ETHICAL REVIEW FOR RESEARCH INVOLVING INDIGENOUS PEOPLE –

IREAP Guidelines - ACU Human Research Ethics Committee

# Preamble

ACU supports the values outlined in the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007)* and is committed to quality research conducted sensitively and ethically and in a culturally appropriate manner and in the spirit of Reconciliation. This is in line with the ACU *Statement of Commitment to Reconciliation* approved by Senate in March 1998.[[1]](#footnote-1)

The IREAP Guidelines were developed in 2014, reviewed in 2022 and endorsed by the ACU Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research Committee (ATSIRC) at the December 2022 meeting.

# ACU requirements

ACU Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) will refer all research conducted by ACU staff or students which involves any activities pertaining to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research to the ACU Indigenous Research Ethics Advisory Panel (IREAP) for consideration. This includes “all research that impacts or is of particular significance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, including the planning, collection, analysis and dissemination of information or knowledge, in any format or medium, which is about or may affect

Indigenous peoples, either collectively or individually”.[[2]](#footnote-2)

The IREAP members are experienced internal and external Indigenous Researchers who cover a breadth of research discipline areas relevant to ACU, and the University’s Research Ethics Manager.

# ACU Process

When researchers indicate on the online ethics form that their research involves Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants or topics, they will be asked to attach an additional document to their application.[[3]](#footnote-3) This document will give researchers the opportunity to explain how they have ensured that their research is culturally appropriate, and how they have addressed the following issues:

* community approval/access (where appropriate)
* reciprocity and feedback to participants/community
* awareness of local issues
* additional local ethics/other approval requirements (if required)
* consent
* archiving material (where appropriate)
* Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property Rights

The application including this support material will be referred to the ACU Indigenous Research Ethics Advisory Panel (IREAP) who will either make a recommendation to the ACU Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) for approval, with or without amendments, or who will refer the application back to the researcher for more information or to request changes.

# Relevant guidelines

There are a number of excellent resources informing research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. All research involving humans in Australia is subject to the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* (2007, updated 2018)(National Statement). The National Statement is upheld by the values of:

* Research merit and integrity
* Justice
* Beneficence
* Respect

Section 4 of the National Statement addresses ethical considerations specific to participants, with [Chapter 4.7 specifically addressing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.](https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/publications/national-statement-ethical-conduct-human-research-2007-updated-2018#toc__1428)

The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) has also produced two other relevant documents:

* *Keeping research on track II***[[4]](#footnote-4)**
* *Ethical conduct in research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities: Guidelines for researchers and stakeholders 2018*[[5]](#footnote-5)

These documents outline 6 core values:

* Spirit and integrity
* Cultural Continuity
* Equity
* Reciprocity
* Respect
* Responsibility

These core values are in turn demonstrated through evidence of:

* Consent
* Research agreements
* Cultural and intellectual property
* Cultural competency

The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) produced the valuable *Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research*[[6]](#footnote-6). It has 4 principles:

* Principle 1 – Indigenous self-determination – which involves recognition and respect; engagement and collaboration; informed consent; and cultural capability and learning
* Principle 2 – Indigenous leadership – which comprises Indigenous led research; Indigenous perspectives and participation; and Indigenous knowledge and data
* Principle 3 – Impact and value; which involves benefit and reciprocity; and impact and risk, and
* Principle 4 – Sustainability and accountability – concerning Indigenous lands and waters; ongoing Indigenous governance; and reporting and compliance.

ACU recognises that innovative research often involves film, media or communication outcomes and encourages researchers to explore the relevant protocol documents in framing their proposals including:

* [New media cultures: protocols for producing indigenous Australian new media](http://find.lib.uts.edu.au/search;jsessionid=067DCEED796D66C96352BC19C2E24F9A?N=0&Ntk=All&Ntx=matchallpartial&Ntt=New+media+cultures+%3a+protocols+for+producing+indigenous+Australian+new+media): by Terri Janke.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Researchers wishing to conduct research with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander participants and communities or on Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander topics are expected to demonstrate their respect and care through familiarity with these documents.

# Local requirements

In addition to ACU approval, some research may have local requirements requiring specific approval. Where such local requirements apply, ACU researchers will not be required to complete a full ACU ethics application form in addition to local HREC approval. Rather, they will be able to register their external ethics approval, together with supporting documents.

The following states have HRECs for local health research involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people:

* NSW - Aboriginal Health & Medical Research Council of NSW Ethics Committee[[8]](#footnote-8)
* NT - Central Australian Human Research Ethics Committee and the Human Research Ethics Committee for the Northern Territory Department of Health and Menzies School of Health Research[[9]](#footnote-9)
* SA - SA Aboriginal Health Research and Ethics Committee[[10]](#footnote-10)
* WA - Western Australian Aboriginal Health Ethics Committee[[11]](#footnote-11)

In addition, individual communities and organisations may have their own requirements for access and approval to conduct research. Researchers should demonstrate how they have built or how they intend to build respectful relationships with communities and individuals, so as to enable proper engagement and obtain necessary approvals and consent. This should be reflected in research timelines that accord with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives.

# Enquiries

If you would like to discuss your research before you submit your application, please contact:

**Ethics Secretariat**

Ph: 02 9739 2646

[Res.ethics@acu.edu.au](mailto:Res.ethics@acu.edu.au)

**Dr Jessica Russ-Smith**

Acting Convenor, Indigenous Research Ethics Advisory Panel (IREAP)

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# Appendix A

**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander & Australian Catholic University**

**Values and Principles Statement (2021)**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have survived for over 60,000 years, with their own understandings of the earth and its living beings, the stars in the sky, the tides on the shores, the spirits and ancestors that guide them and the lore that has raised them.

Each country is unique in their knowledges, yet there is a shared and collective experience that brings together the values, spirituality and perspectives as sovereign peoples of lands that were unceded.

The values that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples hold close are built on the interconnectedness of themselves to land, saltwater and freshwater, the stewardship they employ in caring for country and their relatedness to each other. Ancestral footsteps are felt when there is acknowledgement of Elders that have directed them in their wisdoms towards sustainably living and thriving on the many nations that this land contains.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have long endured the pain and trauma connected with Colonisation and subsequent attitudes and actions of educators, including those in religious education. While many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples received the message of the Gospel into their hearts and found it liberating, many others suffered pain and loss. Many who should have been offered the benefits of School, College and University education were not given that right. We cannot change what has occurred in the past; we can recognise the trauma that this history has given and begin to gain mutual understandings of a sustainable future that exemplifies truth, love and respect for human dignity to prevail.

Australian Catholic University (ACU) understands that significant harms have been done that have denied voices and truth telling for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The need for this to be recognised and acknowledged is ever-present, as an educational institution can choose to actively engage in change that redresses these inequities. Education has rejected many marginalised groups throughout history, creating a barrier to opportunities and a greater comprehension of society overall. The education required to understand the knowledge, expertise and lived experiences within First Nation peoples has largely been neglected.

ACU is guided by our Mission Statement that espouses truth and love, the pursuit of knowledge, human dignity and the common good as fundamental commitments. ACU’s Values Statement positions truth, academic excellence, service, equity, diversity, accessibility, wellbeing and sustainability as important values. In connection with Australian Catholic University Mission and Values Statements, we commit to these Values regarding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

**OUR VALUES**

**Acknowledgement and Recognition**

We acknowledge the history of colonial practice, recognise the original inhabitants of the land and recognise strength in the knowledges of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

**Respect and Reverence**

We respect the traditional custodians and pay respect to the Elders, for their footsteps have nurtured the land. We honour the spiritual connection to country and the responsibility held in its care.

**Listening and Understanding**

We hear the words, and the silences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples which have been built by a history of denial and misunderstandings through colonial practice. We will undertake further listening to the expertise of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

**Co-design and partnership**

We will sit in circle with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities and organisations as an act of partnership and relationship to one another

**OUR PRINCIPLES**

According to guiding frameworks and the University’s Mission statement, adhere to the following principles in connection with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples:

1. Acknowledge that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have walked this land for over 60,000 years, and as such are the original inhabitants.

2. Acknowledge that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have held systems of knowledge, philosophy and spirituality long before Colonisation occurred. Much of this knowledge has been obscured, appropriated or rendered insignificant in western-centered institutions.

3. Recognise the painful history involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people since Colonisation began, including the dispossession of land, the removal of children from families and the decimation of communities which reverberates through Australian society today. The denial of this history further enables structural barriers to occur for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and without this recognition, a lack of understanding will continue to predominate in contemporary society.

4. Commit to further invest in highlighting the knowledges and expertise of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and provide equitable access to these knowledges. This investment must extend to the engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders, organisations and communities, as well as students, staff and the academy overall.

5. Build understanding of the many pedagogical principles that can be found within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge systems, attempting to provide relevant knowledge connected to their campus locations and elsewhere. While these learnings capture many Indigenous knowledges around the world, there are specific characteristics within the many different nations within Australia and the Torres Strait Islands. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are not homogenous. These knowledges have the potential to enrich understandings across many disciplines throughout the university.

6. Demonstrate an ongoing commitment to education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, as it is an inalienable human right for everyone to gain an education. This requires access, participation, representation and visibility for all people involved with the university.

7. Follow cultural protocols and ask permissions for use of important knowledges to the Elders and knowledge holders of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities. The cultural labour of individuals communities and populations should not be expected. Rather, ACU must work in building partnerships and collaborations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples for the knowledge and expertise that they offer.

# Appendix B – Supporting information to Indigenous Research Ethics Advisory Panel (IREAP)

The ACU Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) would like more information in support of your application because you have indicated that your research involves Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander research.

*Our aim is not the inhibit anyone’s engagement in Indigenous research, but instead to encourage reflective and ethical research which considers the impact of research activities and findings on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals and communities. These questions are intended to help you to* ***plan and design*** *your Indigenous research project, rather than just explain it.*

As per the new AIATSIS Code (2022, p. 6) “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research should be understood as research that concerns or impacts Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in any of the following ways:

* The research is about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, societies, culture and/or knowledge, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander policies or experience.
* The target population is Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals, groups, communities or societies.
* The target population is not explicitly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals or communities but the research population includes a significant number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
* Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people have been incidentally recruited and researchers wish to do separate analysis of Indigenous-specific data.
* There are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals or communities contributing to the research.
* There is new or pre-existing data related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples being used in the research.
* The research concerns Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ lands or waters”[[12]](#footnote-12)

This is because Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research can involve sensitive areas that require extra thought and attention. The information you provide will be sent to the Indigenous Research Ethics Advisory Panel (IREAP) together with your ethics application. IREAP will either:

* forward your application to the HREC with a recommendation for approval. (Note: this does not mean that the HREC might not have other questions for you.)

or

* return your application to you and ask you for more information. (Note: once you have addressed the issues to their satisfaction, IREAP will then forward your application to the HREC for consideration.)

Please attach an additional document answering the following questions:

1. Have you consulted or collaborated with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander researchers, community organisations, or advisors in developing this project? Have you considered whether this research benefits participants and/or communities in ways proportionate to their involvement? Please provide brief details or explain why not.
2. Please provide a positionality statement that describes the research team’s expertise relevant to this project and experience partnering with and researching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities.
3. If your research involves working with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander participants from specific communities tell us how you intend to obtain community approval or access? If you can attach a Letter of Support from the community/communities your research engages with this will be helpful. If you are unable to show evidence of support for your research from the local community please explain why.
4. If your research involves Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander participants tell us how you intend to obtain consent from participants.[[13]](#footnote-13)
5. If your research involves working with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander participants from specific communities tell us how you intend to develop respectful research relationships with communities and individuals?
6. Show us how you will demonstrate reciprocity to the participants/community.[[14]](#footnote-14) If you do not believe this is appropriate for your research, please explain why not.
7. Please demonstrate your awareness of local issues that might impact upon your research. This may include, for example, if your research may involve culturally-restricted information, known conflicts of interest, or local cultural, political or environmental factors which might impact on visits or research trips.
8. Please indicate whether you will require additional approvals to conduct your research or permissions to access or use specific archives, data collections, images, or oral histories etc[[15]](#footnote-15) If yes, attach a copy of the approval(s) or indicate when you will be able to provide evidence of approval.
9. Tell us what you plan to do with the data after you have completed your research.[[16]](#footnote-16)
10. Tell us how will you inform people in the community/communities you have engaged with about your research outcomes and the final report/product?
11. Who owns the Intellectual Property (IP?) relating to the research? How will you identify this and advise people in the community/communities you are engaging with? If you are working with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander knowledge holders, have you considered whether it might be appropriate for any ensuing outputs to be co-authored?
12. Please provide any other information you feel should be considered in support of your research.

## Appendix C

## Sample Participant Information Sheet & Consent Form

In the Information Letter please introduce yourself to the people you will be engaging with for your research.

For example:

My name is Nerida Blair. I am a Wakka Wakka woman from south-west central Queensland. My father was Harold Blair, an Aboriginal singer and activist. I live in Darkinjung country on the Central Coast of NSW and work in Dharug country in the Faculty of Education and Arts, Australian Catholic University (ACU) in Strathfield, NSW. I have worked in Aboriginal education for over 30 years, mostly in NSW in universities but also in the public service.

My name is X... I am a Dharug man living in Sydney and working at the Australian Catholic University in Strathfield, NSW.

My name is Z... I am a Professor. I have developed curriculum in higher education over the past thirty years in developing countries as well as in Australia. My passion is in curriculum development, pedagogy and assessment. I am a scholar of higher education leadership in the academy. In the different roles I have had in education I have been fortunate enough to have collaborated with Indigenous peoples for many years.

# IREAP Artwork and Letterhead

The ACU HREC commissioned local ACU artists Danielle Dent and Cassandra Gibbs to produce an artwork explaining the aims of IREAP. The six circles represent the values of Spirit & Integrity, Reciprocity, Respect, Equality, Survival & Protection, and Responsibility[[17]](#footnote-17). The seven circles represent the ACU campuses. All these circles sit alongside rivers of knowledge. The campsites between the rivers represent the people engaged in learning, teaching and researching, and the flow in and out represents the importance of continual engagement. The ripples in the river represent the ripple effect of learning and research. The four campsites represent the four key values of respect, justice beneficence and research integrity.

This artwork has been adapted with the permission of the artists to provide templates for use in consent forms, information sheets, PowerPoint presentations etc. These templates can be downloaded from the [Ethics Webpage](https://www.acu.edu.au/research/research-ethics-integrity-and-compliance/research-ethics).

1. See Appendix A [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://aiatsis.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-02/aiatsis-code-ethics-jan22.pdf> Page 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See Appendix B [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. <https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/resources/keeping-research-track-ii> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. <https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/resources/ethical-conduct-research-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples-and-communities> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. <https://aiatsis.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-02/aiatsis-code-ethics-jan22.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. <http://www.australiacouncil.gov.au/resources/reports_and_publications/artforms/digital/media_arts_protocols_for_producing_indigenous_australian_media_arts> [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. <https://www.ahmrc.org.au/ethics-at-ahmrc/> [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. <https://www.menzies.edu.au/page/About_Us/Menzies_committees/Human_research_ethics_committee/> [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. <https://ahcsa.org.au/> [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. <https://www.ahcwa.org.au/> [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. <https://aiatsis.gov.au/sites/default/files/2022-02/aiatsis-code-ethics-jan22.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. See Appendix C for a sample Consent Form and Participant Information letter. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. For example, are you training other Indigenous researchers to assist you in your research? Are you engaging Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people at all stages of your research process? Are you returning any transcribed material to people for their editing? Are you acknowledging the input of community members in any publications? Are you arranging payment in recompense for time spent by someone helping you with your research? [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. For example, Aboriginal Health & Medical Research Council of NSW Ethics Committee requires ethics applications be submitted for health related research involving Aboriginal people in NSW. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. For example, have you considered archiving material, such as tapes of interviews? [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Taken from [Keeping Research On Track: A guide for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples about health research ethics](https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/guidelines-publications/e65). [↑](#footnote-ref-17)