Research Ethics Policy

Introduction to the RE policy

Bethlehem University seeks to promote a culture of excellence in research and to uphold the highest ethical standards in research and academic integrity based on consistent adherence to the mission and vision of Bethlehem University as a Lasallian university, in accordance with the national and international guidelines that govern the ethical conduct of research.

Research, whether basic or practical, can be defined as the systematic investigation of a research question, problem, or phenomenon, grounded in rigorous disciplinary or interdisciplinary methodology and developed in the context of a certain theoretical framework, debate, or literature in a discipline or across disciplines. The ultimate objective of research is to produce, contribute to, and disseminate generalizable and original knowledge in the specific field of scholarship.

Vision and Mission of BU

Bethlehem University is a Catholic co-educational institution in the Lasallian tradition whose mission is to provide quality higher education to the people of Palestine and to serve them in its role as a center for the advancement, sharing and use of knowledge.

The University emphasizes excellence in academic programs and the development of students as committed people prepared to assume leading positions in society. The University aspires to fostering shared values, moral principles and dedication to serving the common good.

Vision and Mission of DoR

The mission of the Deanship of Research at Bethlehem University is to promote, in coordination with the Research Council and the Office of the Assistant Vice President for Teaching and Learning, a culture of excellence in research and to cultivate a thriving research culture in support of the University's calling in serving the needs of the Palestinian people and humanity.

RE Statement

This document provides a general framework that lays out the basic principles and standards of a research ethics policy for Bethlehem University. All research, including but not limited to research involving human subjects, animal participants, personal data, or human tissue, conducted in the name of or under the auspices of Bethlehem University should be reviewed and ethical clearance must be obtained, before data gathering commences. This ethical review and clearance process applies to all University faculty, staff and students, including collaborative projects involving researchers from other institutions or organizations. It also applies to research that comes under the aforementioned definition of research and that is undertaken in Palestine.

The vast majority of ethical questions in research involve compliance with, and the straightforward application of, internationally recognized ethical principles; however, the approval of research ethics in Palestine may require more complex considerations in light of the specific socio-political context, in which research is conducted and disseminated. Ethical considerations in research are, nonetheless, grounded in a continuous process of reflection, critique and assessment of the researcher's decisions throughout the whole research process.

These ethical considerations should apply not only the principle of benefice/ beneficence—that the benefits that research participants should obtain from the research justify the risks; they should also apply the non-maleficence principle—that the risks to the participants as a result of their involvement in the research should be minimal or completely nonpresent.

These considerations will pay attention to different matters, including but not limited to, privacy of all individuals who might be affected by the research, not just the research participants who are directly involved in the research; the duty of care, safety and well-being of all such individuals; the potential for harm, risk and distress to any such individuals and appropriate measures taken to mitigate these adverse effects where necessary; the disclosure of all information pertinent to these potential harm and risks involved in the study; the comprehensibility of questions being asked; the safety of data being generated; the rights of the subjects that are engaged in the research; the publication of results; and so on.

Particular attention will be given to vulnerable subjects such as children, the poor and marginalized, and those with no voice.

Researchers should also consider the purpose of the research, sources of funding, research methods, value to the community, wider impact, and the measures to be undertaken to safeguard and protect the rights and interests of others involved especially, local vulnerable communities.

It is the responsibility of the researchers to act in full compliance with these principles in light of the most recent ethical practices in their disciplines, their assessment and interpretation of these principles, and the realities on the ground in Palestine. It is also the responsibility of departments and colleges to educate faculty, staff and students on these principles and their

judicious implementation and ensure full compliance with these regulations.

External research requests submitted by non-BU faculty and other researchers must be submitted for "site-specific approval" at the researchers' respective institutions or organizations prior to its implementation within University premises and facilities. This ethical review process does not substitute for the legal, regulatory and governance requirements, which could be required in addition to the ethical clearance that must be obtained for specific types of research.

RE Committee: IRB

All research, including but not limited to human subjects, vertebrate animals, personal data, or human tissue, conducted by members of the BU community is subject to review and ethical clearance by the Independent Review Board (IRB). The IRB works with the research community at BU to ensure that the international ethical standards are met for the conduct of research.

The IRB members have the authority to approve, require modifications or disapprove the research proposal under review.

The IRB will report to the Dean of Research and through the DOR to the Vice President for Academic Affairs.

IRB Membership:

1. The Board shall include 6 qualified (PhD holders, whenever possible) members and will consist of members of the Research Council representing all university colleges and institutes:

- Faculty of Arts
- Faculty of Science
- Faculty of Business
- Faculty of Education
- Faculty of Nursing and Health Sciences

The members should represent the diversity of genders and religious traditions comprising the Bethlehem University community.

2. The Board must also include an external expert or adviser who will ensure that all research conducted in the name of the University is reviewed for compliance with the ethical review procedure.

3. If the Board is to review any research that involves children, prisoners, pregnant women,

or handicapped/ people with mental disabilities, an expert from these fields shall be called upon to serve.

4. This Board will be chaired by a senior member of faculty. The Dean of Research may act as the chairperson of the IRB at BU.

5. Where a piece of research in which there is an interest of a member of the Board is being considered that person will be excused for that item.

6. For any research proposal to be approved, it shall have the approval of the majority of the IRB members.

Procedures

IRB review of research.

1. The IRB shall have a copy of the informed consent signed by the subject and researcher.
2. The researcher and BU administration will be formally informed with the IRB decision of that proposal. In case of disapproval, reasons should be included.
3. The IRB has the authority to monitor and observe the consent process all over the research period.
4. The IRB chairperson should be informed by the researcher of any changes in the previously approved research activities.

Criteria for IRB approval:

1. The researcher must use the appropriate procedures to ensure that the risks to subjects are minimal.
2. The anticipated benefits to the subject must exceed any possible risks.
3. Each subject or an authorized representative of the subject (for children or subject with mental disability) must sign an informed consent which shall be written in an accessible language to the subject.
4. The privacy of the subjects must be protected.
5. The IRB has the authority to revoke the approval of research, if it is not conducted in accordance with the IRB regulations.
6. In case of joint research projects, BU is only responsible for the part conducted at its facilities by its researchers.
7. Research involving pregnant women or neonates should be based on published preclinical studies ensuring that the risks to the mother, her fetus or the neonates are absent or minimal.
8. Research involving nonviable neonates shall ensure that the functioning of the neonate will not be artificially maintained and that the research will not terminate the heartbeat or respiration or add any risk to the neonate.
9. Research involving human behavior or prisoners as subjects shall include an IRB member that has experience in the field.

IRB Records:

The IRB chairperson should have records of the followings:

1. The research proposal, sample consent form, progress reports, reports of injuries to subjects, to be provided by the researcher.
2. Minutes of the IRB meetings and decisions.
3. Copies of correspondence between the IRB and the researcher.

The informed consent shall include:

1. A statement on the purpose of research.
2. Duration of the subject participation.
3. The number of participating subjects in the research.
4. Description of the procedures to be applied to the subject.
5. Description of any anticipated benefit to the subject.
6. Description of the possible risks and available compensation or medical treatment.
7. Procedure to ensure the privacy of the subject.
8. A statement that the subject is voluntarily participating in the research and will have no penalty if he or she decided to withdraw.
9. A name of a reference to the subject--i.e, one of his/her first relatives.
10. Cost of the subject's participation, if any.
11. Signatures of the subject or his/ her legal guardian and the researcher.