

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN RESEARCH ACROSS CULTURES

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Abstract

Through a review of relevant literature and institutional policies and guidelines on research ethics, this capstone project explored the effect that cultural components can have on the outcome of a project through the tendency of applying ethnocentric practices. In understanding that most U.S. institutions follow western philosophies for ethical practices, regardless of the scope of the research project or the background and cultural affiliation of research participants, it was suggested by the author that institutions utilize a questionnaire before conducting the research, as well as before working with research participants in international projects.

The questionnaire focuses on common topics that are likely to address value systems across cultures. These topics include language, religion, socio-economic status, minority populations, the structure of social relationships, age of maturity, perceptions of power, concern for time, regard for material goods, display of emotions, and preferred style of communication. The intent for including these topics on a questionnaire before conducting research and working with research participants is to build cultural competency with researchers and ensure that all nuances have been addressed to better guarantee a successful research project that further minimizes unintentional harm to a research participant population. The questionnaire is presented in a way that encourages institutions to utilize the questionnaire in various ways and apply the information in different aspects of a project, depending on the needs of the institution and the project.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1. Background.

The field of research administration is thought to have first started in the United States nearly 60 years ago,¹ and came about because of World War II when the U.S. government started funding research projects. The field of Research Administration was created, therefore, to provide additional regulations and controls for research initiatives.² As such, multiple federal agencies such as the National Science Foundation and the National Institutes of Health were created to support the emerging profession. Over a few decades, scientists saw an increase in the number of regulations that were created as a way to oversee the United States' research initiatives. Scientists at the time could not continue researching in the same manner as had been done in the past due to the extent of the regulation increase which required more personnel to handle the research activities and manage research projects.³

As a result of the growing needs within research institutions, the field of Research Administration has been growing in recognition globally, and international research administration has developed as a profession in various parts of the world,⁴ which has allowed for the expansion of international projects. Along the way, some have developed the perception that American research administration is the “gold standard” for the field and, as such, believe that research administration outside of the U.S. is mediocre and in need of American direction,

¹ Kerridge, S. (2021, March 26). Research Administration Around the World. Society of Research Administration International. <https://www.srainternational.org/blogs/srai-jra1/2021/03/23/research-administration-around-the-world>

² Myers, P. E., & Smith, M. F. (n.d.). Research Administration in History: The Development of OMB Circular A-110 Through Joseph Warner's COGR Subcommittee, 1976-1979. 18.

³ Smith, S. (2019). Research Administration: The Most Important Job No One Knows About [Johns Hopkins University].

<https://jscholarship.library.jhu.edu/bitstream/handle/1774.2/62358/Smith%2C%20Sydney.pdf?sequence=1>

⁴ Kerridge, Simon and Scott, Stephanie F., 'Research administration around the world', Research Management Review, Vol 23, No. 1, 2018. pp. 1 – 34.

supervision, and control.⁵ For an international project to be successful, however, extra consideration must be given to international components, such as varying perceptions of ethical practices that exist around the world.

An example of varying ethical views between populations of people includes the Havasupai Case which consisted of researchers from Arizona State University who began collecting DNA samples from members of the Havasupai tribe in the 1990's. The study intended to look for gene variants associated with diabetes, which was common among tribe members. To do this, researchers needed to collect blood samples from tribe members. This is significant because "most of them had not completed high school, and, for many, English was a second language".⁶ In addition, blood is extremely sacred to the Havasupai tribe.⁷

Of the 650 members of the Havasupai tribe, roughly 100 members gave blood to the researchers between the years 1990 and 1994. By 2003, the Havasupai tribe learned that their blood had been used for more than the intended diabetes study. "Other ASU researchers also utilized the Havasupai samples for their work and published papers about inbreeding, alcoholism, and the origin and migration of the tribe from Asia".⁸

Many argue that the ethical concern lies with the informed consent process, whereas the language in the informed consent signed by research participants was not directly clear on the future uses of the blood samples. While there is ethical concern around the informed consent process that took place, another area of concern involves the cultural aspects. More specifically,

⁵ Carfora, J., & Wallen, D. (2013). Building Toward Successful International Research Collaborations. In NCURA's Sponsored Research Administration: A Guide to Effective Strategies and Recommended Practices.

⁶ Sterling, R. (2011). *Genetic Research among the Havasupai: A Cautionary Tale*. 13(2), 113–117. <https://doi.org/10.1001>

⁷ The Havasupai Indians and the Mistreatment of Their Blood. (2016, December 10). *Race and Living Laboratories*. <https://commons.princeton.edu/livinglaboratories/2016/12/10/the-havasupai-indians-and-the-mistreatment-of-their-blood/#:~:text=As%20mentioned%20in%20the%20video,where%20the%20blood%20was%20held>

⁸ Sterling, R. (2011). *Genetic Research among the Havasupai: A Cautionary Tale*. 13(2), 113–117. <https://doi.org/10.1001>

the topics of schizophrenia, alcoholism, and population inbreeding which were studied without the Havasupai tribe's knowledge, are "taboo topics in the Havasupai culture".⁹ In addition, the theories that emerged because of the unknown studies about the tribe's origin conflicted with the tribe's core beliefs.¹⁰

1.2. Statement of the Problem.

Ethical research practices have proven to be a challenge as improper treatment of research participants is commonplace throughout research history. The example of the Havasupai tribe highlights that being cognizant of cultural differences, even within the same country, can be problematic – especially with historically marginalized populations. As a result of patient mistreatment during research studies, ethical guidelines have been developed in the United States and Europe. In the United States more specifically, the Belmont Report, first published by the National Commission in 1979, has become the basis of research ethics, and the understanding of the need for ethical guidelines has grown throughout the years. Today, "many different professional associations, government agencies, and universities have adopted specific codes, rules, and policies relating to research ethics"¹¹.

While there are several ethical guidelines in place within the field of Research Administration, and the guidelines are important for the conduct of research, it is necessary to note that the various codes, policies, and principles that exist within institutions often conflict in varying situations and require considerable interpretation. As such, it is imperative that researchers have the proper cultural competency to be able to interpret, assess, and apply

⁹ Parker, G. (2021, October 20). Community Research, Ethics, and the Impact of the Havasupai Case. *Ampersand*. <https://blog.primr.org/community-research-impact-of-havasupai-case/>

¹⁰ Sterling, R. (2011). *Genetic Research among the Havasupai: A Cautionary Tale*. 13(2), 113–117. <https://doi.org/10.1001>

¹¹ Resnik, D. B. (2015). What is Ethics in Research & Why is it Important? 7.

research rules in various situations that would allow for appropriate ethical actions in coordination with varying scenarios.¹² Although this idea is well understood in the field of Research Administration, the process of interpreting, assessing, and applying research rules does not always incorporate cultural differences which affect others' perceptions, actions, and overall ethical frameworks, as it can be understood in the case of the Havasupai Case. The potential negative consequences related to this is especially important for research administrator and researchers within U.S. institutions to consider since "it is almost unheard of in the United States to consider culture when it comes to developing international research agreements".¹³ It is clear through the history of research that many ethical problems exist, especially regarding developing countries.¹⁴

1.3. Project Question.

The purpose of this project is to create a questionnaire for institutions to use in international collaborations that better takes into consideration ethics across cultures. The intentional use of the questionnaire would be to better understand the complexity of ethics in research by highlighting various cultural components that exist. This could be for larger and more, seemingly, well-known populations as well as marginalized populations. For marginalized populations, they may fall under the category of a protected population within U.S. institutions. In this case, it may be easier to work with the institutional IRB to find pertinent information. In addition, the questionnaire may assist in determining whether a population may fall under the

¹² Resnik, D. B. (2020, December 23). What Is Ethics in Research & Why Is It Important? National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences. <https://www.niehs.nih.gov/research/resources/bioethics/whatis/index.cfm>

¹³ Institute of Medicine 2014. Culture Matters: International Research Collaboration in a Changing World: Summary of a Workshop. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/18849>.

¹⁴ Caleb Wall, & Overton, J. (2006). Unethical Ethics?: Applying Research Ethics in Uzbekistan. *Development in Practice*, 16(1), 62–67. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4029860>

category of a protected population based off the information gathered. More specifically, the information on ethical considerations and cultural components would give insight into how institutions may want to approach doing international research.

1.4. Project Objectives.

Through the design and implementation of an institutional questionnaire for research ethics that focuses on cultural components, research administrators and researchers will understand influencing factors outside of their frame of reference as a way to avoid ethnocentrism in research. More specifically, research administrators and researchers will be able to approach research practices from multiple cultural perspectives with extensive knowledge of practices and perceptions from varying global contexts.

Knowledge gained through the questionnaire about the research participant population can then be implemented in various other aspects of the project process. For example, depending on the specific details of a project, knowledge gained through the questionnaire about the research participant population can be reflected in the informed consent language. The knowledge gained about the research participant population may also be reflected in the project contract terms and overall language of the agreement.

1.5. Significance.

Through the utilization of an institutional questionnaire for research ethics with cultural components, research projects can be completed in a way that is better suited to multi-cultural collaborations. With this, being considerate of cultural components and ethical frameworks can help in promoting more successful collaborations by ensuring that Western notions of research ethics are not the sole influencer for deeming research practices as the ethical standard.

1.6. Exclusions and Limitations.

While addressing the topic of ethics in research, several exclusions and limitations were intentionally applied to avoid imposing influencing thoughts. This then helped ensure that cultural competency and the need to learn about cultures before conducting research remained a focal point throughout the entirety of this project.

Culture and ethics are two very broad terms. There can be variations in thought processes and practices even within similar groups. Due to this, it is not possible to include all cultural considerations, ethical frameworks, or overall factors that play into how a group of people determines their thought processes or their preferred practices. As such, for this project, information about ethical considerations in research across cultures focuses on broad topics which may vary between and among groups of people. This exists as a limitation within this project for two specific reasons. First, the topics addressed in the questionnaire were chosen by the author based on their perceived relationship to the concept of cultural sensitivity. Since cultural practices and perceptions can vary greatly between and among groups of people, this aspect of the project is subjective. Secondly, closely related to the first limitation, the topics chosen are not necessarily representative of the breadth of topics that an institution may choose to incorporate into a questionnaire.

An additional area of exclusions and limitations relates to the proposed utilization of the questionnaire among institutions. The focus of this project is on the utilization of the information provided on the questionnaire before or during the development of the project proposal. The intent of this is to ensure that researchers are aware of, and take into consideration, potential nuances that may affect a project before getting too far into the project process. While this is the intent of this project, institutions may utilize the questionnaire, or the information gained from

the questionnaire, in various ways. Some of the uses of the information gained from the questionnaire include, but are not limited to, background information for the project, specially designed informed consent, and contract terms and conditions.

Along with the notion of the use of the questionnaire, the questionnaire has the potential to be used in a decision tree format, if chosen by an institution. Due to the varying needs of institutions and specifics of a project, the questionnaire made for this project is not presented with branching logic to help guide an individual through the questionnaire.

Similar to the complexity of culture and ethics, the review of institutional guidelines and policies on ethics was limited due to time constraints. In addition, the review of institutional guidelines and policies were limited to U.S. institutions only. Non-U.S. institutions were not included in the review of institutional guidelines and policies as a way to reduce the number of perceived variations that may exist and affect the presentation of the final product. As such, the needs outlined in this project may not be representative of all institutions and the proposed questionnaire may not apply to all institutions.

Chapter 2. Literature Review

2.1. Overview of literature review.

According to Kerridge (2018), the field of research administration has been growing in recognition globally and international research administration has developed as a profession in various parts of the world.¹⁵ As such, research administration has grown along with the needs of research institutions.¹⁶ The National Research Council (2008) specifically notes that “ethics concerns related to research on human subjects have received substantial attention [and] analogous committees concerned with ethics” exist in Europe, the Americas, and Canada.¹⁷ Aagaard-Hansen and Vang Johansen (2008) specifically highlight various U.S. and international codes of ethics that have been developed and utilized as a means of key reference points.¹⁸ Such development in ethics allows there to be a uniformity in policies and guidelines across institutions, particularly in the U.S.

A popular resource used for research ethics is the Belmont Report which gives clear guidance on handling ethical issues inherent in research involving human subjects. More specifically, the Belmont Report of 1979 is an influential document that addresses “basic ethical principles that should underlie the conduct of biomedical and behavioral research involving human subjects and to develop guidelines which should be followed to assure that such research is conducted in accordance with those principles”. The three principles are respect for persons,

¹⁵ Kerridge, Simon and Scott, Stephanie F., ‘Research administration around the world’, *Research Management Review*, Vol 23, No. 1, 2018. pp. 1 – 34.

¹⁶ Smith, S. (2019). *Research Administration: The Most Important Job No One Knows About* [Johns Hopkins University].

<https://jscholarship.library.jhu.edu/bitstream/handle/1774.2/62358/Smith%2C%20Sydney.pdf?sequence=1>

¹⁷ National Research Council 2008. *International Collaborations in Behavioral and Social Sciences: Report of a Workshop*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/12053>.

¹⁸ Aagaard-Hansen, J., & Johansen, M. V. (2008). *Research Ethics across Disciplines*. *Anthropology Today*, 24(3), 15–19. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20179919>

beneficence, and justice which are described by Commission as “general prescriptive judgments [...] that should assist scientists, subjects, reviewers and interested citizens to understand the ethical issues inherent in research involving human subjects”.¹⁹ This document works as the basis for research ethics in the United States.

While guidelines help to provide uniformity in research, it is noted that researchers need to be aware of “the problem of ethnocentrism” as research ethics committees are often formed with a “Western philosophical perspective”.²⁰ More specifically, it is noted by Leong that guidelines regarding research tend to reflect the culture of the country in which the research is originating. This is noted as problematic in the fact that some institutional guidelines for research do not specifically address international and cross-cultural research.²¹ Similarly, Caballero notes that most research collaborations have been designed in a way that more specifically addresses the needs of the U.S., and some U.S. investigators have been caught taking advantage of ethical vulnerabilities in less experienced review boards.²² In addition, Silverman et al. share that “applying Western notions of bioethics can be challenging in countries that embrace dissimilar cultural, social, and religious values”.²³

Emanuel et al. specifically examines controversies in the ethics of research in developing countries and discusses previously proposed ethical frameworks for research. While Emanuel et

¹⁹ National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research. (1978). The Belmont report: Ethical principles and guidelines for the protection of human subjects of research. [Bethesda, Md.]: The Commission.

²⁰ Institute of Medicine 2014. Culture Matters: International Research

²¹ Institute of Medicine 2014. Culture Matters: International Research Collaboration in a Changing World: Summary of a Workshop. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/18849>.

²² Institute of Medicine 2014. Culture Matters: International Research Collaboration in a Changing World: Summary of a Workshop. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/18849>.

²³ Silverman, H., Edwards, H., Shamoo, A., & Matar, A. (2013). Enhancing Research Ethics Capacity in the Middle East: Experience and Challenges of a Fogarty-Sponsored Training Program. *Journal of Empirical Research on Human Research Ethics: An International Journal*, 8(5), 40–51. <https://doi.org/10.1525/jer.2013.8.5.40>

al. discuss issues pertaining to standards of care, reasonable availability, and quality of informed consent, Emanuel et al. focus more on appropriate benchmarks for understanding “how well the enumerated ethical principles have been fulfilled”.²⁴

Wall and Overton provide a detailed example of how Western notions of research ethics are not applicable in all scenarios. As such, Wall and Overton examine how practices deemed ethical in the U.S. may be considered unethical in developing countries. As it was explained, when conducting research in a developing country, several ethical issues need to be considered, such as the principles of self-determinism, non-maleficence, and justice and beneficence. As such, principles created as ethical guidelines actually have a tendency to create ethical problems when they take full consideration. Overall, it was noted by Wall and Overton that Western ethics can “effectively bar research from being conducted”.²⁵

Ethics-related challenges in research are also noted by the National Research Council. According to the National Research Council, there have been several recent proposals to reconsider ethics frameworks to “further guide international researchers and ensure fair benefits”.²⁶ In response to such notions, Dhali explains that “there is no one-size-fits-all solutions” to the problem of ethnocentrism in research ethics.²⁷ Suggestions to ethical research practices made by Emanuel et al. are highlighted as being applicable in all research

²⁴ Emanuel, E. J., Wendler, D., Killen, J., & Grady, C. (2004). What Makes Clinical Research in Developing Countries Ethical? The Benchmarks of Ethical Research. *The Journal of Infectious Diseases*, 189(5), 930–937. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30075913>

²⁵ Caleb Wall, & Overton, J. (2006). Unethical Ethics?: Applying Research Ethics in Uzbekistan. *Development in Practice*, 16(1), 62–67. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4029860>

²⁶ National Research Council 2008. *International Collaborations in Behavioral and Social Sciences: Report of a Workshop*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/12053>.

²⁷ Institute of Medicine 2014. *Culture Matters: International Research Collaboration in a Changing World: Summary of a Workshop*. Washington, DC: The National Academies Press. <https://doi.org/10.17226/18849>

institutions.²⁸ On the other hand, Wall and Overton recommend a case-by-case analysis of the relative merits and risks of each research proposal in terms of local context.²⁹

2.2. Details of review.

Information gathered through the literature review provides insight into how the topic of ethics and the gap that exists within research studies can be viewed by others. In addition, the literature review also provides insight into the extent to which cultural components are currently considered in the development of institutional guidelines. While all the information gathered in the literature review is valuable in understanding the need for an institutional questionnaire that helps institutions better take into consideration ethics across cultures, a few resources stood out more prominently for this particular project. These resources include: *Enhancing Research Ethics Capacity in the Middle East: Experience and Challenges of a Fogarty-Sponsored Training Program* by Silverman et al. (2013) and *Research Ethics across Disciplines* by Aagaard-Hansen and Vang Johansen (2008).

Enhancing Research Ethics Capacity in the Middle East: Experience and Challenges of a Fogarty-Sponsored Training Program by Silverman et al. (2013) provides explicit data on regulations and guidelines in several countries. More specifically, the data is relevant to the middle eastern countries of Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Sudan, Syria, Yemen, Iraq, Morocco, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the UAE. Information per country is then broken down into the categories of country, population, area, GDP per capita, human development index, % below the poverty line, % GDP, per capita, education index, freedom rating, corruption perceptions index,

²⁸ Emanuel, E. J., Wendler, D., Killen, J., & Grady, C. (2004). What Makes Clinical Research in Developing Countries Ethical? The Benchmarks of Ethical Research. *The Journal of Infectious Diseases*, 189(5), 930–937. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30075913>

²⁹ Caleb Wall, & Overton, J. (2006). Unethical Ethics?: Applying Research Ethics in Uzbekistan. *Development in Practice*, 16(1), 62–67. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4029860>

gender inequality index, and registered clinical trials.³⁰ This data can be viewed both regionally and per country, which allows for various interpretations of how international components affect ethics in research. This applies to this project because it gives insight into areas that may affect ethical practices. In other words, the information provided by Silverman et al. highlights areas of importance that researchers should consider before participating in international research projects.

Research Ethics across Disciplines by Aagaard-Hansen and Vang Johansen (2008) provides a cross-disciplinary perspective on conducting research and the utilization of data collected throughout the research process. This is valuable in the fact that it gives insight into varying aspects that are considered to be critical to ethical research practices across research disciplines. In addition, the article focuses on the topic of vulnerability in research, while also addressing the needs of research participants both during and after the research is concluded.³¹ In terms of ethical considerations, this information widens the perspective on the overall well-being of various populations of research participants.

Together, these resources provided a good basis for understanding the varying needs that exist between populations of people. In turn, this helped in first understanding where the gap in research ethics lies and, second, how to address topics in the proposed questionnaire.

2.3. Applicability of Literature Review.

Generally, information about ethical considerations in research across cultures can be found on institutional websites, such as research universities. Such information shared on

³⁰ Silverman, H., Edwards, H., Shamoo, A., & Matar, A. (2013). Enhancing Research Ethics Capacity in the Middle East: Experience and Challenges of a Fogarty-Sponsored Training Program. *Journal of Empirical Research on Human Research Ethics: An International Journal*, 8(5), 40–51. <https://doi.org/10.1525/jer.2013.8.5.40>

³¹ Aagaard-Hansen, J., & Johansen, M. V. (2008). *Research Ethics across Disciplines*. *Anthropology Today*, 24(3), 15–19. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20179919>

institutional websites works as a tool, most commonly, for research administrators and researchers from the institution. More specifically, information shared on institutional websites provides resources to research administrators and institutional researchers as it relates to guidelines, policies, standards, and trainings. In addition, it provides insight into the process of research for individuals not affiliated with a specific institution, but who may want to learn more about the specific processes of a particular institution.

To begin to understand institutional websites as a tool for research administrators and researchers, one can review some of these websites. Some examples include the University of Michigan webpage entitled **Research Ethics & Compliance**³² and the University of Minnesota webpage entitled **Ethics and Compliance**.³³ The University of Michigan's webpage shares information specifically on compliance programs related to animal care and use, conflicts of interest, human research protections, research safety, export controls, and research integrity, among other topics. Similar to the University of Michigan, the University of Minnesota's webpage focuses on human research protections, animal care and use, biotechnology activities oversight, export controls, conflict of interest, and reporting research misconduct. On both web pages, informational overviews are provided for the varying topics, which relate more to policies and guidelines instead of ethics components.

While websites from known research institutions help understand the research process and how a particular institution may operate, web pages do not address varying cultural components that are taken into consideration throughout a project that helps in determining ethical practices. The literature review conducted for this project highlights the idea that ethical

³² University of Michigan. (2022). Research Ethics & Compliance. Research Ethics & Compliance. <https://research-compliance.umich.edu/>

³³ University of Minnesota. (2022). Responsible Conduct of Research and Ethical Teaching and Scholarship. University Policy Library. <https://policy.umn.edu/education/doctoralperformance-appg>

guidelines may be more easily viewed as a blanketed topic that lacks clear evidence of ethical foundations or frameworks and rather focuses merely on policy. In other words, institutional websites that share information on ethics in research lack context as to how such policies and guidelines came to be, how the policy or policies apply to ethical frameworks, and how the policies and guidelines apply to current research projects. This may be perceived as an indication that ethics, ethical frameworks, and ethical practices are not viewed by institutions as being variable and malleable to the research participant population.

Chapter 3. Need Assessment

3.1. Need Assessment.

Determining the need for this project came from a review of institutional guidelines and policies from various U.S. research institutions. Variables about key topics and terms related to ethics were gathered. The key topics and terms were selected from the Glossary of Commonly Used Terms in Research Ethics³⁴ and chosen based on their relation to the concept of cultural sensitivity. The variables were then compared alongside other institutions to determine a need for a questionnaire for institutions to use in international collaborations that incorporate ethical considerations across cultures. The determination

Through assessing the information gathered, an overall average of below 50% use of the key topics and terms related to ethics among all reviewed institutional guidelines and policies from various U.S. research institutions was an indication that research institutions need to expand on their concept of ethics and allow for more cultural sensitivity as a way to avoid ethnocentrism and better meet the needs of the research participant populations.

3.1.1 *Assessment of Need.*

The variables reviewed on institutional guidelines and policies include Responsible, Fairness, Accountability, Autonomy, Bias, Honesty, Required Training, and Optional Training, or close variations of those words (i.e. responsibility as opposed to responsible). It is evident that basing a need purely on word choice on institutional guidelines and policies is a case of semantics, and it is recognized that other meaningful words could have been used in the place of the words selected for this project. Therefore, the information gathered was reviewed as a whole

³⁴ National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences. (2021, August 10). Glossary of Commonly Used Terms in Research Ethics. National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences. <https://www.niehs.nih.gov/research/resources/bioethics/glossary/index.cfm>

to show the extent to which ethical components were addressed. In other words, this process allowed for a broad scope review to help determine the frequency to which ethical components were mentioned or discussed within institutional guidelines and policies.

3.2. Metrics.

10 research institutions ranking within the top 100 U.S. universities were reviewed.

When gathering information about the usage of topics or key terms, the number 1 indicated that the topic or term was used, while the number 0 indicated that the topic or term was not used.

When assessing the variables between institutions, straight averages were used to determine the frequency of the topics or key terms used in research institutions. More specifically, the information was gathered in a way in which the rate of usage of topics or key terms among research institutions was evident. From there, an overall average was calculated which indicated that the total use of the selected ethical terms among research institutions equaled that of 43%.

In addition, information related to the frequency of the topics or key terms used in research institutions was compared to the research institutions' U.S. ranking. The rankings were rearranged based on their ethical term usage. This helped to illustrate that higher ranking does not equate to more ethical term usage. The metrics for this need assessment can be seen in **Table 1.1** below.

Forbes Ranking	Sample Ranking	Institution Name	Responsible	Required training	Optional training	Fairness	Accountability	Autonomy	Bias	Honesty	Ethics Ranking	Institution
2	1	Yale University	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	2	Yale University
3	2	Princeton University	1	1	1	0	1	0	1	0	1	Princeton University
4	3	Stanford University	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	2	Stanford University
5	4	Columbia University	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	3	Columbia University
6	5	MIT	1	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	1	MIT
7	6	Harvard University	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	4	Harvard University
9	7	University of Pennsylvania	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	4	University of Pennsylvania
12	8	Duke University	1	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	2	Duke University
22	9	University of Michigan	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	4	University of Michigan
84	10	University of Minnesota	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	University of Minnesota
Averages			100%	40%	40%	50%	40%	0%	20%	50%		
										Overall Average	43%	

Table 1.1. Use of ethical terms used by research institutions

3.3 Sources.

A review of research institution websites provided the necessary information to calculate the usage of terms in institutional policies and guidelines on research ethics.

3.4. Committees.

No committees were established for the purpose of assisting in the need assessment of this project.

3.4.1. The role the committee played in your project

No committees were established for the purpose of assisting in the need assessment of this project.

Chapter 4: Project Description

4.1. Discussion of project elements.

Research ethics guidelines on a variety of topics have been released by organizations and national bodies in both developed and developing countries.³⁵ Although a variety of guidelines exist, it is evident that they lack true cultural considerations that follow any particular ethical framework. Evidence of this can be seen through reviewing institutional policies and guidelines on the ethical conduct of research, IRB approval processes, and relevant data available through previous research done on the topic. In this sense, within the U.S., ethical guidelines in research act as a policy for institutions rather than a true ethical framework that can meet the specific needs of the research participant population.

The purpose of this project is to create a questionnaire for institutions to use in a project to better understand the research participant population. This may be particularly beneficial in international collaborations where cultures vary and there may be different perceptions of ethical standards. More specifically, the questionnaire intends to emphasize topics that are likely to vary across cultures in terms of perceptions of appropriate behavior and mannerisms. The information gathered through the utilization of the questionnaire can then be used to better understand the complexity of ethics in research by calling attention to various cultural components that exist. In this sense, it is important to consider culture and how that culture may influence the employment of ethical perceptions and practices. More specifically, it is necessary to focus on determining factors that have the potential to define how a particular institution may want to approach research projects by helping researchers navigate various ethical considerations and cultural components.

³⁵ Schuklenk, U., & Ashcroft, R. (2000). *International Research Ethics*. Blackwell Publishers, 14(2), 158–172.

To be able to establish ethical considerations across cultures in a manner that can easily be used in a variety of scenarios and contexts, the questionnaire created focuses on ensuring that researchers are familiar with the value system of the population. Components necessary for considering value systems include familiarization with social structures and economic structures, which further encompasses the areas of individualism, conservatism, and national laws within given countries. In addition, regulation and enforcement of data protection laws is another important component to consider.³⁶ Overall, the questionnaire developed is intended to promote cultural competency among researchers as they are “correlated with philosophical, political, and religious ideas that are embedded in a society”.³⁷

Through the design and implementation of an institutional questionnaire for research ethics with cultural components, research administrators and researchers will understand influencing factors outside of their frame of reference and they will be able to approach research from multiple cultural perspectives with extensive knowledge of different practices and perceptions from varying contexts. Researchers will also gain knowledge of the research participant population before conducting research which will help ensure that all elements of the project are appropriate for the research participant population.

³⁶ Data Protection Laws of the World. (n.d.). DLA Piper. <https://www.dlapiperdataprotection.com/>

³⁷ Caleb Wall, & Overton, J. (2006). Unethical Ethics?: Applying Research Ethics in Uzbekistan. *Development in Practice*, 16(1), 62–67. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4029860>

Chapter 5. Methodology

5.1. Methodology Overview.

Ten U.S. universities were selected based on their overall ranking within the top 100 universities list for the year 2021. According to Forbes, many criteria are taken into consideration to help determine which institutions are deserving of being ranked as top universities. As such, some of the criteria considered include their Carnegie Classification, research output, specialty focus, and data from 2 federal databases³⁸. To test the applicability of this notion, the ten U.S. research institutions' ethical guidelines were reviewed.

The review process included analyzing the usage of key topics and terms which are common in the field of research administration. The key topics and terms were selected from the Glossary of Commonly Used Terms in Research Ethics and were chosen based on their relation to the concept of cultural sensitivity. The terms selected include Responsible, Fairness, Accountability, Autonomy, Bias, Honesty, Required Training, and Optional Training, or close variations of those words. The variables were then compared alongside the other institutions to determine the popularity of the words used among all the selected institutions. This determined an overall lack of reference to the key topics and terms, which further indicated a need for a questionnaire to be developed for institutions to use in international collaborations that incorporate ethical considerations across cultures.

In addition, it was necessary to understand the great breadth that “ethics” encompasses, since ethical decision-making “permeate[s] everyday life.”³⁹ Ethical decision-making helps to guide someone through the process of determining right from wrong. As such, many ethical

³⁸ Kreznar, C. (n.d.). America's Top Colleges 2021. Forbes.
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/christiankreznar/2021/09/08/how-we-rank-americas-top-colleges/?sh=5d0a3bf443e0>

³⁹ A Framework for Making Ethical Decisions. (n.d.). Brown University.
<https://www.brown.edu/academics/science-and-technology-studies/framework-making-ethical-decisions>

frameworks exist, all of which have their own means and justifications. Ethical frameworks are traditionally divided into the areas of meta-ethics, normative ethics, and applied ethics.

Metaethics “deals with the nature of the right or the good, as well as the nature and justification of ethical claims.” Normative ethics “deals with the standards and principles used to determine whether something is right or good.” Lastly, applied ethics “deals with the actual application of ethical principles to a particular situation.”⁴⁰ To be successful in situations requiring ethical decision-making, therefore, it is important to ensure that the situation at hand is addressed sensitively as issues may arise. This relates to research on the notion that there may be varying ways of addressing a single situation.

As such, one of the main concerns regarding ethics in international projects is the tendency for procedures to align with western philosophies. In this sense, the practice of ethics equates to ethnocentrism and can have counterproductive, or even harmful, effects. Another concern regarding ethics in international projects relates to the lack of cultural competency that exists among researchers; although, the lack of cultural competency may arguably contribute to the tendency for the practices to be ethnocentric. In this sense, ensuring that researchers receive adequate cultural competency training may positively impact the likelihood of practices conducted in international projects to avoid ethnocentric tendencies. As such, a great focus of the design for this project was on cultural competency as an existing issue. For the purpose of this project, the following definition of cultural competency was used.

Cultural competence refers to awareness of unique and defining characteristics of the populations for which health professionals provide care and from which they wish to enroll clinical research participants. Cultural competence entails understanding the importance of social and cultural influence on patients’ health beliefs and behaviors.⁴¹

⁴⁰ A Framework for Making Ethical Decisions. (n.d.). Brown University. <https://www.brown.edu/academics/science-and-technology-studies/framework-making-ethical-decisions>

⁴¹ Harvard Catalyst. (2009). Cultural Competence in Research. <https://skilledwork.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/CCR-annotated-bibliography-10-12-10ver2-FINAL.pdf>

By addressing cultural competency as the root of the issue, it is believed that cultural competency will help researchers understand the perspectives and needs of others. In turn, researchers will be more likely to show compassion towards others and, therefore, address important criteria with a critical eye before entering into an international project.

Since cultural competency as a means to better address ethics in international projects was an important aspect of this project, it was necessary to break the notion of “culture” up into varying categories that are considered influential factors in one’s cultural practices. This included reviewing various regional value systems.

5.2. Project Design and Discussion.

Based on the information about the regional value systems, specialized questions were created. Through these questions, a researcher is guided through important cultural aspects that require thorough consideration. The topics of the questions include language, religion, socio-economic status, minority populations, the structure of social relationships, age of maturity, perceptions of power, concern for time, regard for material goods, display of emotions, and preferred style of communication which may allow a researcher to become more easily familiarized with the research participant’s views on individualism, conservatism, and laws.

5.3. Discussion of Questionnaire

A questionnaire was not used to collect information for this project.

Chapter 6. Project Results and Discussion

6.1. Project Result 1

The questionnaire created encompasses a variety of topics that bring light to the needs of research participants to ensure that a research project does not unintentionally harm a research participant population through by going against standard beliefs or practices employed by the research participant population. The intended user of the questionnaire includes researchers who are nearing the approval phase from the institution's IRB. While most institutional IRB approval process is driven by the three ethical principles of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice, the questionnaire created for the purpose of this project would provide more specific information about the intended research participant population. Therefore, before moving further in the research project, it is recommended that researchers use the questionnaire to ensure that they familiarize themselves with more abstract aspects of the potential research participant population.

The topics selected as the focus for the questionnaire questions include language, religion, socio-economic status, minority populations, the structure of social relationships, age of maturity, perceptions of power, concern for time, regard for material goods, display of emotions, and preferred style of communication. These topics were chosen based off their association in identifying the cultural needs of research participants, which may impact the research participants likelihood to participate through the course of a project.

To address each topic, a question was asked which would require the researcher to answer. Since the focus of the questionnaire is to build cultural competency and avoid ethnocentric practices in research, the questions were designed in a way to

- make the researcher think beyond institutional policies;

- understand influencing factors outside of the researcher's own frame of reference;
- expand the researcher's knowledge and understanding of the population of people making up the research participants; and
- identify the needs of the research participants throughout the entire process.

By ensuring that questions are asked in a way that promotes understanding unique to the research participant population, researchers are likely to simultaneously build their cultural competencies.

The results of the guidelines, while working as a tool to build cultural competency in researchers, will also work as a frame of reference to help guide an institution through a project. More specifically, depending on the results of the guidelines, a researcher or the researcher's institution may determine that the needs of the research participant population do not align with the intended conduct of the project or means of disseminating the results of the project.

Similarly, a researcher or the researcher's institution may be able to identify specific areas of concern that need to be addressed, that the researcher or researcher's institution has the means and capacity to change, before delving deeper into a project. In this sense, aspects of the research plan may be altered to better meet the needs of the research participant population.

Whether it is determined that a project cannot move forward as initially planned or not, the information gained through answering the questionnaire benefits institutions by addressing matters in a way that is more specific to the research participant populations. As such, institutions will be more likely to avoid ethnocentric practices which may potentially harm the research participant population.

6.2. Project Result 2.

While the questionnaire provides thought-provoking questions that help address ethics in international projects through building cultural competency, institutions may also consider

additional or alternative means to avoid ethnocentric practices. As such, institutions may want to alternatively address research ethics in international projects through more specially designed questions or formatting.

By creating more specially designed questions or formatting, an institution may better address the needs of the research participant population in a way that better aligns with the institutional policies that are already in place. In terms of formatting the questions, therefore, if an institution can clearly design questions that align with the institutional policies, the institution may choose to utilize a program, such as REDCap. Utilizing a program like REDCap is easy to use and modifiable to streamline timely data review. This, therefore, may allow the institution to store information, apply branching logic more easily, and, overall, makes it easier to participate in research projects.⁴² While there are many benefits to utilizing a program like REDCap, it may take more initial work from the institution to review institutional policies, address questions relevantly, and apply branching logic appropriately.

⁴² Colfer, A., Brodecki, D., Hutchins, L., Stellar, J., & Finn Davis, K. (2011). Technology Supporting Research and Quality Improvement: A Success Story. *Elsevier Inc.*, 26, 595–596. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pedn.2011.08.007>

Chapter 7. Recommendations and Discussion

7.1. Introduction

It is evident that U.S. research institutions tend to frame ethical practices around western philosophies which can have ethnocentric tendencies and can be harmful to research participant populations for several reasons. As a result, the author proposes that institutions incorporate alternative guidelines to address specific cultural components that are otherwise not taken into consideration through a typical IRB approval process. Since it is not possible to address all cultural components and institutional nuances in a single document, the proposed questionnaire is designed to present be generic questions to address a larger variety of needs

7.2. Recommendations

While the guidelines provide thought-provoking questions that help address ethics in international projects through building cultural competency, it is recognized that a generic document will not meet the needs of every research project. As such, alternative recommendations have been provided as additional potentially appropriate means to avoid ethnocentric practices. As outlined in Chapter 6, additional alternatives to the guidelines recommended include more specially designed questions.

7.2.1. Recommendation 1

Currently, the questionnaire was created in a generic form which could easily address the needs of many institutions and areas of research. Although the generic form of the questionnaire should be sufficient in many aspects, some institutions may find that, due to policies within the institution, more specially designed questions may be necessary. In this case, an institution may want to alter the proposed questions to better meet its own needs. In addition, altering the

questions may allow a researcher to focus more closely on the specific cultural needs of the research participant population.

This may be an ideal alternative solution for a research institution to implement. It would not likely require many additional resources to be able to design a questionnaire to the likings of an institution. Considering that the questionnaire focuses on cultural components, however, an institution may want to consult with appropriate personnel to ensure that the way in which questions are represented are consistent with the needs of the institution, research project, and research participant population.

7.2.2. Recommendation 2

In certain scenarios, it is foreseen that guidelines may not be sufficient in meeting the ethical concerns in research across cultures. In the chance that applying guidelines are not appropriate, institutions may alternatively consider making modifications to institutional policies on ethics. In this sense, an institution may reorganize how the IRB approval process takes place. In this sense, an institution may require additional information from researchers prior to receiving IRB approval.

An institution may be likely to consider this option as a means to better ensure consistency in the process; however, addressing ethical concerns in research across cultures through the reorganization of institutional policies may not be feasible to do varying constraints within an institution.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

Research administration is a growing field with corresponding growing areas of need. One specific area of growth includes additional needs in research ethics. Ethical research practices have proven to be a challenge as improper treatment of research participants is evident in previous and historic research projects. While there are several ethical guidelines in place within the field of Research Administration, and the role of guidelines in the conduct of research is important, it is necessary to note that they often conflict in varying situations and require considerable interpretation as it relates to culture and cultural needs for research participant populations.

To be able to address this need in the area of research ethics, it is imperative that researchers can interpret, assess, and apply research rules in various situations. As such, the creation of guidelines for institutions to use was proposed as means to address ethics in international collaborations and to avoid ethnocentric practices in research. By taking into consideration cultural components and understanding influencing factors outside of the researcher's own frame of reference, a researcher may be more likely to unknowingly incorporate ethnocentric practices in research.

More specifically, the guidelines created address potentially important cultural needs. These needs include language, religion, socio-economic status, minority populations, socio-political processes, the structure of social relationships, age of maturity, perceptions of power, concern for time, ability to cope with uncertainty, regard for material goods, display of emotions, openness to change, group orientation, and preferred style of communication. These topics intend to promote an understanding of the unique needs of research participant populations and

build the researcher's cultural competencies. In doing this, the conduct of research projects may end up being more ethical, as it relates to the specific research participant population.

There were many limitations to this project. The primary limitation relates to the inability to address all institutional needs and varying cultural components. As a result, the proposed guidelines may not be appropriate for all institutions or projects. An alternative suggestion to the proposed guidelines includes rewording the guidelines to better fit the cultural needs of the research participant population. Another alternative would be an institution revising its policy or policies related to reviewing the ethical practices of a project.

In the future, institutions may pursue further activities that “involve educational efforts, administrative functions, and advocacy roles to convince key stakeholders to implement changes at the national and institutional levels”.⁴³ This may be done by applying the principles of self-determinism, non-maleficence, justice, and beneficence on a case-by-case basis by analyzing the relative merits and risks of each research proposal.⁴⁴ to address the existing gaps in research ethics capacity,

⁴³ Silverman, H., Edwards, H., Shamoo, A., & Matar, A. (2013). Enhancing Research Ethics Capacity in the Middle East: Experience and Challenges of a Fogarty-Sponsored Training Program. *Journal of Empirical Research on Human Research Ethics: An International Journal*, 8(5), 40–51. <https://doi.org/10.1525/jer.2013.8.5.40>

⁴⁴ Caleb Wall, & Overton, J. (2006). Unethical Ethics?: Applying Research Ethics in Uzbekistan. *Development in Practice*, 16(1), 62–67. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4029860>

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Appendix A. Copy of Questionnaire

PROJECT OVERVIEW	
Project Name:	
Primary Investigator's Name:	
Country/region project is taking place:	
Briefly describe the composition of the research team:	
POPULATION(S) OVERVIEW	
What is the name of the main population?	
Are there any minority groups present within the population of research participants?	
1) _____	3) _____
2) _____	4) _____
<i>**Consider all minority groups listed above through the rest of this questionnaire**</i>	
What percentage of the population is:	
<i>At or below poverty line:</i> _____	<i>Middle class:</i> _____
<i>Working class:</i> _____	<i>Upper class:</i> _____
How does the population view material goods? Select all that apply:	
<input type="checkbox"/> Offensive	<input type="checkbox"/> Status symbol
<input type="checkbox"/> Tendency to collect	<input type="checkbox"/> Indifference
<input type="checkbox"/> Disregard for possessions	<input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
Is the population known to be open to change?	<input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> Yes
How does the population adhere to time commitments?	
<input type="checkbox"/> Strict	<input type="checkbox"/> Moderate
<input type="checkbox"/> Relaxed	<input type="checkbox"/> Disregard
<i>Explain:</i>	
Indicate the level of data protection regulations within the country where research is being conducted?	
<input type="checkbox"/> Heavy	<input type="checkbox"/> Robust
<input type="checkbox"/> Moderate	<input type="checkbox"/> Limited
<i>Explain:</i>	

COMMUNICATON	
What is the common language used by the population?	
What other languages are/may be spoken by the populations	
1) _____	3) _____
2) _____	4) _____
Are there any common nonverbal cues that the population may use to communicate? <input type="radio"/>No <input type="radio"/>Yes	
<i>Explain:</i>	
How does the population display emotions?	
Is it common for emotions to be masked? <input type="radio"/>No <input type="radio"/>Yes	
Will the language have any significant impact on the understanding of the population? <input type="radio"/>No <input type="radio"/>Yes	
<i>Explain:</i>	
What is the populations preferred style(s) of communication?	
1) _____	3) _____
2) _____	4) _____
Are there any nuances associated with the way the population communicates? <input type="radio"/>No <input type="radio"/>Yes	
<i>Explain:</i>	
RELATIONSHIPS	
Indicate the structure of the social relationship with the following:	
<i>Immediate Family</i>	<i>Acquaintances</i>
<i>Distant Relatives</i>	<i>Coworkers</i>
<i>Close Friends</i>	<i>Strangers</i>
Are there any nuances associate with the way the population maintains relationships? <input type="radio"/>No <input type="radio"/>Yes	
<i>Explain:</i>	
How does the population define positions of power? Select all that apply:	
<input type="checkbox"/> Legitimate positional power	<input type="checkbox"/> Reward power
<input type="checkbox"/> Expert power	<input type="checkbox"/> Referent power
<input type="checkbox"/> Coercive power	<input type="checkbox"/> Informational power
<input type="checkbox"/> Connections	<input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____
What are characteristics of people in a position of power, as viewed by the population? Select all that apply:	
<input type="checkbox"/> Gender	<input type="checkbox"/> Age
<input type="checkbox"/> Role	<input type="checkbox"/> Relationship
<input type="checkbox"/> Experience	<input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____

RELIGION	
What religions are practiced by the population?	
1) _____	3) _____
2) _____	4) _____
Will the religious ideology impact any aspect of the project?	
<i>Explain:</i>	
AGE OF MATURITY	
What is considered the age of maturity?	
Are there certain transitions that need to be practiced before an individual is considered an adult?	<input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> Yes
<i>Explain:</i>	
RESEARCH PROJECT SPECIFICS	
Does the informed consent align with the identified needs of the population?	<input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> Yes
<i>Explain:</i>	
Does the planned conduct of the research align with the needs of the population?	<input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> Yes
<i>Explain:</i>	
Will the intended outcome and plan for dissemination align with the needs of the population?	<input type="radio"/> No <input type="radio"/> Yes
<i>Explain:</i>	
Describe known areas of the research project that need further vetting or additional planning:	

Appendix C. Biographical Statement

Katie Rice is a second-year research administration student at Johns Hopkins University of Krieger School of Arts and Sciences. Prior to pursuing a master's degree in research administration, she received a bachelor's degree in anthropology and a bachelor's degree in organizational studies from the University of Tulsa's Henry Kendall College of Arts and Sciences in 2017. She is interested in international research administration and compliance with regulations for research projects.