Reforming the Ethics Application Process

M. Rodwan Abouharb
Liz Ralph-Morrow
Nils Metternich

Current Views of Ethics Application Process

Our ideal future view of the Ethics Application Process

Current ethics procedure

- All ethics submissions need to be approved by me (faculty) or Liz (students) and then submitted to UCL Research Ethics Committee, regardless of the level of risk.

- The forms have been designed centrally, are not user friendly and often not relevant for research undertaken in political science.

- Submission to REC is also often fraught and long winded with an unnecessary level of complexity in the forms and types of questions posed of students and faculty.

- Beginning the next academic year Departments have the opportunity to bring low risk applications inhouse.

Proposed Ethics Procedure: simplify the ethics application process

- New forms that will guide students and faculty to assess:
  - if they need any kind of ethics approval
  - If they do, the level of risk their application generates

- For low-risk applications we will construct a new user friendly ethics application process, in concert with colleagues who are particularly familiar with this, as we near a complete draft.

- LSE government department have reformed their ethics application process and they provide a good model for us to build upon.

- The aim of this reformed application process will:
  - be to guide the student/faculty member using language that people understand to help them gauge their risk
  - Help students/faculty take actions to mitigate risk and meet the guidelines.

Proposed Ethics Procedure II: Re-organising submission and review process

- Move to a system of three hard deadlines throughout the academic year which link to the dissertation process and academic funding cycles.
    - Colleagues to submit their applications in time for these deadlines.
    - Move to a committee system that reviews these applications in batches.

- Colleagues with relevant expertise will be asked to review applications where they can provide expert guidance; this will be reflected in peoples workload hours.

- We expect this inhouse fixed deadline model for low-risk applications will be much more efficient than everything being sent to UCL REC.

- Fixed deadlines throughout the year will help better manage workloads for committee members and encourage colleagues to provide a longer time-horizon to plan their applications.

- High-risk applications process continues as before.
- We will push REC to understand that their forms need revision to be more relevant to SHSS in general and political science in particular.