

## Commerce Research Ethics Committee (COM REC)

### Terms of Reference

Title	Terms of Reference, Commerce Research Ethics Committee (COM REC)
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Person(s) responsible for drafting, review and revision	COM REC Interim Chair Commerce Deans Advisory Committee (DAC) COM REC Servicing Officer, for administrative support
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Approving body	Commerce Faculty Board, and submitted to EiRC for noting
Relevant related policies, procedures and guidelines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Standard Operating Procedure, COM REC</li> <li>• UCT Policy for Responsible Conduct of Research</li> <li>• UCT Research Ethics Code for Research Involving Human Participants</li> <li>• Register of Ethics Approvals for Research Conducted under the Auspices of UCT</li> <li>• Code for UCT Research Ethics Committee Members</li> <li>• Appeal to Ethics in Research Committee: Standard Operating Procedure</li> <li>• Conflict of Interest Policy</li> <li>• Policy and Standard Operating Procedure: Ethics Clearance and Permission to Engage UCT Staff and/or Students or their Data in Research</li> <li>• UCT Policy and Procedures for Breach of Research Ethics Codes and Allegations of Misconduct in Research</li> <li>• UCT Whistleblowing Policy</li> <li>• EiRC Recommendations: Standard criteria for inclusion in research invitations</li> <li>• UCT Guideline for Risk-Based Ethical Review of Research (Human Participants)</li> <li>• EiRC Guidelines and recommendations for the use of generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools in research</li> <li>• UCT Research Data Management Policy</li> <li>• The Commerce Practice Note on secondary data</li> </ul>

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### 1. Purpose and Scope

To ensure the protection of human rights and the well-being of human research participants based on ethical and integrity principles and norms, and compliance with the highest ethical standards in social and scientific research, including matters involving authorship and research misconduct, but excluding research involving animals.<sup>1</sup>

For avoidance of doubt, the Commerce Research Ethics Committee will consider and exercise oversight of the ethical aspects of all research proposals originating in the Faculty of Commerce that involve human participants, or secondary data collected on human subjects, including senior (i.e. 3<sup>rd</sup> or 4<sup>th</sup> year) undergraduate research projects required in part fulfilment of the degree, postgraduate research (irrespective of whether that research constitutes the whole or part of the degree), and research conducted by academic or research staff members and/or academic staff groupings in the Faculty.

Internal ethics applications that fall within the definition of 'Health Research' as defined in the National Health Act (61 of 2003), or from researchers, students, or groups outside of UCT will be handled by the Inter-Faculty Human Research Ethics Committee (IFHREC) in accordance with that Committee's mandated scope of responsibility.

### 2. Delegated authority of the committee

The Commerce Research Ethics Committee (COM REC) has been established to review and take decisions on ethics applications it receives from University of Cape Town staff and students in the Faculty of Commerce. The Commerce REC has been granted this authority by the Dean of the Faculty of Commerce, and the Commerce Faculty Board.

Furthermore, the Dean and Commerce Faculty Board, recognise the independence of the Commerce REC to make decisions within the scope of its terms of reference, standard operating procedure, institutional policies and international and national laws, with no undue influence or interference placed on the committee.

### 3. Membership

#### a. Composition

The membership of the Commerce REC shall consist of

- A Chair, appointed by the Dean of Commerce
- The Dean of the Faculty of Commerce, or their nominee (*ex officio*)
- The Deputy Dean of Research and Internationalisation of the Faculty of Commerce, or their nominee (*ex officio*)
- One representative elected from each academic department in the Faculty, and approved by the Dean of Commerce

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from the Senate Ethics in Research Committee Terms of Reference (2023, [https://uct.ac.za/sites/default/files/content\\_migration/uct\\_ac\\_za/87/files/SENATE\\_ETHICS\\_IN\\_RESEARCH\\_COMMITTEE\\_ToR.pdf](https://uct.ac.za/sites/default/files/content_migration/uct_ac_za/87/files/SENATE_ETHICS_IN_RESEARCH_COMMITTEE_ToR.pdf))

- A member of another Faculty's REC. Ideally, given disciplinary overlap, this member should come from HUM, SCI, or the GSB
- Up to two further members co-opted by the COM REC, and approved by the Dean of Commerce, to ensure sufficient domain expertise in research involving human subjects
- A representative from the Postgraduate Commerce Students' Council as an observer member.

The Dean of Commerce is responsible for seeking to ensure that the overall composition of the committee is diverse with respect to academic rank, gender, and race.

Collectively, the committee should include sufficient members with the necessary qualifications and experience, including research ethics training, to be able to review and evaluate the ethics of the proposed research, as well as to assess the anticipated layperson's perspective.

#### *b. Servicing Officer*

The Servicing Officer shall be appointed by the Dean of Commerce, in consultation with the Commerce Faculty Manager.

The Servicing Officer shall be responsible for:

- Scheduling of meetings, in consultation with the Chair, as necessary.
- Securing an appropriate venue for meetings, or provision of online meeting links.
- Preparing meeting agendas, in consultation with the Chair.
- Distributing the meeting agendas at least 7 days prior to a meeting.
- Recording or taking notes for the meetings.
- Providing attendance registers with appropriate declarations pertaining to conflicts of interest and/or commitment and confidentiality.
- Preparing meeting minutes for review by the Chair and/or Executive Committee (Exco).
- Inclusion of those minutes in a forthcoming agenda for review and/or approval.
- Obtaining the Chair's signature for the minutes, following committee approval.
- Maintenance and provision of a suitable shared repository for committee documents (including but not limited to prior agendas, minutes, project applications, outcome letters and other relevant committee documents).
- Recording of any action items agreed to in committee meetings, including the person responsible and timeframes for completion.
- Liaising with committee members to ensure that action items are completed within the agreed timeframes.
- Other administrative duties as assigned by the Chair of the COM REC

In the event a Servicing Officer is unavailable, a substitute Servicing Officer must be seconded by the Faculty Manager to service the COM REC.

#### *c. Term of office*

Committee members will be appointed for a period of four (4) years, aligned with the regular UCT Committee cycle. Committee members may serve two (2) consecutive terms, following which they are not eligible for further membership until at least one appointment cycle (4 years) has lapsed. Joining the committee mid-cycle would not result in that time served counting as one of the two successive terms. After a break in service, committee members are eligible to be reappointed to the Commerce REC. Such breaks in service would not preclude individuals from serving on other UCT REC's, where those REC's Terms of Reference would inform their eligibility.

The Committee will commence consideration of its reconstitution nine to twelve months before the end of its term of office.

*d. Letters of appointment*

Committee members shall be provided with letters of appointment issued by the Dean of Commerce. The Servicing Officer is permitted to assist in the preparation of the letters of appointment, provided they are reviewed and signed by the appropriate authority in the Faculty of Commerce.

Letters of appointment shall include the following information:

- Name of individual.
- Position they will hold on the committee (in relation to the committee composition).
- Name of committee to which they are being appointed.
- Duration of the appointment, including the start and end dates.
- Information related to professional liability insurance provided by the institution.
- Expectations related to induction and ongoing training, including where to find resources and who to contact for assistance.

A committee member must formally accept their appointment to the REC, in writing, to the Servicing Officer and Chair. This acceptance must also include a commitment to complete the necessary training to actively and regularly participate in REC activities, including review of applications received and, a commitment to acting in accordance with the REC Code (as per 3.m. below).

*e. Appointment of a Chair*

The Chair of the COM REC is appointed by the Dean of Commerce, after consultation with the Faculty of Commerce Dean's Advisory Committee.

The Chair of the COM REC would normally have served one full term as a member of the COM REC before appointment as Chair to ensure continuity and familiarity with COM REC processes and procedures. In addition, the Chair should be a senior academic (Associate Professor or above), or have demonstrable experience in the assessment and handling of sensitive issues relating to research ethics.

*f. Duties of the REC Chair*

The Chair of the REC is expected to guide the efficient and ethical functioning of the committee. The Chair will work closely with the Servicing Officer to ensure that meeting documentation is sufficiently and timeously prepared, shared with the committee and stored in the repository and that scheduled meetings are run in accordance with this terms of reference and the accompanying standard operating procedure.

The Chair will also be responsible for:

- Signing off on research project outcomes letters.
- Reviewing responses to the pre-screening questionnaire and determining whether applications are exempt from ethics review or need to proceed with a full ethics application. (This task may also be shared with the Deputy Chair(s) and/or Exco.)
- Reviewing and signing off on annual reports to the EiRC and other institutional bodies.
- Ensuring that any declared conflicts of interest/commitment are suitably addressed in the functioning of the committee and decisions it makes.
- The regular review, development, monitoring of the COM REC's Terms of Reference and Standard Operating Procedures.

- In collaboration with the Servicing Officer, the Chair will monitor induction and ongoing or refresher ethics training of committee members, including reporting of these activities to the EIRC.
- In collaboration with the Servicing Officer, ensure that action items identified in meetings are attended to and completed by the responsible persons.

*g. Election of a Deputy Chair(s)*

The members of the COM REC will elect from among themselves a Deputy Chairperson.

*h. Duties of the REC Deputy Chair(s)*

The Deputy Chair of the COM REC is expected to assist the Chairperson with responsibilities, and matters that may arise in between meetings of the COM REC, and to act as the Chair of the COM REC, with delegated authority, in the absence of the Chair of the COM REC.

*i. Executive Committee*

The COM REC shall have an executive committee composed of

- The Chair of the COM REC
- The Deputy Chair of the COM REC
- One other member of the COM REC, elected by the COM REC

The Executive Committee has delegated authority to act in its discretion on behalf of the COM REC in between meetings of the COM REC. Matters that are deemed by the Executive Committee to be of sufficient importance and/or consequence (including, but not limited to, consideration of reports of violation of ethics protocols) must be referred to a full meeting of the COM REC.

Decisions made by the Executive Committee in between meetings of the COM REC must be reported in the agenda of the immediately succeeding meeting of the COM REC.

*j. Duties of committee members*

REC members and researchers are expected to familiarise themselves with the institutional documentation as well as national and international research ethics guidelines and should have documented proof of such familiarity.

Members are expected to attend all meetings of the COM REC, and to undertake such ethics reviews as allocated to them.

A member of the COM REC on sabbatical or leave for more than six months may be replaced by an alternate member drawn from the same constituency as the substantive member with the agreement of the Chair of the COM REC. That alternative member will be expected to undergo the training requirements specified in (k) below and to perform all duties that would normally fall to the substantive member. Time spent as an alternative member will not count towards a full term, in cases where such a member is later appointed to the committee as a substantive member.

#### *k. Training requirements*

As a condition of assuming membership of the COM REC, all members are required to undergo training on

- Principles of ethical research
- Use of the administrative system used to review and approve ethics applications

Training on the principles of ethical research will be by means of [self-paced online modules produced by the UCT Office of Research Integrity](#). Members of the committee will be required to lodge certificates of completion within 2 months of appointments with the COM REC Servicing Officer in respect of the following modules:

- 1: Introduction to Research Integrity
- 2: Misconduct and Questionable Research Practices
- 3: Authorship and Publication Practices
- 4: Research involving Human Participants
- 5: Managing and Sharing Human Research Data
- 7: Ethical Review Essentials: Key Insights

Failure to complete the above training within 3 months of appointment will result in suspension of membership of the COM REC.

Training on the use the administrative system used to review and approve ethics applications will be provided for the committee by the Research Systems team in the Research Office. Specific procedural use of the electronic Research Administration (eRA) system, as determined by the COM REC processes, will be provided within the committee and is outlined in the appropriate manuals.

Periodic training (and refresher training) will be provided within the COM REC, where necessary drawing on skills within the Office of Research Integrity.

Members of the committee are expected to familiarise themselves, particularly, on the definitions of Health Research, and the processes for handling ethics applications that fall within the ambit of Health Research, where these cannot be considered by COM REC and must be referred to either the Health Sciences REC or the Inter-Faculty Human REC (IFHREC) as appropriate.

#### *l. Membership list*

The membership list shall be kept up-to-date by the committee's Servicing Officer, in consultation with the Chair and the Faculty of Commerce Deanery.

The membership list shall appear of the front of each agenda and minutes document produced.

#### *m. Conduct of committee members*

Members of the Commerce REC shall conduct themselves in accordance with the [UCT Code for Research Ethics Committee members](#).

Members shall be required to review the Code as part of their induction training and confirm that they agree to act in accordance with the code.

#### 4. Committee records and documentation

The committee shall have access to a shared repository. This repository shall take the form best suited to the needs of the committee (for example, the internal governance intranet, a Vula site or an MS Teams site). The repository shall contain at least the following documents:

- i. Current and previous terms of reference documents.
- ii. Current and previous standard operating procedure documents.
- iii. Current and previous guidelines, practice notes or recommendations developed by the committee.
- iv. Record of current and previous committee membership, including member attendance, apologies and absences.
- v. Agendas, minutes and supporting documentation pertaining to meetings, stored per year and then per meeting, to enable ease of access and searching.
- vi. Current and previous annual reports prepared for the EiRC and other bodies to which the REC reports.
- vii. Record of the training that committee members have undertaken, when that training took place, the service provider, and any additional or refresher training undertaken by committee members.
- viii. Any incidents or deviations from ethics practices or policies which have been reviewed by the committee.

#### 5. Availability of committee documentation

The following documentation shall be made available on a publicly accessible website, to keep the operations of the REC as transparent as is possible:

- i. Most recent or currently approved terms of reference
- ii. Most recent or currently approved standard operating procedures
- iii. Most recent or currently approved guidelines, practice notes, recommendations, how-to/user manuals for the eRA system
- iv. A link to the eRA system for applications
- v. Contact details for the Chair and/or Servicing Officer so that queries may be directed appropriately, this may be a shared committee email account.

#### 6. Accountability, oversight, and reporting

##### *a. Annual Reporting*

##### *Faculty oversight and reporting*

The COM REC is appointed by the Dean of Commerce. It is therefore accountable to the Dean.

The COM REC shall make an annual report available to the Dean of the Faculty of Commerce, and the Commerce Faculty Board. The report shall summarise the activities of the committee for the preceding year, including the number of ethics project applications received, those approved or rejected and, reasons for rejection.

##### *Reporting to the Senate Ethics in Research Committee (EiRC)*

The REC is also accountable to the EiRC, the umbrella body of all Faculty and Departmental RECs across the institution.



The committee shall make an annual report available to the EiRC. The report shall summarise the activities of the committee for the preceding year, including the number of ethics project applications received, those approved or rejected and, reasons for rejection. The EiRC shall provide a reporting template to the Faculty REC to complete to streamline and harmonise the reporting practices across the institution.

*b. Incident or deviation reporting*

The REC shall report any incidents that deviate from ethics and integrity best-practice or institutional policy to the Dean of Commerce. The report shall include a summary of the incident, the deliberative process that REC engaged in to reach a decision, what that decision is, any remedial action recommended and the progress of the remedial action.

The REC shall have a standard operating procedure to manage and address any instances of ethical deviations or non-compliance with ethics regulations and policies.

Any incidents may also be reported to the EiRC, either at a regular committee meeting or in the annual report process, whichever route the Chair deems is most appropriate.

## 7. Remuneration of committee members

Members of the Commerce REC will not receive remuneration for their role on the REC.

Members may request a letter from the Servicing Officer, signed by the Chair, confirming the length and type of service on the committee to include in *ad hominem* promotion applications.

Given the burdens of time and responsibility that attaches to service on the Commerce REC, and particularly to the Chair, Faculty of Commerce promotions and awards committees are expected to afford particular weight to service on the Commerce REC when considering applications for promotion or awards.

## 8. Authorship and acknowledgement

The template document for Faculty Terms of Reference (ToR) was developed by Mrs Paula Saner (Manager, Office of Research Integrity). Each Faculty has permission to edit and adjust the template to suit faculty needs and practices. The COM REC ToR were drafted by Professor Tom Moultrie in accordance with the template document in April 2024 and submitted to the Faculty Board in August 2025.

The [National Health Research Ethics Council \(NHREC\) Ethics in Health Research Guidelines](#) (v3 2024) provided useful information which has been incorporated into these Terms of Reference.

Thanks go to the internal audit team for recommendations for improving ethics governance structures at UCT through strengthening and harmonising (where possible) documentation and processes.