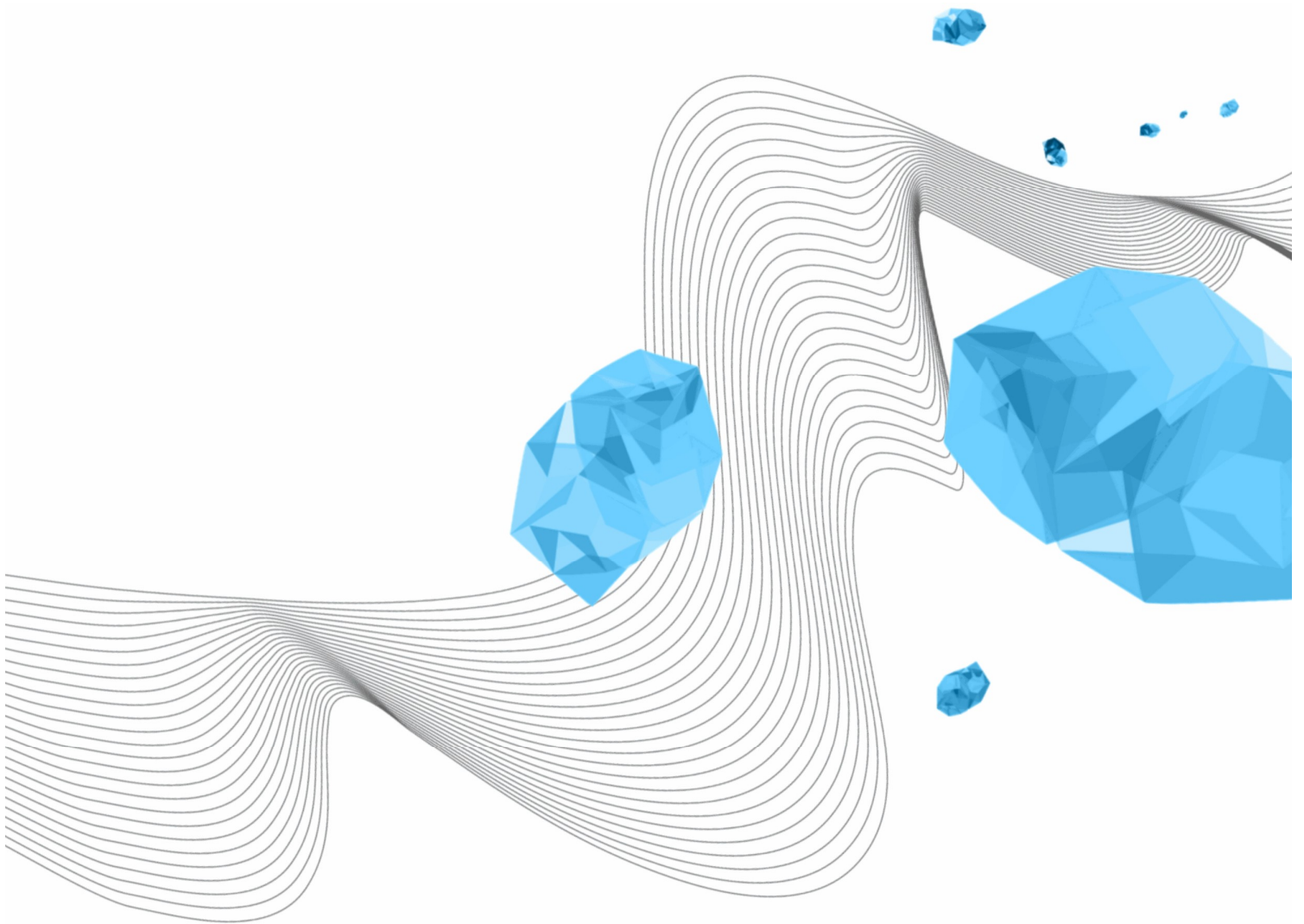# ITC ETHICS COMMITTEE HOUSE RULES

Version: 4.0

COLOPHON

ORGANISATION
Faculty of Geo-information Science and Earth Observations (ITC)

TITEL
ITC Ethics Committee House Rules

SUBJECT
Scientific Integrity

PROJECT

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3.0	04-04-2022	Marga Koelen & Ana María Bustamante Duarte	
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Introduction

The Faculty Board of the Faculty ITC has established an Ethics Committee. Its task is to ensure the quality of the ethical review process by establishing quality assurance procedures. Its activities are defined in the Faculty Regulations of Geo-Information Science and Earth Observation, Article 10f, as follows:

- *"It reviews research proposals in the domain of Geo-Information Science, according to and falling within the scope of the Research Ethics Policy of the University of Twente. This includes the self-assessment and provision of information to researchers regarding the review procedure.*
- *It keeps records of the reviews and archives the reviews according to legal provisions and applicable policies of the University of Twente.*
- *It informs, periodically, the Faculty Board of the researcher, or in case of multiple researchers: the Faculty Board of the leading researcher, about the advice of the committee."*

The composition of the ITC Ethics Committee

The composition of the ITC Ethics Committee (IEC) consists of seven members:
- Portfolio holder research acts as the chair of the IEC;
- Research support officer acts as the professional secretary;
- Three researchers from the Faculty of ITC;
- One ITC PhD candidate;
- One researcher from another UT faculty.

The call for new members is done via "General Announcement" to all the ITC Faculty. The selection of a new IEC member is done by the committee chair, who has interviewed together with the IEC's secretary the different candidates. The selection always aims for diversity not solely in gender, age, ethnicity and education but also in disciplinary expertise.

The Faculty Board (FB) appoints the IEC members. The IEC secretary requests an official appointment letter to the FB secretary and sends it to each IEC member.

Membership responsibilities and rights

A member has a seat in the committee in a personal capacity based on their expertise. The IEC members are accountable to the chair of the committee. The appointment is for four years, after which reappointment for the same period term can take place one time.
Membership of the committee ends:
a) by voluntary resignation;
b) by the termination of employment with the faculty;
c) when a member has served on the committee for eight years;
d) by not fulfilling the responsibilities or in case of misconduct (which must be established by the majority of the committee).

Description of member's roles

The secretary of the IEC is responsible for reporting the course of events during the meeting appointment and dismissal procedure. The day-to-day management of a committee consists of the chair, the vice-chair and the professional secretary. The executive board meets when necessary. The secretary is accountable to the chair of the IEC.

Responsibilities of the IEC and the researcher

The scientific quality of the research is the responsibility of the researcher(s) or the research team leading the research. The IEC issues advice to the researcher concerning the submitted research proposal and the request for advice. As part of it, the IEC carries out an ethical review when requested and may also advise on the design or methodology of a study if ethical concerns are derived from it. The advice issued can encourage conducting the suggested project or recommend changes to its design to address the concerns raised. As such, the IEC does not provide ethics "approvals" or "rejections." Nonetheless, if an "approval" is needed for publication or other research project purposes, it can be requested from the dean by the professional secretary, based on the advice issued.

The advice is expected to be provided to the researcher or the research team within approximately 15-20 working days of receiving the application form. The researcher will be notified upon submission of their research to be reviewed on the approximate time this will take. If a research proposal has been modified per the advice of the IEC, it is a proposal that does not need to be reassessed by the committee. However, if changes have been done later on due to additional factors that the researchers consider are major and can have an ethical impact, it is suggested that these are again consulted with the IEC.

Furthermore, the IEC can seek advice from external experts if needed. However, it is the researcher's or the research team's responsibility to determine whether the research project should be submitted to other specialized ethics committees or advisors. If not provided by the responses in the questionnaire, the IEC can also provide this advice (e.g., for geo-health research).

Reviewing and decision-making process

- A researcher submits the GEO ethics committee's questionnaire for ethical review in the UT Ethics Review Tool. The IEC secretary completes the initial screening of the research submitted for review to ensure the completion and quality of the submission. This will ensure that all material is available for the reviewer(s) to provide informed advice on the research.
- It is relevant to highlight that all submissions from Ph.D. candidates and MSc students need to count first on the approval of their main supervisor, as mandated by the UT 2018 Research Ethics Policy. In case the researcher is an employee, the supervisor plays no role in the process.

- The questionnaire is reviewed by at least one IEC member. Once the reviewer advises on the questionnaire, the researcher receives a notification email and can then visit the submission in the web application and access the advice in a .pdf form. It will contain an application number, the submission, the comments from the supervisor, and the advice from the reviewer(s).
- If the case is deemed complex, the IEC member can request a second opinion from another member or request to have it discussed at an IEC meeting with all other members.
- In case the initial reviewer is not available, the IEC secretary will find a second reviewer for the submission.
- The secretary of the IEC is responsible for managing submissions, assigning reviewers, and extracting data on the ethics submissions and their state for the report. The IEC secretary is the first contact point in case of any technical problems in the web application.
- A member who takes a minority position about a decision may request the secretary to state this explicitly in the report.
- The reviewing process mentioned above applies to all ITC research, including MSc, PhD, and academic research conducted by a faculty member.
- If deemed desirable, the IEC will give the lead of the research project or the designated researcher for this aspect of the researcher opportunity to explain it further in a meeting of the committee.
- After the conclusion of each advice, the members and external experts destroy all digital files and paper documents regarding the reviewed research project but keep the advice given for verification purposes. The secretary of the IEC is responsible for giving a shadow repository of the issued advice. In addition, anyone who is not a member of the committee but who is involved in reviewing a research proposal will be asked to agree to non-disclosure.

The general operation of the IEC

In consultation with the chair, the secretary calls the meetings and determines the agenda. The committee meets four times per year. The secretary then ensures that the committee members have the meeting documents at their disposal one week before the meeting. The meetings are of a closed nature.

The secretary is responsible for reporting on the meetings. The minutes are approved at the next meeting, if necessary, after making the necessary changes. The approved minutes are confidential.

The IEC has two non-working periods each year that researchers need to account for, in addition, to the 15-20 working days of response time. These periods are from approx. July 15 – August 15, and from approx. December 15 – January 15 depending on the seasonal calendar. Submissions done close to or during these periods will be resumed in the reviewing process as soon as the IEC members are back in service.

The IEC reports annually on its activities to the dean of the ITC faculty and the University-wide Ethics Committee (UwEC) via the IEC's chair. For reporting, the IEC secretary will use general

information from the application of the research projects and collaborations and that from the advices. These data will be used anonymized, not disclosing any personal information from the researchers. The reports will be kept with all relevant documents in an IEC dedicated folder within the UT-servers.