Ordinance of the Ethics Committee (for psychological and related research)

(May 27th, 2011)

The Faculty Assembly of the Faculty of Philosophy decides:

I General Regulations

§ 1 Purpose

This ordinance intends to regulate the ethical aspects of psychological respectively related research conducted at the Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Zurich with the goal to ensure the protection of the human participants and to maintain the ethical appropriateness of the research projects.

§ 2 Research Projects

[1] Research projects can refer to both research on humans (biomedical research) and research with humans (social research). Research projects at the Institute of Psychology of the University of Zurich are only permitted if the "Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct" of the American Psychological Association (APA) and the "Ethische Richtlinien für Psychologinnen und Psychologen der Schweizerischen Gesellschaft für Psychologie (SGP)" ("Ethical Guidelines for Psychologist of the Swiss Psychological Society (SPS)") are followed. In research projects of other disciplines of the faculty the corresponding relevant guidelines of those disciplines apply. The Ethics Committee provides a checklist to ascertain if the guidelines of the APA and the SPS are being followed.

[2] If not all questions on the checklist can be answered unequivocally with "yes", then it is mandatory to submit an application for the execution of the research project to the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Philosophy.

§ 3 Research Project Supervision

[1] Research projects are to be conducted under the supervision of a member of the Faculty of Philosophy. The principal investigator is responsible for the execution of the research project, for following the guidelines of the APA and the SPS, as well as for meeting the requirements put forth by the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Philosophy.

[2] Students' supervisors are the principal investigators of projects conducted by their students. The principal investigator is required to instruct the student in regards to the binding ethical guidelines.

II Ethics Committee

§ 4 Structure

[1] The Ethics Committee is a standing committee of the Faculty of Philosophy.

[2] It comprises seven people:

a) Three professors of institutes of the faculty that conduct empiric research; one of the persons can be professor emeritus. Two of the professors should be part of the Institute of Psychology, one professor part of another institute;
b) One research associate of a discipline of the University of Zurich with expertise in ethical questions; for example an employee of the Ethics Research Institute;
c) One representative each of the ranks of the "Privatdozierenden", of the non-professorial academic staff and of the students. The representatives should be part of the Institute of Psychology or another institute conducting empiric research.

[3] The members of the Ethics Committee are elected by the Faculty Assembly. The duration of a term of office is two years (one year for the student representative). Reelection is possible. The election is confirmed by the Dean of the Faculty of Philosophy.

[4] The members of the Ethics Committee elect a president of the committee from their midst.

§ 5 Tasks

[1] The Ethics Committee grants approvals for the execution of research projects in cases in which the guidelines of the APA and the SPS are not unequivocally fulfilled according to the self-assessment of the principal investigator. The Committee verifies that the protection of the research participants is ensured. It informs the faculty assembly once a year about the applications and the granted approvals.

[2] The president accepts the applications, checks their completeness, convenes meetings or lets the documents circulate amongst the committee members and informs the applicants about the final decision in writing.

§ 6 Conflict of Interest

Members of the committee involved in the evaluation process must disclose any conflicts of interest and must refrain from participating in the evaluation process if they meet any of the criteria listed in the legislation on administrative law.

§ 7 Experts

The president of the Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Philosophy can call upon outside experts if there is not sufficient expertise available within the committee when evaluating an application.

III Procedural Regulations

§ 8 Types of Procedures

[1] Applications for single and group projects are evaluated through the standard process. A simplified process deals with minor changes of existing approvals.

[2] If research paradigms respectively specific research methods (instruments, tasks, questionnaires) in group applications are assessed in regards to their ethical safety and approved, then the principal investigator is allowed to use them in individual studies with comparable groups without further approval.

[3] The extension of ethics approval from single studies to one or several more studies, as well as minor changes to the research method or extension to other groups, is considered a minor change. The president decides what constitutes a minor change.

§ 9 Submission of Applications

Applications are to be submitted to the Ethics Committee as a hardcopy and as an electronic version and are to include all necessary documents for the evaluation. The application form and guidelines in which the necessary documents and required information are specified in detail are provided by the Ethics Committee.

§ 10 Data Inspection

Members of the Ethics Committee have access to all research project materials, data and processes at any time.

§ 11 Standard Process

[1] An ethics committee meeting is usually convened to assess the individual applications. At least four members must be present. The decisions of the Ethics Committee are made by the simple majority of the members present with the president casting the deciding vote in the event of a tie.

[2] In exceptional cases, especially in case of temporal urgency or regarding research projects with minor risk, which is determined by the president, the Ethics Committee can deal with their affairs by way of correspondence. This is based on the prerequisite that no member insists upon a meeting and a unanimous consent on the application is reached.

§ 12 Simplified Process

The Ethics Committee can deal with applications for change through simplified processes by way of correspondence. This is based on the prerequisite that no member insists upon a meeting and that at least five members reach a consensus.

§ 13 Types of Decisions and Validity of Approvals

[1] Applications can be approved, denied, or approved with certain conditions.

[2] If conditions are to be fulfilled, approval will only be granted once all conditions have been completely fulfilled.

[3] Approval can be granted for 36 months at most. If research projects run longer, an application for an extension must be filed to continue with the project.

§ 14 Confidentiality

All involved persons are obliged to maintain confidentiality towards third parties in regards to the content of the meetings and decisions.

§ 15 Storage

The Ethics Committee documents the applications and all made decisions. The hardcopies of the applications are stored for a period of ten years.

IV. Interim and Concluding Regulations

§ 16 Interim Regulations

Research projects which have started prior to the enactment of this ordinance and with a total duration of less than 24 months are not affected by these regulations.

§ 17 Effective Date

This ordinance becomes effective from August 1st, 2011.