly in regard to the proper ethical relationships with its internal and external communities.

7.   Policy Objectives

This policy aims to encourage and support good quality research engagement of students and academic staff at SPU. Its aim is also to ensure that our research approach and outputs are comparable to local and global universities that SPU considers to be its appropriate academic peers.

8.   Guiding principles

8.1.   SPU recognises that one of the essential characteristics of its institutional purpose and identity is that its students and academic staff contribute to the generation of new knowledge, new understandings and/or new interpretations within and across the broad disciplines of academic activity at our University. This is broadly referred to as the research activities of a university.

8.2. The Senate of SPU is the primary governance structure for academic matters, including the research activities of staff, students and the institution as a whole. Through support of its advisory structures, Senate provides oversight on development, quality and directions of research activities at SPU.

8.3. Responsibility and accountability for all research activities and research funding lie with SPU as an institution. Individual academics and students execute this responsibility and accountability on behalf of SPU.

8.4. It is an expectation at SPU that all academic staff are research active, at least at the minimum level, and in keeping with their agreed workload distribution. This requirement is based on the understanding that an important role of the university as social institution is to contribute to new knowledge, as well as our awareness that the educational development of our students is best served when our academic staff are themselves driven by curiosity to participate in knowledge development activities in their disciplines.

8.5. In the evaluation of its research outputs, SPU will seek the opinions and affirmation of its peers within the knowledge discipline or area of research and application, who are themselves acknowledged as competent researchers. This approach is directed towards ensuring that our research activities are benchmarked against the best quality of local and international universities.

8.6. Research at SPU will be guided by the best of ethical standards and integrity in the relationship with research subjects, the use of research facilities and equipment, and in the interpretation and dissemination of research outcomes.

8.7. Within the limits of its resources and the other contending priorities, the University will ensure that suitable funds and proper administrative processes are available to support staff and students in their research endeavours.

8.8. In preservation of the principle of academic freedom, SPU will take measures to defend its research staff, students and entities against undue external influence or pressure that is intended to censor, curtail or impose unacceptable interpretations or use of research projects or research outcomes.

8.9. Except for special considerations such as sensitivity of information, preservation of artefacts or intellectual property; all research outputs at SPU will be made available in publicly accessible forms such as scholarly publications, regulated and shared databases, electronic research commons, or our library shelves.

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9. Research Expectations of Academic Staff

It is expected that academic staff at SPU will:

9.1. include research as one of the priorities of their academic work;

9.2. undertake high quality research in a manner that acknowledges the nexus between research, teaching and academic citizenship activities to which their research relates;

9.3. stay informed about new research directions, methodologies, debates and the contextual place of their research results within the specialities or fields of their disciplines;

9.4. be aware of – and operate within – the research policies, programmes and opportunities of the statutory research bodies and funding agencies, both locally and internationally and make use of the opportunities that are provided by such plans and programmes;

9.5. actively seek opportunities to engage in interdisciplinary and cross-disciplinary research activities with academics from other disciplines or with specialists in practice outside of the university;

9.6. seek and maintain research collaboration and cooperation with researchers in South Africa and internationally as a means of creating and participating in research networks;

9.7. actively source and obtain funds in order to establish and support a sustainable financial basis for their research;

9.8. as necessary and with the financial assistance of the University, improve their own qualifications to the doctorate level in order to better prepare themselves as researchers;

9.9. participate in appropriate University research mentoring and research development initiatives as and when they occur;

9.10. execute the responsibilities of the University in regard to contract research with diligence and in full recognition of our obligations as stated in the agreement with the contracting parties;

9.11. respond to research related intellectual property matters in accordance with the University's policy and, where appropriate, take advantage of opportunities for the commercialisation of research;

9.12. make research results accessible to the wider research community through lectures at national and international seminars and conferences, publications in academic books and approved journals, performances, exhibitions or other media (as appropriate);

9.13. defend the reputation of SPU as an institution that strives for the highest levels of quality, ethics and integrity in its research endeavours.

10. Institutional Support for Academic Research

In its governance and organisational arrangements, its administrative support structures, its allocation of financial resources, and its staff development strategies, SPU will endeavour to encourage and facilitate the research activities of academic staff. Within the limits of its resources and in proper consideration of need, SPU will aim to:

10.1. ensure that the organisational structures are arranged to facilitate the planning, execution and management of research activities, in a manner that regulates and maintains the standards of performance of such activities;

10.2. establish the regulatory framework, structures, guidelines and policies for providing oversight and, where necessary, approval to research ethics matters;

10.3. develop structure and management guidelines for the establishment of research institutes; research centres and research units in academic Schools at SPU

10.4. continuously encourage academic staff to initiate and develop individual or team research activities;

10.5. actively seek opportunities and encourage participation in multi-disciplinary and inter-disciplinary research activities;

10.6. ensure regular and proper recording, reporting and acknowledgement of research outputs of SPU academics and students;

10.7. ensure timeous and proper narrative and financial reporting to donors and outside contracting partners on research progress and research outcomes;

10.8. facilitate opportunities for academics to share and transmit their research insights through student lectures, conference presentations and presentations to the interested public and university community;

10.9. seek opportunities for research collaboration and research funding and inform academic staff of these opportunities as they arise;

10.10. contribute to development of research capacity, particularly of junior and emerging academics, to undertake research, grow their scholarship and to raise and manage research funding;

10.11. encourage and assist academic staff members to meet the requirements for acknowledgement of research standing, such as the NRF rating;

10.12. assist academic staff to acquire the necessary laboratory facilities, research materials, literature and archival resources as well as human resource assistance for the execution of their research;

10.13. source bursary and scholarship support for postgraduate students and develop the pedagogical approaches for research supervision by academic staff to ensure that postgraduate students complete their qualifications in minimum time;

10.14. structure the arrangements for research and sabbatical leave to give academic staff the maximum opportunity to deepen collaboration networks and regularly extend their domains;

10.15. encourage and facilitate short-term research visits by significant researchers from South Africa and around the world in order to stimulate and promote research at SPU;

10.16. on a regular basis, give suitable acknowledgement to academic staff and students who show consistent and high quality research engagement;

10.17. through the Senate Committee on Research, ensure that internal, University research funds are equitably shared in a discerning and directed manner that best contributes to the long-term research development of SPU;

10.18. maintain effective associations with the national statutory research councils (NRF, MRC, ARC, etc.) as well as international research funding councils (NSF, AAU, ERC, etc) that are essential for the support and promotion of research at our University;

10.19. encourage and nurture a research culture in which diversity of opinion and academic freedom are defended and respected and which seeks to encourage

active and respectful critique, as an essential component of knowledge development.

10.20. encourage the presence and research participation of postdoctoral students, research fellows and academic visitors from other universities.

11. Research Ethics and Academic Integrity

SPU expects that its staff and students will undertake their research activities with honesty, integrity and due care for life and the environment. In this regard, SPU fully subscribes to the principles and responsibilities contained in the Singapore Statement on Research Integrity (see Appendix 1). The sections below expand on some of the important principles and the structural arrangements that SPU will use to provide oversight to these matters.

11.1. **Respectful Relationships**:   All researchers are expected to operate in accordance with ethically accepted standards in relation to themselves, their colleagues, the wider scientific and academic community, their human and animal subjects as well as the environment and society. This includes respect for diversity in interactions with research participants of different languages, cultures, capacities and/or abilities, different species, and in the environment. Researchers must show respect for human dignity, particularly in the case of vulnerable persons or groups (as defined by the National Health Research Ethics Council[1]). Vulnerable persons are entitled to special protection against abuse, exploitation or discrimination. Ethical obligations to vulnerable individuals and groups translate into special procedures to protect their interests.

11.2. **Free and Informed Consent**: It is the responsibility of researchers to ensure that people participating in their research are properly informed and that consent is properly obtained. This requires careful consideration of matters such as the need for education, process, rights, duties and requirements for obtaining free and informed consent by human subjects. The inability to give their consent adds to the demand that animal subjects be treated humanely in research work.

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[1] http://www.doh.gov.za/nhrec/norms/ethics.pdf

11.3. **Respect for Privacy and Confidentiality**: Researchers must ensure that the privacy and confidentiality of people involved in the research is appropriately protected with regard to access, control and dissemination of personal information. This includes the requirement to protect mental or psychological integrity of all involved in the research, including the researchers.

11.4. **Environmental Hazards**: Researchers must exercise particular caution and obtain the necessary ethical and regulatory clearance when working with environmentally hazardous materials such as genetically modified organisms, bio-hazards, chemical hazards and radioactive materials.

11.5. **Aim to Do Good and Do No Harm**: Researchers have an obligation to do no harm as well as to ensure that their research endeavours aim at overall good. In the planning and execution of a study, the researcher should always take into consideration the possible unintended consequences of the research and the indirect or direct effects it may have. This may involve a proper assessment of the balance between risks and benefits, which includes risks or discomfort to humans, animals and the general environment.

11.6. **Scientific Integrity**: Research undertaken must be methodologically sound, scientifically valid and be conducted by researchers who are technically competent and sufficiently knowledgeable for the research task. Research results must be honestly analysed and reported with proper acknowledgement of any inherent or potential bias. The original data must be retained and made available for further assessment by peers or other researchers on reasonable request. Data and information must never be acquired under false pretences or through misrepresentation of the research intentions.

11.7. **Integrity of Scholarship**: SPU considers plagiarism in research in a very serious light. This is the practice of passing other people's ideas, materials, literary works, concepts or creative works as one's own. Researchers must always properly acknowledge and credit the work of others in their own work. Furthermore, all persons who were substantively involved in the conceptualisation, analysis and interpretation of results, writing or revision of the intellectual content of a scholarly work must be acknowledged as collaborating authors in publication of the work.

11.8. **Management, Governance and Oversight of Research Ethics at SPU**: The University framework for research ethics governance will primarily reside in the

University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) which is a sub-committee of Senate.

a. The UREC holds the central responsibility for approval, monitoring and training on research ethics at SPU.

b. The rules and procedures of operation of the UREC must be developed and regularly reviewed by the UREC and approved by Senate.

c. The UREC may form sub-structures to deal with different contextual aspects of research ethics such as human research ethics; animal research ethics or the use of hazardous materials in research.

d. Academic staff have an obligation to ensure that, not only their own research, but also any undergraduate or postgraduate student research conducted under their supervision is ethically sound and properly approved by the UREC.

e. Where research projects are subject to external approval, such as by the Department of Health or professional bodies, the researcher is responsible for ensuring that this approval is sought and obtained.

f. Where approval for a project has been given by a research ethics committee at another university, as may be the case with collaborative projects, the UREC must be provided with proof of this.

POLICY APPROVED BY: SENATE

DATE: 23 May 2018　　　　　　**RESOLUTION: 10/2018 S**

SENATE APPROVAL NOTED BY COUNCIL:

DATE: 27 June 2018

APPENDIX 1

Singapore Statement on Research Integrity

Preamble. The value and benefits of research are vitally dependent on the integrity of research. While there can be and are national and disciplinary differences in the way research is organized and conducted, there are also principles and professional responsibilities that are fundamental to the integrity of research wherever it is undertaken.

PRINCIPLES

Honesty in all aspects of research

Accountability in the conduct of research

Professional courtesy and fairness in working with others

Good stewardship of research on behalf of others

RESPONSIBILITIES

1. Integrity: Researchers should take responsibility for the trustworthiness of their research.

2. Adherence to Regulations: Researchers should be aware of and adhere to regulations and policies related to research.

3. Research Methods: Researchers should employ appropriate research methods, base conclusions on critical analysis of the evidence and report findings and interpretations fully and objectively.

4. Research Records: Researchers should keep clear, accurate records of all research in ways that will allow verification and replication of their work by others.

5. Research Findings: Researchers should share data and findings openly and promptly, as soon as they have had an opportunity to establish priority and ownership claims.

6. Authorship: Researchers should take responsibility for their contributions to all publications, funding applications, reports and other representations of their research. Lists of authors should include all those and only those who meet applicable authorship criteria.

7. Publication Acknowledgement: Researchers should acknowledge in publications the names and roles of those who made significant contributions to the research, including writers, funders, sponsors, and others, but do not meet authorship criteria.

8. Peer Review: Researchers should provide fair, prompt and rigorous evaluations and respect confidentiality when reviewing others' work.

9. Conflict of Interest: Researchers should disclose financial and other conflicts of interest that could compromise the trustworthiness of their work in research proposals, publications and public communications as well as in all review activities.

10. Public Communication: Researchers should limit professional comments to their recognized expertise when engaged in public discussions about the application and importance of research findings and clearly distinguish professional comments from opinions based on personal views.

11. Reporting Irresponsible Research Practices:

Researchers should report to the appropriate authorities any suspected research misconduct, including fabrication, falsification or plagiarism, and other irresponsible research practices that undermine the trustworthiness of research, such as carelessness, improperly listing authors, failing to report conflicting data, or the use of misleading analytical methods.

12. Responding to Irresponsible Research Practices:

Research institutions, as well as journals, professional organizations and agencies that have commitments to research, should have procedures for responding to allegations of misconduct and other irresponsible research practices and for protecting those who report such behavior in good faith. When misconduct or other irresponsible research practice is confirmed, appropriate actions should be taken promptly, including correcting the research record.

13. Research Environments: Research institutions should create and sustain environments that encourage integrity through education, clear policies, and reasonable standards for advancement, while fostering work environments that support research integrity.

14. Societal Considerations: Researchers and research institutions should recognize that they have an ethical obligation to weigh societal benefits against risks inherent in their work.

Available at: ***www.singaporestatement.or***