

# **Guidelines on Academic Ethics**

## **Preamble**

Goa University expects all its members to adhere to the highest standards of academic ethics. This document will serve as a guide to implement these standards in all the departments on the University campus as well as the institutions affiliated to Goa University. For the University departments situated on the Taleigao Plateau the following guidelines are applicable. These are prepared taking into account different contexts of academic life which include teaching, conducting research, publishing papers and books, training and administration. A variety of situations where accidental or deliberate misconduct can occur are considered. In the event of any allegation or possibility of misconduct having occurred, the appropriate remedial and / or disciplinary procedures are described herein. It is advisable for all academic members (including faculty, postdoctoral or project researchers and students at all levels) to familiarize themselves with its contents.

Several sections of this document are reproduced verbatim, or with only minor changes, from the documents “*Scientific Values: Ethical Guidelines and Procedures*” of the Indian Academy of Sciences, and “*Guidelines on Academic Ethics*”, Indian Institute of Science Education and Research, Pune. Other sections have drawn upon the above documents more indirectly. All this has been done with the kind permission of the above institutions.

## **1. Teaching & Training**

### **1.1 Student recruitment and evaluation**

Recruitment of students at all levels in Goa University should involve a just and fair procedure that is explicitly spelt out in advance. When assessments involve interviews, as in Ph.D. student selection, it has to be accepted that subjective academic judgements are involved. However, care must be taken to avoid considerations unrelated to the student's merit, as well as conflicts of interest.

### **1.2 Ethics in teaching and learning**

All course instructors which includes permanent faculty members, contractual teachers and visiting academicians should aim for the highest quality in their course content and teaching methodology. The procedure by which a course will be assessed should be made clear to students at the outset as outlined in the Ordinance **OA.18A**. For the evaluation of projects and theses based on seminars / interviews, subjective academic judgements are inevitable but, as above, care must be taken to avoid introducing extraneous considerations. Sensitive student-related issues including records and communications should be shared only out of academic necessity and only with the

appropriate persons. The dignity of the classroom or laboratory environment must be maintained at all times.

Students, on their part, are expected to dedicate themselves to each course with complete honesty as well as a sincere effort to participate and learn. Assignments, tests, exams and related activities must be carried out strictly in accordance with the provided guidelines. Attempting to use any unauthorized materials or information, or copying or stealing from another student or any other source, is ethically unacceptable and will attract provisions of **OA.5.14**

### **1.3 Ethical training to students**

As part of their orientation students in the University Departments shall be asked to view a training video / online presentation as soon as they are admitted. Additional ethical training customized to specific research or study activities shall also be imparted wherever appropriate.

## **2. Conduct of Research**

### **2.1. Ethical responsibilities**

In research projects/dissertations there is usually a Principal Investigator (PI) / Research Supervisor or a set of co-PIs / co guides who lead the project / guide the dissertation. They should monitor the research procedures and formulate policies for recording data and compiling results. These policies should be made known to all collaborators. The PI should specially ensure the supervision and appropriate mentoring of young researchers including students and postdoctoral fellows.

Despite the above, all individuals participating in a research project are responsible for their own actions and should make sure these are consistent with, and uphold, high ethical standards. In particular, younger researchers including students and postdoctoral fellows have their own obligations to carefully follow ethical principles in their research. Unethical behaviour on their part cannot be justified by the claim that they were following a mentor's instructions.

### **2.2 Data management**

In both independent and collaborative research, every effort must be made to ensure that data are collected and computations performed with complete honesty. Fabrication, falsification or improper manipulation of data are highly unethical and must not be resorted to. Researchers have a duty to familiarize themselves with the methods of handling, processing and storing data that are considered acceptable/unacceptable in their own field. They should be aware that the correctness and originality of a research publication can be questioned, even long after publication. Particularly with experimental work, defending the publication requires properly recorded raw data to be produced. Its absence will typically be treated as suspicious. A well maintained lab notebook

provides not only a permanent record of results and protocols for future publications, but also serves as critical evidence for a claim of priority in the case of patent applications and as proof of adherence to appropriate ethical standards. Tampering with or manipulating records in a laboratory notebook is unacceptable. It is recommended that research related data, lab notebooks and material be stored in a secure but accessible manner.

### **2.3 Ownership**

Physical materials including lab notebooks, data sets etc. arising out of research performed at University, will remain the property of Goa University unless explicitly decided otherwise. The same holds for software and processes having commercial value.

### **2.4 Responsible use of funds**

The management of research funds requires adherence to Goa University financial policies and regulations as well as policies of the respective funding agencies. This is applicable to both funds received from University and from external granting agencies. Efforts should be made to ensure reasonable and efficient use of resources following transparent and fair processes.

### **2.5 Sharing of equipment / facilities**

Equipment / facilities installed at Goa University is expected to be shared in a collegial spirit with colleagues who require access for their own research, as long as such access does not impede the original purpose for which the equipment / facility was created. In such situations, the PI can decide on details such as who actually operates the equipment and at what times, as long as sharing is willingly facilitated and transparent procedures are in place.

### **2.6 Experiments involving cell lines, animals or human beings**

All experiments that involve use of cell lines, animal and human research subjects require ethical permission and approval. Experiments that involve the use of animals come under the purview of the University Institutional Animal Ethics Committee (IEAC) which functions based on the guidelines of Committee for the Purpose of Control and Supervision of Experiments on Animals (CPCSEA) <http://cpcsea.nic.in/>

Experiments involving cell lines, stem cell research and human subjects come under the purview of the University Institutional Human Ethics Committee (IHEC) which functions based on the [guidelines of Indian Council of Medical Research \(ICMR\)](#).

## **2.7 Safety and environment**

Research activity must not endanger other people or the environment in any way. Goa University expects all its members to incorporate safety and environmental concerns into their research practices. Environmental guidelines, regulations and laws must be followed and appropriate licenses / permits and clearances obtained for the handling, storage or disposal of hazardous material. Within experimental laboratories Goa University and PIs have joint responsibility for ensuring that the work area is safe, and that research practices of the group do not endanger the research team, visitors or the public. In this regard the PI is expected to encourage team members to undergo appropriate training to maintain safety and environmental standards, and also to advise the Institute about any safety measures that need to be put in place.

## **2.8 Responsibilities of a Research Supervisor**

Research supervisors should display the highest ethical standards when dealing with students. Conflict issues should be identified and dealt with as soon as possible. Claims and counter-claims about relative contributions in a research study need to be handled with manifest fairness and clarity.

It is recommended that students meet regularly with their doctoral research committee, whose role is to monitor the progress of the student's thesis work, to ensure the student and thesis advisor work efficiently to meet the relevant deadlines, and to mediate resolution of disputes should they arise.

## **3. Publications**

### **3.1 Authorship**

For the authorship of research publications all listed authors of a publication should have contributed significantly to it. It is unethical to include anyone as an author of a paper without their knowledge and clear consent.

Researchers should familiarize themselves with the standards in their field and the criteria laid down by the journal to which their work is submitted. Deliberate failure to follow these criteria would be treated as ethical misconduct, not only towards the journal but also towards University.

### **3.2 Plagiarism**

The Oxford Dictionary defines plagiarism as “*the practice of taking someone else's work or ideas and passing them off as one's own*”. In the context of scientific research, it can involve unattributed lifting of textual material or scientific ideas or actual research results. The most extreme example would be a deliberate attempt to pass off someone else's entire research project as one's own.

However, it can also involve (deliberate or unintentional) incorporation of some ideas or results of other researchers, without proper attribution, within one's own research publication. Though the degree of severity can vary, plagiarism always amounts to ethical misconduct and requires redressal. The use of someone else's work in one's own is not by itself unethical. A limited amount of textual material in someone else's paper can be copied if it is clearly marked as a quote (typically by enclosing it within quotation marks) *and* the source is explicitly cited where the quote starts or ends.

Alternatively, text may be paraphrased with a general indication of where the concepts originated. Occasional re-ordering or substituting of words is not sufficient to count as paraphrasing: the recommended procedure is to read and understand the source material, then put it away and express the idea in one's own words. Besides textual material, the incorporation of ideas, figures, graphs etc. from other sources in a manner that conveys a false impression that they are original amounts to plagiarism.

Taking one's own published results and reproducing them in another work as if they were new is "self-plagiarism". "Duplicate publication" – submitting the same research results to two or more journals and treating them as separate publications – is also a form of self-plagiarism and must be avoided.

Plagiarism is an issue not only for scientific publications but also for internal reports, textbooks, monographs and grant proposals. The considerations above apply equally in all these cases.

### **3.3 Thesis writing**

A thesis typically involves collecting a large amount of material, both previously established and original. The manner of presentation must be such as to make clear what has been taken from other sources with appropriate acknowledgement and permissions if required, and what is the original content. For a student, thesis writing is often the first major occasion that requires taking personal responsibility to handle ethical issues. Guidance should be imparted by the supervisor to make sure that data is presented appropriately and plagiarism, even inadvertent, is avoided.

Similarity to one's own published data in the thesis is acceptable only if it is within the period of research. Any thesis with similarity to external content more than the limit prescribed in **OA.19A** shall not be processed for evaluation.

### **3.4 Responsibility of referees**

Faculty members who are asked to review a manuscript or a research proposal have a responsibility to ensure that they do not misuse their advance access to the information and ideas in these documents. The use of such advance access to publish a competing work, or carry out research that pre-empts the proposed project, would be highly unethical.

## **4. Confidentiality**

Several aspects of academia require the maintaining of strict confidentiality. The proceedings and Minutes of certain meetings, as also assessments for hiring and promotion, are not to be discussed publicly. It is particularly important for the health of Goa University that candidates about whom positive or negative comments are made in confidence by specific members should not hear about these in a way that can create resentment or an inappropriate sense of obligation. Unauthorized circulation of confidential Minutes or other privileged communications, within or outside Goa University, amounts to a serious breach of academic ethics. For this purpose, it is best to consider all official emails and communications on such matters to be confidential unless it has been expressly clarified to the contrary.

## **5. Management of Academics**

### **5.1 Evaluations: hiring, promotion, awards**

The assessment of candidates for hiring, granting of tenure, promotion and awards is a regular activity in Goa University. While this necessarily involves some degree of subjective judgement, it is essential that an assessor takes great care to eliminate personal biases and extraneous considerations and proceed in a manner that is timely, visibly fair and balanced. The general criteria for hiring, assessment and awards should, as far as possible, be laid down in advance. It is inappropriate to introduce new criteria, not previously agreed upon, during an assessment process purely for the purpose of favouring or disqualifying specific candidates. When referee evaluations are used, they should be sought in writing.

### **5.2 Technology and materials transfer**

Research conducted at Goa University is based on the principle of the free dissemination of knowledge, and this also applies to collaborative research between Goa University and industry. Goa University subscribes to the principle that all inventions and discoveries emerging from publicly funded research should be made available for public benefit through appropriate technology transfer. Whenever inventions are patented or technology emerging from Goa University research is licensed for commercial use, care must be taken that the principle of free dissemination of scientific knowledge remains paramount.

When conducting research activities supported by external granting agencies or jointly with other research institutions, Goa University members must consider entering into clear agreements (formal or informal but explicit) which cover the nature of the collaboration, materials and technology transfer (whenever relevant), authorship of resulting publications and ownership of patentable inventions

these agreements must be consistent with the principles enunciated above. Memorandum of Understanding (MOUs) are essential for collaboration with industry and for certain public institution-funded research. They should clearly state the manner of sharing of proprietary data, time lines to avoid delay of publications and procedures to be followed for patentable data. Potentially patentable inventions that arise from collaborative research with industry carried out at Goa University are to be subject to stipulations of the MOU between the industry and University, set in place prior to the commencement of the research.

### **5.3 Bias and discrimination**

People of different ethnicities, socioeconomic strata, genders, ages, affiliations, backgrounds and sexual orientations enrich Goa University's academic community. There must be no direct or indirect bias or discrimination against any individual based on the above categories. Goa University aims for the full and equal participation of women in all academic activities. It is everyone's responsibility to foster a gender-neutral and supportive environment to achieve this goal.

### **5.4 Bullying and harassment**

In academia it is essential to promote an atmosphere of free and frank debate and exchange of ideas. In this context, any form of bullying including cyber bullying or harassment by individuals or pressure groups is not acceptable. Ragging of students, whether by other students or any University staff, is strictly prohibited and will invite punishment in accordance with Government of India and Supreme Court guidelines. For more information, see Goa University homepage: [www.unigoa.ac.in/systems/a/welfare/justice/antiragging.html](http://www.unigoa.ac.in/systems/a/welfare/justice/antiragging.html) as well as University Grants Commission site: <http://www.ugc.ac.in/page/Ragging-Related-Circulars.aspx>.

### **5.5 Interaction with public and media**

Statements made to the media should be as objective, fair and balanced as possible. The same holds for scientific information conveyed to the public. Faculty members and researchers are expected not to use the media to promote their own personal image or create a false or exaggerated impression of their achievements.

## **6. Conflict of interest**

Several types of situations can arise in academia where a person experiences a conflict of interest. Reviewers of manuscripts may find that the contents of the manuscript have a potential impact on their own research or financial interests. Assessors for a hiring / promotion / award may be personally related to a candidate. Researchers who are also shareholders of a company may find

themselves in a situation where their research could impact the company's financial situation. In all such cases it is essential for researchers to promptly disclose foreseeable conflicts of interest. It is not sufficient for the researcher to decide on their own to handle the matter objectively. The decision on whether the conflict of interest requires definite action (such as the researcher withdrawing from a committee) has to be taken by other responsible colleagues. Foreseeable research conflicts at University should be reported to the Vice Chancellor of Goa University, while potential conflicts during review of manuscripts should be reported to the journal editor. In case an assessor has a personal relation to a candidate in a hiring / promotion / award interview, this fact should be communicated to the committee Chair (or if the assessor in question is the Committee chair, then to the appointing authority of that Committee).

## **7. Reporting of misconduct**

Suspected ethical misconduct at Goa University must be reported to the Vice Chancellor. There will be no reprisal for complaints made in all sincerity and good faith, even if they later turn out to be unfounded. However, complaints that turn out upon investigation to have been falsely made with deliberate intent to malign the accused will be treated as a serious form of ethical misconduct. Duly signed complaints carrying the full name and address of the complainant can be made by anyone, not necessarily a University member. Some relevant documentation must be supplied along with the complaint in order for the Vice Chancellor to be able to decide whether there is a *prima facie* case. The complainant should not give wide publicity to the complaint at this stage. Such publicity, if it occurs, can be treated as ethical misconduct even if the complaint is found to have merit and continues to be investigated.

## **8. Mechanism to address complaints**

The Vice Chancellor will appoint a standing Committee on Academic Ethics for a pre-determined duration whose task is to investigate ethical complaints and also impart ethical training from time to time. The Vice Chancellor may also consult a broad-based Advisory Committee on ethical issues that involves Deans, Heads of Department and other faculty members.

### **8.1 Course of action**

Upon receiving an ethics complaint, the Vice Chancellor should decide whether there is *prima facie* merit in the allegations. Finding such merit does not imply that the complaint has been upheld but only that it has not been found obviously invalid or frivolous. To decide this, the Vice Chancellor may consult the Ethics Committee. At this stage, if appropriate the Vice Chancellor may, in consultation with the Ethics Committee, explore the possibility of an amicable solution through mediation. If this is successful, the complainant will modify or withdraw the complaint in writing. However, the complainant should not be coerced to accept mediation. If the Vice



Chancellor is satisfied that the complaint merits investigation it should be passed on in full, including supporting documents, to the Ethics Committee. Simultaneously the Vice Chancellor should communicate it to the subjects of the complaint, informing them that an investigation will take place with which they are required to cooperate fully. Their response to the complaint should be invited and passed on to the Ethics Committee. The Vice Chancellor should also inform the complainant that the complaint has been referred to a Committee for investigation. During the investigation period, both the complainant and the subjects of the complaint may submit information or documents to the Vice Chancellor, who shall forward these (if relevant) to the Ethics Committee. During this period, they should not communicate with the Committee except when invited to do so, and should also minimize their communications with the Vice Chancellor on this matter. The Ethics Committee should investigate the complaint carefully and with due discretion. During this period, it should try to hold a face-to-face meeting with both the complainant and the subjects of the complaint if possible. At the end of its investigations it will submit a written report to the Vice Chancellor of Goa University indicating the extent to which merit has, or has not, been found in the complaint, and suggesting remedial action if any is required. The Committee must not publicize the report at this stage. On receiving the report, the Vice Chancellor should communicate it in full both to the complainant and to the subjects of the complaint and invite their response. Thereafter the Vice Chancellor may decide to accept the report in full and implement it, or accept it partially, or reject it totally. In each case this decision should be communicated to the Ethics Committee. The final verdict on the case, including any redressal required, will take the form of a written statement by the Vice Chancellor communicated to the complainant, the subjects of the complaint and the Ethics Committee. The Ethics Committee report may be attached to this statement in full or part, if relevant. Any attempt to interfere with the functioning of the Ethics Committee in any manner, or refusal to cooperate with the investigation, constitutes an ethical violation by itself. This should be reported by the Committee to the Vice Chancellor for appropriate action.

## **8.2 Time frame**

The investigation of an ethics complaint cannot easily be assigned a time-frame. However, for relatively simple cases it is desirable that the first report be submitted within 1-2 months. More complex cases, particularly those requiring detailed investigation of scientific issues, can take as long as six months to a year or even more.