**Humanities Postgraduate Research Skills Training**

**Research Ethics**

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(with thanks to Dr John Canning)

**Group discussion: Ethical scenarios**

Each group member should choose one of the scenarios from the lists below and overleaf to discuss. In each case consider:

* What are the ethical issues involved?
* How do they relate (or not) to the Faculty of Humanities guidelines?
* How would you approach the topic/situation ethically?

NB: Some individuals may find the mention of some of these topics difficult. If any member of your group does not wish to discuss a particular topic, please respect that group member and discuss another topic.

1. A Victorian chapel with its own graveyard has recently been demolished. Four houses will be built on the site. When the chapel was built in 1850 a small number of Roman coins were found. The aim of the project is to excavate the site for Roman remains before the new building takes place.
2. A local charity runs creative writing workshops for sex workers. The project is to research the kinds of topics they write about.
3. A project aims to create a website of interviews with Holocaust survivors living in the UK.
4. A project about language teaching will be carried out with classroom observations and focus groups in a single school, with a close-knit group of teachers and administrators.
5. A project aims to explore the activities of the British Union of Fascists in Hampshire between 1932 and 1940.
6. A project on cultural heritage will include interviews with public figures involved in local and national government.
7. A project is set up to create a website for prisoners in Hampshire and the Isle of Wight to publish poetry.
8. A project is proposed where a researcher will attempt to join a small and highly secretive religious group about which little is known.
9. A project is proposed to research the use of English language on a social networking website.

The above topics are ethically difficult at the start, but sometimes difficult ethical issues arise when you are not looking for them. Consider how you would address the following:

1. Your research into a dead author suggests the possibility that he was bisexual. Nothing published in his lifetime suggests this and his children are still alive.
2. You are visiting a school as a part of your research into how people learn foreign languages. On one of your visits a 14-year-old tells you that she is being sexually abused by a family friend. What do you do?
3. On a visit to the British Library you unearth a PhD thesis by an unknown author on your topic. On reading the thesis you notice its similarity to a key text on the topic written by another author ten years later.
4. You are doing your PhD on the work of an individual who was a prominent and well-respected member of the religious community in which you grew up. The person is not well-known outside your group, but you find out lots of things about her character which you find difficult to come to terms with.
5. A foundation set up to promote the work and legacy of a well-respected individual awards you a small grant to run a conference about the person’s life and work. One of the speakers argues that his impact was less important than usually suggested and that his sister did most of the real work anyway. The foundation’s leaders express their anger about how their subject was treated.