Academic Research Policy and Ethics at the Arab Open University (AOU)

Adopted by AOU University Council

Meeting No. 63, on 11 July 2018

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Introduction:

This document is divided into two parts:

Part One contains the "Academic Research Policy at the Arab Open University".

Part Two contains "Academic Research Ethics at the Arab Open University Bylaws".

Article (1): Nomenclature

This document is named: "**Academic Research Policy and Ethics at the Arab Open University**"

Part I: Academic Research Policy

Article (2): Reasons/Objectives of this Policy

In view of the gradual change of the AOU from a teaching establishment into a teaching/research establishment, the need to formulate a research policy which identifies the priorities of academic research and its responsibility, in addition to catalyst research projects. This policy also determines the research administering system and procedures in the aim of developing the AOU's performance and its research capabilities. The catalyst research projects in the Arab Open University are fully described in the bylaws named **"The Academic Research Policy at the Arab Open University".** The ethical sides and academic research controls, however, shall be delineated in **Part II** of this document.

Article (3): Research Types & Priorities

Research work is generally defined as any type of fact-finding in an organized way aiming to contribute to the development of human knowledge. There are four major types of research:

1. Basic research
2. Strategic research
3. Applied research
4. Experimental research

Basic and experimental types of research aim to build novel theoretical or experimental knowledge in which the thinking process is stimulated in an organized manner concerning why certain natural or human phenomena happen to achieve the basic goal represented by increasing our knowledge for understanding[1].

Applied research, however, is the true search for novel facts targeting a specific practical aim[2].

If we take into consideration the present stage of the development of the research process at the University and the efforts which are being made to make an active contribution to the growth and the socio-economic development of the local society, (or that which embraces the civic community and the private and public sectors), we will observe that the AOU concentrates on applied research programmes. Thus, the internal grants pay special attention to this type of research. However, this does not mean disregarding other types of research.

The University must identify certain areas of strategic (applied) research in the different colleges. These areas ought to encompass strategic research that represents sources of research power capable of attracting enough researchers from all AOU branches to form the required mass of researchers. Moreover, these research topics should be able to attract external sources in the aim of collaborating or financing, which is considered one of the important aspects of developing the local community.

Article (4): The Responsibility of the Teaching Staff Members and the University

Contributing to the development of human knowledge through high-quality research works is considered a basic element of the university's message. It also consorts with its aspirations and its strategy. Therefore, all full-time staff members ought to engage in research work. The research rating of any university depends on the sum total of research papers produced by its staff members or students. Normally, the largest contributions are those of the staff members, and since they contribute to the growth of knowledge, they support and enrich students' leaning experiences.

Producing research papers, which are later published, is one of the conditions stated in the contract between the University and all full-time teaching staff. It is also considered a major factor in renewing their contracts.

While the teaching staff accord keen attention to research and to developing their academic and professional experience, the University undertakes the task of providing support for the development of its staff and for promoting research projects. In general, the University does the following:

- Instituting and building the suitable administrative frameworks and infrastructures that support research and promote continuing education activities.
- Drawing up plans aimed to develop research in areas that are commensurate with the University's message and with its strategies, as well as working to provide the environment suitable for implementing such plans.
- Providing grants and other incentives that encourage innovative research
- Developing and providing a safe research environment that takes into account research ethics

- Increasing the number of employees, ensuring their continuity, and increasing their chances of excellence in doing research

Article (5): Research Development and Management

Research development and management include several links that complete one another:

- The Chief Researcher
- The Dean and the faculty's Research Development Committee
- The Research Committee in an AOU Branch
- The Supreme Academic Research Committee
- Office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs

First: The Chief Researcher

A. The Chief Researcher shoulders the responsibility of conducting the research and of providing the immediate supervisor with reports specifying the progress achieved in the research and publishing its results. Being the first person responsible for the research, the Chief Researcher ought to assume two tasks: the administrative responsibility (i.e. administering the project) and the academic responsibility.

1. **On the administrative level**, the Chief Researcher does the following:
- Determining financing opportunities (if the research required such financing)
- Preparing an application for such support in consultation with the concerned parties in the University and after making sure that the application abides by the ethical, security and other standards required by the University and the financing side
- Managing the finances in line with existing and agreed rules and regulations, in addition to presenting the required financial reports
- Presenting reports showing the extent of research progress, and proposing any changes in the agreed research terms, stressing the need to obtain prior approval if the contract is affected by such changes
- Supervising all the administrative aspects of the project for which the chief researcher is responsible.

2. **On the academic level**, the Chief Researcher is responsible for the following:

- Determine the limits of the research task.

- Select team members.

- Supervise all work stages and aspects, and ensure that it is moving according to the designed plan and in line with the ethical framework set by the AOU ensuring commitment to the highest degree of professionalism and quality assurance.

- Prepare reports in accordance with the directives of the financing party and in the highest degree of quality, and work on publishing the research results in accordance with the terms of the agreement.

Make necessary arrangements with the relevant sides in the University concerning intellectual property or copyright as necessary.

B. Some research projects require more than one Chief Researcher when the project has proliferated in terms of topics, specializations, and geographic locations. In such cases, it would be difficult for a single person to manage the project solely. Therefore, some projects may need an assistant to the Chief Researcher.

Second, the Dean and the Faculty Research Development Committee

A. The dean has full authority to encourage and urge all members of the faculty's teaching staff to get involved in academic research activities. The Dean also forms the Research Development Committee (RDC) that represents the AOU branches and consists of high-ranking staff members who are active in producing research works.

B. The tasks of RDC include the following:

- Organizing regular seminars on research methods (and their development worldwide) which serve the faculty'

- Preparing research plans that are commensurate with the University's message, its policies as well as the faculty's strategy, in addition to supporting, observing, and following up these plans

- Facilitating the procedure of forming research groups among AOU branches to carry out a specific short or long-term research project and reporting applications for external support and receiving financial support from the Central Committee for Research Development

- Helping academic staff members locate sources of finance by collecting information about, and preparing a list of, the finance agencies that are related to the research projects undertaken by the faculty.

- Supporting low-ranking staff members through training programmes for carrying out research projects and supervising them

- Encouraging collaboration with researchers from other universities, with research centres and with the local community

- Stimulating and encouraging undertaking research projects that are of interest to multiple colleges within the same AOU branch and also across branches

- Submitting regular reports, via the Dean, to the office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs

Third: The Branch Academic Research Committee

A. A committee is formed in each AOU branch comprising research-active high-ranking teaching staff members. All faculties must be represented in this committee. The branch Rector appoints the chairman and members of this committee.

B. The said committee undertakes the following tasks:

- Organize seminars about the University's policies and prepare research booklets. This committee can seek the help of the Supreme Committee for Academic Research or from the office of the Vice President for Academic Affairs.

- Ensure adequate training for supervisors of research grants who shall help applicants for internal and external support. (The training ought to be done centrally)

- Announce the research projects that are submitted for internal grants; receive them, and choose the accepted ones.

- Collect information about local research-financing agencies, and encourage requests for external finances from internal and external sources of the branch.

- Using the Electronic Research Gate (ERG) in the branch for all sent and received correspondences.

Fourth: The Supreme Research Committee

A. The Supreme Research Committee (SRC) shall undertake the task of supervising and administering research projects done in the Arab Open University. It shall include high-ranking teaching staff members responsible for research development, in addition to the Vice President for Academic Affairs, and the Deans. This committee shall be supported by the Central Research Bureau.

B. The SRC tasks shall include the following:

- Revise and support research development plans in the faculties and provide consultations and advice to them.

- Administer the University's Central Grants it is in charge of. (for more details, refer to the Research Policy at the Arab Open University and The Research Grants & Contracts Guide).

- Build and develop strategic research partnerships with universities and research establishments, as well as principal corporations in the local community, in addition to regional and international development agencies.

- Search for research financing opportunities in the form of donations from agencies specialized in research development and funding, and from charity organizations.

- Organize conferences and seminars on contemporary issues connected with the University's interests.

- Encourage and support research projects shared among AOU branches and faculties.

- Train supervisors of research projects (at least two from each branch) as well as HQ staff, to help staff members select research projects and present applications for internal and external support.

- Provide aid to research development committees in the branches in organizing seminars about the University's research policies and guide, when such help is requested.

- Receive and provide feedback on regular progress reports provided by Research Development Committees in the faculty or the branch.

- Use the ERG in all sent and received correspondences and information related to research.

Fifth:The Role Undertaken by the Vice President for Academic Affairs:

A. The Vice President for Academic Affairs (VPAA) shall be responsible to the AOU President for managing all research projects undertaken by the university staff through the administrative and technical support he receives from the Central Research Bureau and other sides.

B. The VPAA shall undertake the following tasks:

- Draft the strategies, policies, rules and regulations which govern research to be presented through the AOU President for approval of the concerned sides in the University.

- Prepare the Central Research Budget and control expenditure so that it stays in line with the broad framework of the University's budget and with its in-force financial rules and regulations in-force.

- Chair the Supreme Research Committee.

- Receive all reports of research activities from the Deans, Branch Rectors and the Central Research Bureau.

- Report research activities to the concerned bodies in the university via the AOU President.

- Manage the individual property rights at the University in collaboration with the Central Research Bureau.

Sixth: the Central Research Bureau (CRB)

A. The CRB is regarded as the central unit for the management and coordination of research activities at the University. It provides administrative and technical support for the VRAA and for The Supreme Committee for Academic Research.

B. The CRB does the following:

- Collect reports from Research Development Committee of the Faculty and of the branches and prepare them for presentation to the VPAA and to the Supreme Committee for Academic Research.

- Observe the commitment to internal rules and regulations and to those put by the supporting/sponsoring side for all the research projects requesting external financing. The Centre also examines and manages applications for internal finance presented to the Supreme Committee of Academic Research (Please review The Research Grants Policy at the Arab Open University and The Research Grants Guide as well as The Contracts Management).

- Prepare a central list and collect information from research support agencies of interest to the AOU in the countries which host its branches as well as on the regional and international levels, with the help of academic research committees in the branches and research development committees in the faculties. The list referred to above ought to be made available on the Electronic Research Gate (ERG).

- Administer the contents of the ERG of the HQ.

- Help organize training to understand the research guide and policies in the branches when need arises.

Article (6): Research Values and Social Responsibilities

A. The University must find the right research environment that respects ethical and cultural values and mirrors transparency, objectivism, confidentiality, integrity, accountability and social responsibility.

B. While researchers enjoy freedom of choosing their research topics and ways of gathering information to reach adequate results, they have to remain fully committed to the above-mentioned values in selecting their research methods and in managing their research and its outcomes. (For more information, see the document entitled "Research Conduct and Ethics").

C. When they conduct research, all researchers should abide by the University's policies, rules and procedures, in addition to commitment to the conditions asked for by the financier for projects supported by external bodies. The researchers' results ought to be subject to inquiry and scrutiny by their colleagues.

D. All researchers: staff members, students or any other person doing research in the name of AOU must be trained on how to do research in a responsible manner. The Deans, academic research committees, and the Rectors make sure that researchers undertake

adequate training by all available means (electronic and face-to-face) in the form of groups.

Article (7): Development in Conducting Research

A. Since the dissemination of knowledge is one of the principal targets of the University, it is committed to development and variation in conducting research. It also believes that the results of research ought to be made available for all through publication or any other means. However, this vision by the university may need needs scrutiny and investigation if the University or the financing agency owns the intellectual property rights, and that the need for protecting the value of intellectual property which may have a commercial/marketing value require delaying the publishing results. In this case the two parties must agree on the delaying process, its period as determined by the agreement with the financing party.

B. The University does not accept that its staff or students do the research on its premises or use the support given to them by it which is considered confidential. If the researcher or the University receives basic confidential information from the financing agency or from a third party, the commitment to confidentiality must not prevent the right to publish the research results, otherwise such information must not be used.

C. One of the responsibilities of the Chief Researcher is to inform the University authorities, he reports to, of any information in accordance with the terms of confidentiality of the agreement concluded with the external financing agency before an agreement is signed. If such financing agency was given the right to publish the results of the research, and certain amendments were made without the consent of the University and the researcher, the University and the researcher have the right to erase their names from the list of researchers.

Article (8): Ownership of Research Records and Keeping them

A. Research records must be saved and protected in a proper way. This is the responsibility of the Chief Researcher in the first place and of the University as these two parties have the right to use these records. If the agreement with financier does not state otherwise, the results or research works done under the aegis of the University belong to it.

B. Research records should include all the relevant documents, records and materials which are considered necessary for documentation purposes, for the re-structuring of the same, or for the assessment and the scrutiny of research results, incidents and processes which lead up to the ownership of these documents[3].

C. These records ought to include, *inter alia*, administrative information (original, copied or electronic), documents and recorded correspondences, or meetings (written or voice recorded).

D. The University's responsibility includes, not necessarily solely, keeping records when need be for the following reasons[4]:

- Commitment to the agreements signed with financing agencies.

- Protection of the intellectual property resulting from the research work

- Ensuring the proper administration of research including the human element

- Simplifying and easing the processes of making sure that no professional offenses or violations of ethics exist.

- Protecting the rights of the persons involved in the research process to reach information or records

The records must be kept for the duration of period in which these doubts remain, and students' records shall be retained until they graduate. When the researchers leave the University, they have the right to take a copy (not the original) of the research records in which they participated. Moreover, if the Chief Researcher moves to another institute before the end of the project and there are no arrangements that allow him/her to complete the project within the University, he will be entitled to take the records to the new establishment, provided that the AOU President approves this option.

Article (9): Research Leave

A. A teaching staff member may apply for a research leave with the consent of the Rector and following consultation with the concerned Dean and the University's Academic Research Committee, provided that the following conditions are met:

1. That the teaching staff member had spent 6 continuous years in the service of the University when he applies for the leave.

2. That he has a solid research plan which leads to the production of high-quality research.

3. That s/he has a good research record during his/her service in the University

4. That the Branch Rector and the concerned unit head make necessary arrangements, without any financial implications, to cover his/her teaching duties and any administrative responsibilities during the vacation.

B. The period of the leave may reach up to 12 months during which s/he shall receive 75% of his/her full salary. The remaining 25% shall be delayed until the end of the leave as is customary and to the fullest extent. The applicant must submit a report within 3 months following the end of the leave.

C. If the concerned Rector and Dean report positively on the correct implementation of the leave, the deferred 25% of the salary shall be paid to him/her. However, in case the Rector and the Dean do not reach an agreed decision, the President of the University shall decide on the issue. The staff member concerned must sign a pledge to serve the

University for two years after the research leave. The University shall decide on what it deems suitable on whether to continue to hire the person involved or not.

Article (10): Research Centres

Research Centres play a pivotal role in developing and supporting research activities within the University, and in accomplishing its message. These centres contribute effectively to the enrichment of the academic life and to the upholstering of interaction with the local community, in addition to building new and fruitful relations in several fields and specializations.

First: the Principles

The following are the general principles that organize and govern the process of establishing Research Centres in the Arab Open University:

A. A Research Centre in the Arab Open University is considered an officially established AOU Unit. Its establishment ought to be approved by the AOU Board of Trustees according to the following:
1. That the Research Centre has a professional message and aims that accord with the University's message and its objectives and with the strategy of the faculty (If the Centre is established within a certain faculty.)
2. That the Centre, by its nature, but not necessarily, is multidisciplinary, and that it must witness cooperation between AOU faculties and branches.
3. That it contains a number of researchers who are conscious of the University's aims and the scope of its work.
4. That it has adequate financing resources capable of attracting external finance.
5. That it cooperates with researchers from other universities, research centres, and the civil and industrial community.
6. A research centre can be established in collaboration with another institute or institutes.
7. That it does not usually necessitate the appointment of new full-time teaching staff members.
8. The Centre must concentrate primarily on conducting research. However, it is possible to combine research and training and/or consultative services to recover expenses.

Secondly: Governance

The Research Centre must be characterized by the following:

1. It should have its own bylaws stressing the need to describe its message, its aims its geographic location, its partnerships, its members, its administrative council and the meetings it holds, in addition to explaining how its director is appointed and selected, and revealing its sources of finance and its systems of delivery and communication of information.

2. It ought to be administered by its management board based on a recommendation by the AOU President and the approval of the Board of Trustees.
3. It must have a Director who reports to the Dean who in turn reports to Vice-President for Academic Affairs (VPAA) in case the Centre is established within the faculty. Otherwise, the responsibility of the Director of the Centre goes immediately to the VPAA.
4. It is subject to numerous reviews whose nature and method are outlined by relevant bylaws.
5. Its membership terms, responsibilities, and rights must be fully defined.
6. The university's name, and its logo are put next to centre's name.

Article (11): Intellectual Property Rights

This section includes the AOU policy concerning intellectual property rights.

First: Copyright, Patents and Invention Rights[5]

The general understanding of copyright is the "ownership and observation of intellectual property in the original works that are composed." As these rights are subject to some limitations and expectation, the copyright owner has absolute rights to reproduce the work, to derive other works from it, and to disseminate copies of it through selling it and through similar actions. He also has the right to display his work or to produce it publicly.

Invention is defined as a good and useful idea related to machines, tools, manufacturers and materials.

A patent is a permit issued by a government or a union of governments (like the European Union, EU) which grant the no person other than the inventor the right to produce, use, or sell the invented product within the territories of the issuing government.

Second: Ownership, Declaration and Governance[6]

A. The University reserves copyrights in the following situations:
   - Works financed by it.
   - Works started by it for specific aims.
   - Works produced during a specific period and built on the results of the works of a group of teaching staff and/or students
   - Assigned teaching material of courses
   - Works produced by the University's teaching staff and its students through basically using its own materials
   - Works produced by the University's employees within their normal job duties.

B. In all these cases, the AOU employees and students who authorize any work shall have the copyrights of their work unless such copyrights are given to a third party.

C. Ownership of works done by external individuals or institutions employed by the university as consultants or contractors shall go to these persons unless stated otherwise in the agreement.

D. Authors can apply for reproduction of copyright ownership of their works that the University had kept for one of the reasons mentioned above. In this case the sole authority is the University President who can approve or reject such requests. If approved, the University and the individual(s) concerned shall share the returns of these works.

E. The authors shall keep the moral rights of their works which fall under AOU ownership, and they have the right to use them for non-profit purposes. However, they are not entitled to transform them to a third party if the   AOU President did not approve such action. In this case, a third party has no right to use them for commercial purposes.

F. If the authors estimated or expected that their works may have commercial value, they shall have to fill in a disclosure form in which they make clear the nature of intellectual property (copyright) and how these works can have commercial benefit to the University. Then, the University will determine whether to request intellectual property, to demand a share in it, or to let the author(s) have it.

G. The administration and supervision of the intellectual property rights shall be done by The Vice President for Academic Affairs and by the Central Bureau of Research. Should the authors object to a decision by the VPAA, they can appeal the decision to the AOU President who will then form a committee whose members will meet with the author and send their recommendations to the President for a final decision.

Article (12): The Electronic Research Gate

The Electronic Research Gate (ERG) shall be a store for all information related to research in the Arab Open University. The ERG provides access to all research policies and booklets. It also allows research projects to be presented, in addition to observing and following up the progress achieved in such projects (Please refer to: **"The Policy of Research Grants at the Arab Open University"**).

- Through ERG, faculties and branches can send research reports electronically via a form that ERG provides.
- ERG can be used in all correspondences related to research activities in AOU. It ought to be mentioned here that the available part of ERG, contains lists of completed research works and others which are still being done at the University, in addition to other items which involve announcing the publication of research results done at AOU.

Part Two: Ethics of Academic Research at AOU

Introduction

Academic freedom means freedom of teaching and learning as well as following up research without interference not warranted by the law, by institutional pressure or by public pressure.

Research freedom means the freedom of researchers to investigate any subject that raises intellectual and human interest and to present results in a professional and specialized manner without any control or censorship. However, integrity, accountability, and responsibility in conducting research constitute the foundation stone in any research institution academic or otherwise. The violation of any known research standards or principles constitutes a huge damage to each of the establishment conducting research and to the community that aspires to develop knowledge.

Being aware of the significance of the principles that determine academic research ethics, the Arab Open University points out in this part its own ethical values which shall be applicable to all its researchers be they teaching staff, students and all persons using its facilities to do supported or unsupported research.

This part aims to encourage correct research activities and to preserve them through the provision of clear academic principles to control the ethics of research at the Arab Open University.

While academic research is defined as a type of organized research and investigation which contributes to the development of human knowledge, the ethics of academic research mean implementing the ethical principles and the bylaws of professional conduct which organize any research work, starting from planning, and going through collecting and analyzing data, to declaring and publishing results.

Commitment to ethical principles leads to the achievement of the aims and results of the research activity. This commitment also strengthens objectivity and originality in research in the aim of achieving highest standards.

Since the research process relies on collective effort and coordination among individuals and establishments, the moral/ethical principles such as justice, trust, respect, confidentiality, and collective responsibility for protecting collaborating sides, whether they are individuals or institutions, contribute to reinforcing the values that are deemed necessary for collective work.

Implementing moral/ethical values asserts commitment on the part of researchers to the principle of accountability before the public opinion through avoidance of any acts or misconduct that damage academic research and adversely affect ways of dealing with them if they happen to occur. Defining the so-called conflict of interests and avoiding it, protecting research samples and taking care of animals are also instances of good practice.

Since commitment to professional and ethical standards in doing research helps support the research process, various establishments agree to support and finance research projects as soon as they are sure of the quality of the proposed research topic and its

integrity. Many ethical research benchmarks aim to sustain social and moral values. In general, the ethics of academic research at the Arab Open University deal with ethical issues related solely to non-clinical research projects.

Article (13): Ethical Standards and Principles of Good Practice in Academic Research

First: Aims and Scope

- The Academic Research Ethics Bylaws at the Arab Open University aim to present ethical standards and principles of good practice in all the University's faculties and its branches.
- Everything that is spelled out in this document shall be applicable to every person who conducts research in the University or in its name including teaching staff members, students, visiting professors, fellowship members, and consultants.
- These bylaws determine AOU's commitment to formulation of regulatory bylaws that organize the research process. They also seek, through the University's rules, regulations and policies, to enable all researchers to identify ethical, practical, and intellectual challenges which accompany the process of seeking to achieve excellence in academic research.

Second: Basic Ethical Values

The following are a group of general ethical values and practices that apply not only to academic and scientific research in general, but also to all sides of social conduct. They have been highlighted here because of their connection with academic research.

A. **Transparency and Honesty**
   Honesty and transparency are regarded as basic factors in the relationship between the researcher, the research sample, and other concerned sides. Researchers ought to be honest and transparent regarding their research and the researches of others. They also must make sure that the research aims, designs, methodologies, data, and results are subject to scrutiny concerning their abidance by the laws of protection and confidentiality, together with their ethical justification. Researchers must also attest data accuracy and correctness of results. They should also acknowledge the contributions of other parties. They must not commit or hide any indiscretions. They also should allow participants to view the results of the research that they had participated in making, and listen to what they say, if appropriate, after making statements. Establishments ought to instigate a culture which consolidates the principles of honesty and transparency in research studies.

B. **Integrity and Objectivity**
   It is necessary that the general principles of integrity and objectivity should be represented in all research activities. The two elements of integrity and objectivity must be found when any research is conducted. Moreover, prejudice and bias should be eschewed when experiments are designed; when remarks are made; when analyzing data, and when results are explained. Moreover, the fabrication of

ideas, data, and research results by any side shall be considered a gross violation of known academic research principles. Such conduct is utterly rejected.

Researchers must revise their research works in a correct way and make sure they had obtained administrative and financial consent and knowledge of the University's academic research ethics on the internal level – i.e. the AOU level – and on the external level.

The researchers should also spell out any real or possible conflict of interests. This includes revealing any personal or financial interests that could affect the research. The researchers must also seek advice and consultation, and find solutions to possible problems.

Research work is considered justified on both vocational and moral grounds in case there is a reasonable possibility that the society (some of whose members were selected as samples of the research subjects) shall benefit from its results. Accountability concerning whether the research work had been done with integrity falls on the researcher's shoulder.

C. Justice and Non-Discrimination

The moral principle of distribution of justice is based on fairness of distribution of research loads and benefits within a certain group since weak members who are unable to protect their rights should not be exploited in any research activities. Participants in any research work should not be selected solely because they are available, because they can be easily controlled or commanded, or because of their personal, social or economic circumstances. Spreading justice requires non-discrimination against individuals or groups who may benefit from developments of academic research.

Researchers ought not to discriminate against individuals or groups in choosing or eliminating participants (such as elimination based on race, ethnicity, age, disability, religion, gender, social status, occupation, family situation, language, or religious, moral or political beliefs) unless their decision is necessary for the research purposes. When the research team is selected, members of the team should not discriminate against other members or against students on any basis other than academic competence and integrity.

D. Legality and Accountability

One of the responsibilities of researchers is to keep abreast of all governmental policies, including legal, administrative and ethical research requirements, and to stay committed to them. They should include bylaws about the practices and organization of the professional bodies in the countries where any part of the research is conducted. They also have to make sure that any research they undertake must be committed to agreements and conditions stated in the research project, as well as ascertaining that records are available for scrutiny, monitoring and inspection. All researchers, individuals or establishments, must be made aware that, during their whole work, they are responsible to the public and must act on this basis.

E. Social Responsibility and Cultural Sensitivity

Researchers should work seriously to improve social conditions and prevent social damages or reduce them through their research. A research work shall be considered morally successful if it had a role in developing knowledge and if it brings benefit to the local community. To carry out research outside his area, the researcher must respect the directions, values and systems of accountability in the targeted community, together with the articles and actions that constitute the culture and the habits of this and other communities. Before all this, he must obtain approval and support the group that will partake in the study before fieldwork begins.

Cultural sensitivity in conducting research means respecting a decision made by any group of people to refuse or discontinue to participate in any research work at any time. If the research work required obtaining information based on trust between individuals all rights, interests and cultural and intellectual properties of the participants must be preserved. Similarly, the group's contribution to the project must be acknowledged in writing when the results of the research are published.

F. Confidentiality:

Private information about individuals must be dealt with in complete confidentiality with assurances given to this effect. If this condition is violated, the issue can be referred to a civil court. Since this is possible, the participants need to know how the information that concerns them shall be used. They must have an opinion about how this information, which belongs to them, is used. It is necessary that persons – other than researchers and supervisors who are allowed to view the data – sign an agreement ensuring confidentiality.

It is common practice that researchers should obtain clear consent from each person before obtaining private information about him/her, and before keeping or using this information. Effort ought to be exerted to encode such private information as early as possible and to the greatest possible extent. It must be noted here that confidentiality is not an absolute issue, legally speaking, and that it may be overridden in exceptional cases in matters of more importance such as protection of individuals from harm. The wider the limits of confidentiality are, the more necessary it becomes to inform the participants of the nature of these limits with the obligation to state these issues in the research protocol/contract.

G. Respecting Others:

The concept of respect includes recognizing the dignity of other people and their beliefs (including their cultural and religious beliefs) in addition to the privacy and independence of the participants in the research (whether they form part of the research sample or of the fellow researchers). These persons have the right and

the freedom of deciding to take part in the research or withdraw from it without giving reasons for their decision.

Third: The Ethical Principles of Correct Practices

The principles and ethical bases referred to above affect all aspects of the research work. Thus, they must be adhered to. Moreover, the ethical principles of correct conduct mentioned in this section are linked to all research stages and they organize it beginning with the process of research design, collecting, processing, and saving of data, even up to the stage of declaring and publishing the results. This section also covers any contraventions or disputes which arise during the research period.

1. Excellence

Institutions and researchers must strive to uplift the quality of the research and seek excellence through planning and conducting high-quality research marked by high ethical standards.

2. Originality

Originality in academic research means superiority before anything else. Original research projects become conserved intellectual information that contributes to the development of human knowledge. Researchers must do their best to prove the originality of their research works precisely and with objectivity. They also have to acknowledge the results of research works done by other people. They, too, should respect the intellectual rights of other researchers, from a legal and ethical perspective.

3. Plagiarism

Researchers are not allowed to use published or unpublished works of others, knowingly or unknowingly, and claim that these works are theirs. Nor are they allowed to help another person to do so. When a certain person uses works done by others and/or works done by himself ought to be documented as is well known. Plagiarism falls under the category of what is called "lack of literary honesty" which calls for most stringent punishment. Plagiarism by students is dealt with according to the special bylaws drafted for students in this regard.

Any person who does or does not belong to the University can report a case of plagiarism committed by any person employed by it. This matter should be reported to the AOU President who shall form an investigation committee. Suitable actions shall be adopted based on the findings of the said committee and in line with the suitable procedures mentioned in the University Staff Disciplinary Bylaws.

4. Research Works which Use Human Sampling

Human sampling means deceased or living persons from whom data was obtained by a researcher. Such data may be obtained as follows:

- Through direct communication,

- Through a questionnaire or a recorded oral meeting,

- Through stored data

When research work is done on human samples, researchers must reduce damages and risks, enlarge benefits like respecting human dignity, confidentiality and independence, exercise caution with persons exposed to risks, and allocate the benefits and burdens of the research in a fair manner.

5. Protection from Damage

Researchers must do their best to minimize the risks that result from any physical or psychological damage that may affect any participant, researcher, institute, a financing party or any other person. Each research project must be made subject to a risk analysis and, in the case of high risks, a strategy for risk management and reduction ought to be drawn up in the research protocols and agreements.

Some research projects involve risks that researchers may face. Such risks ought to be identified and reduced. Moreover, safety measures must be taken into account when a researcher conducts interviews individually. The publication of research works may result in damage affecting groups, communities and institutes. Researchers ought to pay attention to such possibilities when the research results are written. The researchers should gauge the degree of risk and damage impact that must occur, including harassment done to participants, and compare them to the possible research benefits and gains to the participants and the community. When judging how much the research work is committed to ethical measures, the risks and damages factors ought to be taken into account, in addition to assessing the effects that may result from it.

6. Prior Consent

Researchers must give persons expected to take part in the research project information about the nature of the project and its aims in a manner that they can understand. Steps should be taken to ensure that the participants in the research are aware of the nature of the research, of the extent of their participation in it and of the fact that they agreed to take part in it by their free will. The research process must include a measure relating to obtaining their consent: the researchers who want to ask for the ethical consent of a participant need to know how to obtain prior consent and how to explain it. Consent can be obtained orally especially if this is in line with the common practice or if the participant could not give a written approval, either because of a certain obstacle, because it may involve certain risks, or because of a specific reason which impedes obtaining a written consent.

Participants can withdraw their approval to participate in the research project any time they wish. In the case they participate in a certain research in specific

circumstances without attaining prior consent, such as confidential researches, a detailed justification ought to be submitted.

7. **The Data**
The data comprise the methodology followed in reaching results. The actual results attained, and how they are analyzed and interpreted by the researchers, depend on integrity in all aspects of managing the data/information including collection of data, using them and sharing them with others. All researchers ought to make sure that the integrity factor exists in their research records.

Collection of data must be done with honesty and impartiality. Researchers must not publish any information as true while they know it is false or that it is the outcome of a deliberate process of fabrication. Researchers should always seek absolute clarity for themselves and for others concerning the research methodology adopted in gathering and analyzing data. A decisive decision shall be taken concerning the method of collecting and analyzing data before the actual research begins whenever this was possible. Moreover, the data must be organized in a manner that allows verification and validation.

In exceptional cases and building on confidentiality and legislations that respect the principle of intellectual ownership (copyright) and the need to obtain data, it is possible, following the publication of the data, to ensure their access to any sides that request it in a logical application and justify the necessity to know and examine its results. In case there is a controversy, the request shall be referred to the Research Ethics Committee.

8. **Joint Projects with External Sides**
In case there are joint projects with another institute, the Chief Researcher in each one should obtain the necessary approval from his institute. A researcher taking part in a joint research project must make sure that all research team members abide by the ethics of academic research.

In case the research is done in a country other than that of the researcher, the researchers should abide by the laws, regulations, and culture prevailing in that country. However, the commitment to the moral principles in the country where the research work is to be done cannot be accepted as an alternative to obtaining the necessary approval of the academic research ethics body in the Arab Open University.

9. **Declaration of Results**
There is a moral/ethical commitment that researchers need to publish the results of their research works in a correct manner, in a responsible way, and as is customary, provided they understand the consequences of announcing the results in the open mass media. However, the declaration of results, which do not abide by the principles announced in these bylaws, is prohibited.

The publishing of research results is necessary as a means of contact with specialists on the international arena so that they will benefit from these results and build on them. Moreover, all the participants in the research ought to obtain its results.

10. **Authorship**

The research must state the role and efforts of all persons who partook in accomplishing the research. In case there are more than one person who contributed actively to the research, the decision concerning the order of names should reflect the extent of each one's participation. In case there was no agreement among the authors (including students), the following authorship rules must be implemented:

- The authorship process includes all the persons who participated in the research and who are responsible and accountable for it.

- The process of ordering the author's names depends on the type of contribution and the extent of shouldering responsibility and accountability regarding its results and the norms adopted in this regard.

- The mere administrative relationship of a certain person to a research (such as technical support, provision of materials or facilities) does not give him the right to be one of the authors.

- The title of author shall not be affected by the payment persons receive for their contributions, or by their job position or by their honorary authorship.

In case the joint research work depends principally on students' Masters Dissertations or Ph.D. Theses, priority ought to be given to the students in the order of participating authors. Finally, the participants must agree on copyright among themselves.

11. Misconduct

Misconduct in academic research means any actual misbehaviour or attempt in

this direction, including collusion with others and facilitating matters for them through fabrication, forgery, plagiarism, or deception when the research project is proposed or undertaken or when its results are made public, or through deviating from the right research path, whether this is done deliberately or it happens as a result of neglect.

Misconduct also comprises failure to abide by correct procedures in conducting research especially if this failure leads to damage done to humans, to other vertebrates, or to the environment. It also comprises banned action, or deleting or causing damage to other persons' works.

Misconduct does not include inadvertent errors or unintended differences in designing, carrying out, explaining, or judging the research's methodology or its results, as well as any abuse that does not relate to the research procedures. Nor does it include research works of poor quality or students' works which are examined, reviewed and fall under the University's Disciplinary Bylaws. As for the details of how research is conducted, these details are usually known solely to the participants in the project. Therefore revealing acts of misconduct can come only from persons in close contact with it.

The issue of reporting cases of misconduct and doubtful research is considered the duty of all academics (whether they belong to the institute in which the research is done or to external institutes). All reports on similar topics ought to be referred to the University's Vice President for Development and Planning or to an AOU branch Rector who shall refer the report to the proper side at the University for investigation.

All such reports ought to be handled with complete confidentiality and no direct or indirect penal action shall be taken against the person who reported it in good faith.

Article (14): Good Ethics Conduct

All research types undertaken at the Arab Open University (which were explained earlier in this document and which include obtaining human sampling) should obtain a Good Ethics Conduct Certificate before starting to do the research obtainable from the Academic Research Ethics Committee.

First: the Academic Research Ethics Committee

The Academic Research Ethics Committee (AREC) is defined as a multi-disciplinary independent committee entrusted with the task of reviewing research works in which human beings take part to make sure that their safety, rights and dignity are safeguarded. There are two levels of the Academic Research Ethics Committee. These are:

1. A committee at the University level:
   This committee is entrusted with the task of reviewing research projects which:
- Include research works on the University level, researchers from different Branches and/or researchers from outside the University.
- Had been referred by the corresponding AREC at a certain branch to the corresponding University-level AREC seeking consultation and advice (because of the existence of certain damages or risks).
- Had been rejected by a branch's AREC and is referred to the higher (University) AREC, as a form of appeal.

2. A Branch-level Committee

The AREC formed in each AOU branch revises all research projects which do not include researchers from other branches and/or from outside the university. It may refer a certain project to the University's AREC and in cases that require a second opinion.

Second: Forming the AREC

The University and the branch's AREC must have numerous specializations. It should also include teaching staff members with experience in matters related to academic research ethics.

Members should be subjected to regular training workshops, especially new recruits. When the AREC undertakes studying a certain project, it may seek consultation from an external side if it finds this necessary.

Third: Ethical Revision Procedures

These procedures are represented by:

- The Chief Researcher must fill in the application for Good Ethical Conduct

and include all required types of information which enable the University

-based AREC to revise the content. This application must be filled in,

even when the Chief Researcher thinks that there is no need for it.

- Cases exempted from obtaining AREC approval are limited to unknown-source surveys that aim to enhance the teaching/learning process and which are u used solely on the University level. If, however, the research project is given a good ethical conduct certificate from a third party, such as a financing agency for example, the document must be presented to the AREC together with the research project and a copy of the application for a good ethical conduct from the 3rd party.

The AREC would then be able to announce its acceptance of the good ethical conduct document or demand more action. In case the information is not sufficient in the application presented by the Chief Researcher, or if it needed further explanations, the Chief Researcher must be informed and asked to present necessary information.

- The AREC in a branch may return a research project to the researcher twice in case it did not meet the required conditions. If the Committee was not convinced that the application meets the minimum number of conditions, after it was returned for the second time, it may decide to reject it. The researcher my appeal this decision to the University's AREC.

- However, after the appeal, the higher AREC may accept to grant good research conduct or it may return the appeal to the researchers for further information. However, after the project is returned, if this committee is still unconvinced that the project meets the minimum number of conditions for approval, it could reject it too and ask the applicants to submit a new application to the branch's AREC three months later.

- Concerning research projects that are immediately received by the AREC at the University, they undergo the same process as that of project going to the AREC at AOU branches. Appeals issued by the higher University committee, however, are referred to the University's President who may form a special committee to look into the appeal.

- When any project is returned for additional clarifications, the AREC ought to point out clearly the ethical requirements that were not available in the research project, as well as the necessary requirements to fill in the missing information.

- If the percentage of damage or risks was not high when the project was revised initially, the Committee may appoint the student's advisor, a Committee member, or another teaching staff member to sign the applications submitted by students for research approval. The same applies to the projects that do not constitute a high degree of damage or risks when they are revised, and in which more than one member of the Committee participate other than the Committee's rapporteur who must sign it.

Part Three: Appendix

Application for a Certificate of Good Research Conduct

List of Requirements:

1. What are the aims of the research project you wish to conduct?
2. How is the project designed?
3. What are your data collection ways/methods?
4. Who are the participant (research sample), how many are they, and what are the selection criteria?
5. What are the procedures for prior approval?
6. What are the conditions of usage charted by the persons who give secondary data?
7. Do you have available all the skills and resources needed for conducting research?
8. What are the expected results of this research?
9. What are the benefits that the researchers will get?
10. What are the methods/means of conveying information to the participants and the means of obtaining their feedback?
11. Did you do any risk assessment to know:
    A. if there were ethical issues that need to be addressed?
    B. the risks related to the institute or the researcher, or to the health and safety of the researchers and the participants.
12. What are the measures taken to ensure confidentiality, privacy and protection of data?
13. Will the project undertaken commit to all the relevant legal and ethical requirements and instructions including those issued by other institutes and/or other countries if this was necessary?
14. Will the research be committed to all required legislations and correct practices related to health and safety?
15. Did the research project undergo any revisions related to the ethics of academic research by a second party?
16. Does it require any issues concerning supervision and auditing?
17. Are you committed to any financial agreements or instructions concerning the project?
18. Did you reach any agreement concerning copyright, publication and authorship?
19. Did you reach any agreement concerning the roles of the authors and the responsibility for mutual cooperation?

20. Did you agree on the roles of the researchers and the responsibilities concerning administration and supervision?
21. Did you identify all issued related to conflicts of interests, declaring and discussing them?
22. Are you aware of the directives issued by al the institutions/organizations related to misconduct in academic research?

Sources of the list

This list is derived – with some changes – from:

- The **UK Research Integrity Office** (UKRIO) (2009): Academic Research Ethics Bylaws

- The **UK Economic and Social Research Council**

Final Remarks:

Final remarks are found on p. 11 of the English version.

1) University of the Western Cape, 2009, P.1

2) Department of Education and Training, Government of Australia, 2015, P.5

3) University of Alberta, 2013, web document – no page number.

4) The part of this section following the endnote mark draws on Stanford University, Chapter one of the web document accessed in November, 2015, no page numbering.

5) Ibid, questions are extracted from Chapter Nine, no page numbering

6) This section draws on: Northwestern University (2015), Stanford University (web accessed in December, 2015), and Victoria University of Wellington (web accessed in December, 2015).

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