Research Integrity in Social Science Research at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

René Bekkers, October 16, 2022

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

1. The Netherlands Code of Conduct for Research Integrity adopted by the Royal Academy of Arts & Sciences (KNAW), the Netherlands Association of Universities (Universiteiten van Nederland, formerly VSNU), the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO) and other organizations; https://www.universiteitenvannederland.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); https://www.nethics.nl/.cm4all/uproc.php/0/pdf/CODE%20OF%20ETHICS%20FOR%20RESEARCH%20IN%20THE%20SOCIAL%20AND%20BEHAVIOURAL%20SCIENCES%20v2%20230518.pdf?_=1756ae64020&cdp=a
3. The FSS procedures for ethics review; https://assets.vu.nl/d8b6f1f5-816c-005b-1dc1-e363dd7ce9a5/c7e3795f-62b7-4b3f-9282-48859461e87e/RERC-Regulations-Feb18_tcm249-880617.pdf
4. The national guidelines for archiving research data in the behavioural and social sciences; https://www.utwente.nl/en/bms/datalab/datasharing/guideline-faculties-of-behavioural-sciences-def.pdf
5. The FSS data management policy, https://vu.nl/en/employee/social-sciences-getting-started/data-management-fss
6. The doctorate regulations ('promotiereglement') of Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam: https://assets.vu.nl/d8b6f1f5-816c-005b-1dc1-e363dd7ce9a5/08b4502d-de82-47ca-9c4c-fd5ad70d47f0/20220901%20VU%20doctorate%20regulations.pdf
7. Graduate school policies: see https://vu.nl/en/about-vu/more-about/the-graduate-school-of-social-sciences under 'Assessments during your PhD trajectory': the 'go/no-go product', https://assets.vu.nl/d8b6f1f5-816c-005b-1dc1-e363dd7ce9a5/7a3d5a64-b995-47c0-ad93-63fc80ad1a60/VU-GSSS%20Go%20No%20Go%20assessment%20-%20introduction%20and%20explanations.pdf and the plagiarism check, https://assets.vu.nl/d8b6f1f5-816c-005b-1dc1-e363dd7ce9a5/736ad95c-1440-4586-87ba-7604687bb3ab/VU-GSSS%20Plagiarism%20check%20of%20the%20GNG%20product%20or%20the%20final%20thesis%20%28fill-in%20document%29.docx

In your particular discipline, additional policies or codes of conduct may apply:

- Anthropology: Ethical Guidelines of the Dutch Anthropological Association, https://antropologen.nl/app/uploads/2019/01/ABv_Code-of-Ethics_2019.pdf
- Management Science and Business Administration: Academy of Management Code of Ethics, https://aom.org/about-aom/governance/ethics/code-of-ethics
- Market research: ICC/ESOMAR International Code on Market, Opinion, and Social Research and Data Analytics, https://www.esomar.org/what-we-do/code-guidelines

- Political Science: Beroepscode NKWP, http://politicologie.nl/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/Beroepscode-2008.doc
- Psychology: beroepscode NIP, https://psynip.nl/beroepskwaliteit/beroepscode/
- Sociology: Beroepscode NSV, https://www.nsv-sociologie.nl/?page_id=17

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 most cases ethics review takes less than a month, but 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_6hCj2czIWzboW6V. 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://vu.nl/en/employee/social-sciences-getting-started/research-ethics-review-fss. 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 at https://vu.nl/en/employee/social-sciences-getting-started/fss-templates-and-example-documents. 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

If your project involves collection or analysis of data, write a Data Management Plan (DMP) before
you start the data collection. Go to https://dmponline.vu.nl and create a new plan. DMPonline will
guide you through the elements that comprise a good DMP. You can share your DMP with the
faculty's data steward Koen Leuveld (k.leuveld@vu.nl) to get feedback. Store the plan in the folder
for Data Management Plans at the G:\ drive of your department. Update the data management plan
when things change during the research project. Make sure to properly version the document, so
changes can be tracked.

If possible, pseudonymize raw data before analysis to prevent data leaks. Avoid working with the raw
data to prevent data loss. Store raw data and the pseudonimyzation key file in a secure location
where it cannot be lost, corrupted, or accidentally edited. This could possibly be the same place
where your raw data will be archived after the project. Make sure that wherever they are stored, the
raw data are accompanied by all information needed to understand the data. This includes metadata
on when, where, why and by who the data was collected, and all documentation needed to
understand variables, such as interviewer manuals. The faculty data steward can help in identifying
what documentation or metadata to include.

Analysis & write-up

During the preparation of your research report, it is a good idea to discuss the analysis strategy and
the findings with your supervisors and other colleagues. To get feedback, you can prepare a working
paper that you share with discussants and present at an internal research seminar. After internal
discussion, it is a good idea to post a working paper in a public preprint repository such as SocArxiv or
Zenodo and invite the academic community to review it and suggest improvements. Next, you can
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 create a publication package containing pseudonymized data, analysis scripts,
documentation, and metadata. Archive the publication package in a public repository, such as
Dataverse https://dataverse.nl/dataverse/vuamsterdam, Zenodo, https://zenodo.org/. You can also
store data on the Open Science Framework, https://osf.io/ if you select an EU storage location.

Have a DOI assigned to your data so others can cite the data you have collected. You can choose to
upload data, documentation and metadata separately and have multiple publication packages refer
to the same data set if this works better for your project.

Never share privacy-sensitive raw data with the public. Such data should be stored securely on DarkStor or ArchStor.

Review

When you are invited to review the work of others, it is a good principle to 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 done 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. Here are some suggestions on how to review empirical research: https://osf.io/7ug4w/

The guidelines for peer review of the Committee of Publication Ethics apply to all types of research: 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). See the complaints procedure at https://assets.vu.nl/d8b6f1f5-816c-005b-1dc1-e363dd7ce9a5/facfccb1-2b51-4f42-b32c-8bebfb29b89f/Academic%20Integrity%20Complaints%20Procedure%20Vrije%20Universiteit%20Amsterdam%20April%202022.pdf