

Research Ethics Guidelines for Master Students at SBE

SBE Ethics Review Board

Date: July 2024



Background

- In 2018, two important ethics documents were issued:
 - The Code of Ethics for Research in the Social and Behavioral Sciences involving human participants.
 - The Netherlands Code of Conduct for Research Integrity.
- Both instruments call for the ethical handling of human subjects in research. Human participants should be handled in an honest, transparent, scrupulous, independent and responsible manner.
- These principles also apply to research conducted by SBE students.

SBE Ethics Review Board

- The SBE Ethics Review Board (ERB) consists of a Chairman, 5 board members and a secretary. The chairman and board members are all SBE affiliated professors.
- The ERB:
 - ensures that research (including student theses) at SBE that uses data on human subjects is in line with institutional, national and international ethics regulations and legal requirements.
 - reviews research proposals and issues statements declaring that the proposals are in line with the guidelines for research involving human subjects.
 - promotes ethical research practices at SBE.

Ethics Procedure for students

- **All students** are required to complete the online ethics self-check prior to the start of their thesis research.
- The online ethics self-check is available here:
https://vuamsterdam.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6nf3iZrOy2CUt8y
- Students that do not complete the self-check will not be able to obtain the full grade for their thesis.

Ethics Procedure for students

- Upon completion of the online self-check, the ERB will issue statements that either report that the students' research proposals:
 1. comply with the SBE ethics guidelines.
 2. do not involve data on human subjects.
 3. have already been reviewed for ethics issues.
 4. do not comply with the SBE ethics guidelines. In these cases, students have to revise their research designs or (in exceptional cases) request their supervisors to apply for a full ethics review.

Ethics issues and advice

- Students should consider the following issues prior to the submission of an ethics application:

Ethics issue	Guidance
Use of personal special data (e.g. religion, ethnicity) and sensitive data (e.g. grades, finances)	Anonymization or pseudonymization and secure storage of data are necessary. If identifiable data is required for thesis, supervisor should contact ERB.
Use of deception or withholding of information about the research project	Transparency and sharing of complete and correct information is essential. Revise study design in case of deception or withholding of information.
Involuntary participation in research	All participation should be voluntary. Revise study if this is the case.
Lack of active informed consent to participate in the study	Active informed consent should <u>always</u> be provided. Revise study if informed consent is not possible.

Ethics issues and advice

Ethics issue	Guidance
Risks, harm or negative consequences due to participation in the research	No risks should be imposed on subjects from participation. Revise study in such cases.
Subjects are exposed to distressing stimuli	Subjects should not be exposed to distressing stimuli. Revise study in such cases.
Age and mental capability of subjects	Subjects should be adults and mentally capable. Supervisors should contact ERB if the data from minors or vulnerable groups are required for research.

- Whenever possible, students are advised to deal with their ethics issues by revising their study designs. For example, variables on ethnicity can be omitted if not necessary for the research question.

Self-check questions



Ethics Self-check for SBE Students

Welcome to the ethics review self-check for students at SBE. You are expected to read the [Research Ethics Guide for Master Students at SBE](#) before applying for a research ethics review. The guide explains the research ethics procedure at SBE as well as the different steps to be followed when submitting a research ethics review. The guide also provides detailed explanations of terms and terminology that you may not be familiar with.

[https://vuamsterdam.eu.
qualtrics.com/jfe/form/S
V_6nf3iZrOy2CUt8y](https://vuamsterdam.eu.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_6nf3iZrOy2CUt8y)

Self-check questions



First name:

Last name:

Supervisor's first name

Supervisor's last name

Supervisor's email address:

Names and email addresses should be typed correctly to ensure that confirmation emails are sent out.

Self-check questions



Do you declare to complete this form truthfully?

Yes

No



The form can only be submitted if answered truthfully. Students can still make minor changes to their research after the self-check. e.g. changing research methodology or the way particular variables or questions are analyzed.

However, students will be required to submit a new application via the online self-check, for fundamental changes to the research design such as changes in the data used or main research questions.

Self-check questions



Title of research project:

(Estimated) starting date:

The starting date should be the date when the master student began to work on the research proposal

Does the research project involve (data on) human subjects?

A human subject or participant is a person that partakes in, or is subject to, research in which data on or from this person are being collected. This includes for instance people that might be representing themselves or the interests of others or an organisation in an experiment, interview, survey, online data source and observational study.

The self-check should be completed before the data collection phase of the thesis.

The starting date should be the date you begin working on the proposal.

A human subject or participant is a person that participates in research in which data on or from this person are being collected. Data can be collected at the individual, group, community or organisation level.

Aggregated data on human subjects such as population figures are not considered as data on human subjects.

Self-check questions

Briefly describe the research project including its objectives (approximately 5 sentences):

This thesis aims to investigate the impact of
In order to achieve this aim, we will draw on survey data, qualitative interviews, experimental data etc.



The thesis description should be as detailed as possible, see the example given in the form field.

Self-check questions



Briefly describe the nature of the target group of subjects/ participants:

We will conduct interviews/experiments with
The survey will be distributed to

We have selected these subjects/participants because...

Is the study medical in nature (e.g. measurements of blood pressure or heart rate, sampling of saliva)?

A study is medical when it concerns a medical topic and a physical or behavioural intervention takes place.

Yes

No

Will new data be collected in this study (experimental set-up, surveys, observations, etc.) or will existing data be used?

New data

Existing data

Both

Footer text - Faculty or Research Institute name

Medical studies cannot be reviewed by the ERB and should be submitted to the **Medical Research Ethics Committee**

Please note that the ethics implications for new and existing data are different. Explanations for both new and existing data are provided in the next slides

Self-check questions

Are all subjects adult (18 years or older)?

Note 1: 17-year-old students are in this case considered adult as well.

Note 2: In case of studies with children younger than 12 years, a letter of consent shall be signed by the legal representative of the child. In case of studies involving children between 12 and 18 years old, the letter of consent will be signed by both the child and the legal representative.

- Yes
- No
- No, but parents/caregivers will (also) give active informed consent

Are all subjects capable of judgment?

Subjects should not lack the capacity to act rationally by virtue of being under age or because of a mental disability, mental disorder, intoxication or similar circumstances.

- Yes
- No
- Uncertain

For children younger than 12 years, written informed consent is required from their legal representatives or parents.

Children that are 12 years and older, should sign the letter of consent together with their legal representatives.

All subjects should be mentally competent and capable of judgement, students should revise their designs if this is not the case.

Self-check questions

Are the subjects in any way vulnerable?

E.g. refugees, persons with drug or alcohol problems, terminally ill persons.

Yes

No

Uncertain

1. Will all subjects (or their legal representatives) give active informed consent that meets the following criteria?
 - a. Information will be provided in clear language for the target audience.
 - b. Information about the nature, content, procedures and risks of the study will be sufficient to let the subject consider his/her consent adequately.
 - c. The purposes of data collection and use will be clearly described.
 - d. Consent will include a statement that identifiable personal information of the subject will not be passed to a third party without consent.
 - e. Consent will be given voluntarily.
 - f. Subjects will be entitled to refuse or withdraw from participation without negative consequences for them.
 - g. Contact details of the researcher(s) will be provided.

Vulnerable subjects are those who are in a position of dependence (whether psychological, social, economic, political, or otherwise), easily stigmatised, discriminated against, prosecuted, or met with violence.

Examples of vulnerable populations include refugees, homeless people, terminally ill people, people engaged in substance abuse or ethnic minorities that are discriminated against.

Research designs should be revised whenever possible, if identifiable vulnerable subjects are involved.

Self-check questions

Are the subjects in any way vulnerable?

E.g. refugees, persons with drug or alcohol problems, terminally ill persons.

Yes

No

Uncertain

1. Will all subjects (or their legal representatives) give active informed consent that meets the following criteria?
 - a. Information will be provided in clear language for the target audience.
 - b. Information about the nature, content, procedures and risks of the study will be sufficient to let the subject consider his/her consent adequately.
 - c. The purposes of data collection and use will be clearly described.
 - d. Consent will include a statement that identifiable personal information of the subject will not be passed to a third party without consent.
 - e. Consent will be given voluntarily.
 - f. Subjects will be entitled to refuse or withdraw from participation without negative consequences for them.
 - g. Contact details of the researcher(s) will be provided.

Voluntary and active informed consent (i.e. the subject performs an action to confirm their participation and evidence of this action had been well documented) is required for all studies.

If the research project occurs in a group or organization, consent should be obtained from the head of the group or organization.

Research in public spaces is permitted if individual privacy is not violated.

Please see the informed consent checklist on the last slide

Self-check questions



Does the study involve methods of deception, e.g. because the awareness of the real purpose of the study would influence the subjects behavior?

- Yes
- Yes, and the participants will be debriefed about the real purpose of the study after participation
- No
- Uncertain

Will subjects be exposed to stimuli (e.g. pictures, text) that can be distressing, offensive or age-inappropriate?

- Yes
- No
- Uncertain

Research should always be conducted in a transparent manner where the research aims, goals and methodology are clearly explained to subjects.

In exceptional cases, information is withheld from subjects because subjects knowledge of the research questions may bias the research outcome. In these cases, subjects should be provided information after their participation but not later than the end of data collection. Subjects should also be offered the right to withdraw their data.

Deception in any form (e.g. not providing true information about the researchers identity or research questions) should not be employed.

Self-check questions



Does the study involve methods of deception, e.g. because the awareness of the real purpose of the study would influence the subjects behavior?

- Yes
- Yes, and the participants will be debriefed about the real purpose of the study after participation
- No
- Uncertain

Will subjects be exposed to stimuli (e.g. pictures, text) that can be distressing, offensive or age-inappropriate?

- Yes
- No
- Uncertain

Subjects should not be exposed to stimuli that can be distressing such as pictures and text.

Participation in the study should not pose any risk, harm or negative consequences on the subjects.

In case this is necessary for the research and the research design cannot be adjusted, the master students and their supervisor need to contact the RERB.

Self-check questions

Do you provide subjects with excessive or inappropriate incentives?

Incentives (e.g. payments or EC's) should not override the voluntary participation in a study. However, providing a small reward - for example to increase survey response rates and therefore improve the study - is often ethically allowed. In any case, make sure to have a justification on why and how you provide incentives to the participants.

Yes

No

Uncertain

Does the study involve processing of social security numbers (BSN)?

If Yes or Uncertain: Adapt the study design. It is forbidden by law to collect social security numbers for research purposes.

Yes

No

Uncertain

Compensation or incentives aimed at increasing participation can be given to subjects.

However, compensation or incentives should not be set so high that they override the voluntary participation in the study. The amount offered should also not result in inflation beyond normal levels.

The nature of these incentives and their potential risks, obligations should be clearly communicated with subjects.

It is forbidden by law to collect social security numbers or BSNs for research purposes.

Self-check questions

Does the study involve processing of so-called special* personal data that can be traced back to an individual?

**Special personal data are: information about subjects' race or ethnicity, political opinion, religion or ideology, union membership, health, sexual behavior, genetic or biometric data.*

Yes

No

Uncertain

Does the study involve processing of sensitive personal data (e.g. financial data of an individual, student grades)?

Yes

No

Uncertain

Strict rules apply for the collection of special categories of personal data and sensitive personal data due to the European General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), if such data is necessary for the master thesis, master students and their supervisors are requested to submit a full ethics review.

Special categories of personal data include religious and philosophical beliefs, trade union membership, biometric data, genetic data, data on sexual orientation or sex life, racial or ethnic origin, health data and political stands.

Examples of sensitive personal data include financial data and student grades.

Self-check questions

Is it possible to trace back the data to an individual person?

*If Yes or Uncertain: Please note that **anonymization or pseudonymisation** of the data should be accomplished as early as possible during the research project. Personal data should be **stored at a secure location** (e.g. VU server or ResearchDrive, not on a USB-stick or unprotected hard drive).*

Yes

No

Uncertain

Unless consent has been given, it should not be possible to identify subjects from the data.

Anonymization or pseudonymization should be accomplished immediately after data collection.

Secure storage should also be used for personal data. .

Questions on anonymization and data storage should be addressed to rdm.sbe@vu.nl

Self-check questions



Has the existing data used in this study already been reviewed for ethics by the Ethics Review Board (RERB) at the School of Business and Economics?

For example if the data in the project was collected and submitted for an ethics review by your supervisor or other faculty member. Please ask your supervisor or the person who provided the data, if uncertain about the response.

Yes

No



If the data used in the study has already undergone an ethics review by the SBE RERB, the survey will end after this question and a report stating that an ethics review has already been conducted will be issued. Supervisors will be notified via email.

In case of uncertainty, students are requested to verify whether a review has been undertaken with their supervisors.

Self-check questions



Has the existing data used in this study already been reviewed for ethics by another review board in the Netherlands or in Europe?

For example if the data was reviewed by another faculty at the Vrije Universiteit or another university in the Netherlands.

Please check with the person who provided the data or the data collection agency, if uncertain of the response.

Please contact the SBE RERB (rerb.sbe@vu.nl) if the ethics review was not conducted in the Netherlands.

Yes

No



If the data used in the study has already undergone an ethics review in the Netherlands or in Europe, the survey will end after this question and a report stating that an ethics review has already been conducted will be issued. Supervisors will be notified via email.

The SBE RERB can be contacted in case of uncertainty (rerb.sbe@vu.nl).

Informed consent checklist

- Study participants should receive an information sheet that clearly describes:
 - the nature and purpose of the research.
 - the benefits and risks of participating in the study.
 - the procedures to decline participation and withdrawal from the study at anytime without negative consequences.
 - whether any personal information about the participant will be collected, processed and how and for what purpose; the right of the participant to request access to and rectification or erasure of personal data.
 - usage of the data during research, safeguarding personal information, maintaining confidentiality and de-identifying (anonymising) data, controlled access to data, especially in relation to data archiving and reuse, ways of dissemination, data archiving and possible publishing.
 - retention period for the research data, or if that is not possible, criteria used to determine that period.
 - contact details of the student, their supervisor.



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