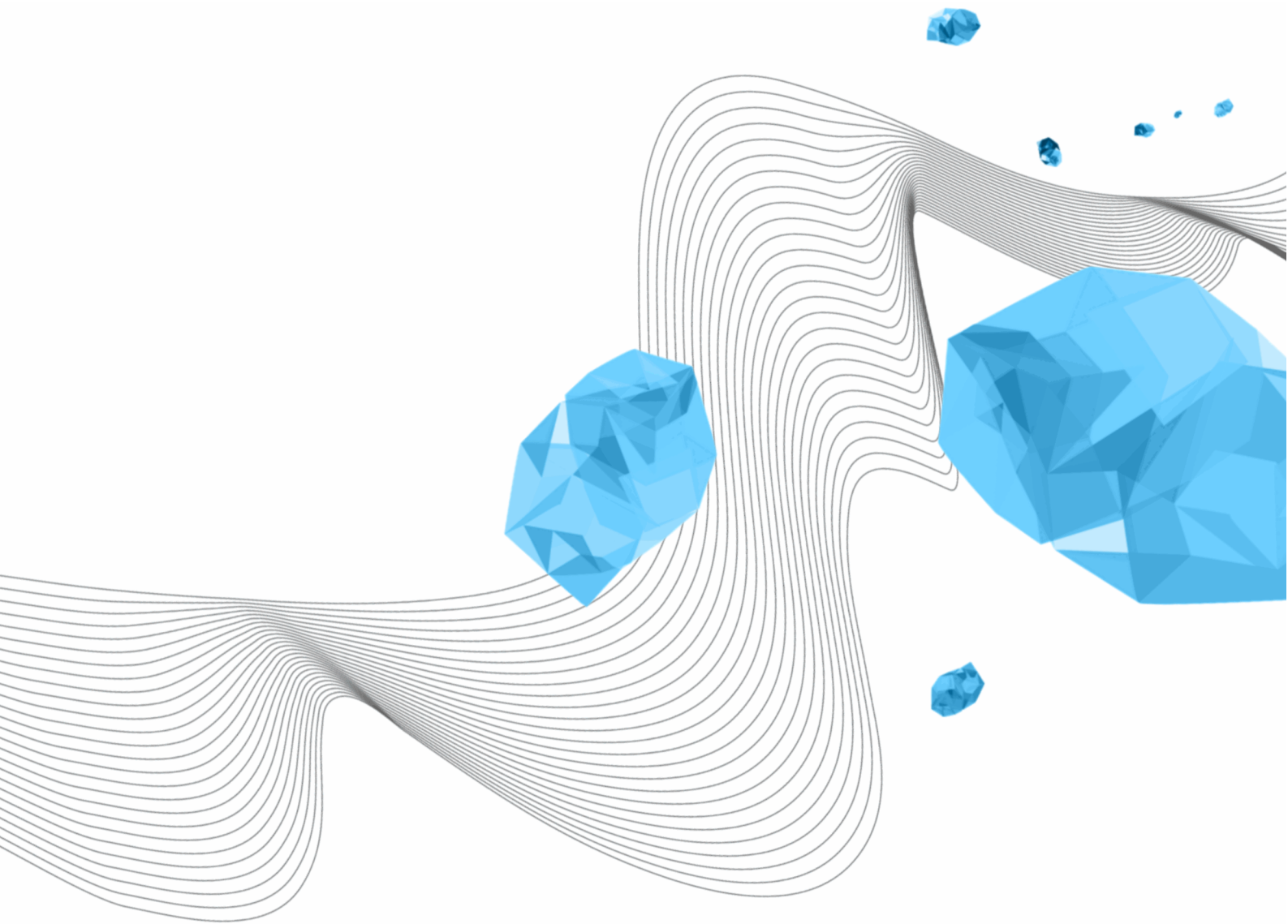


# GEO ETHICS COMMITTEE HOUSE RULES

Version: 5.0



## COLOPHON

ORGANISATION

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

TITEL

Geo Ethics Committee House Rules

SUBJECT

Scientific Integrity

PROJECT

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4.0	18-07-2023	Masome Shariat & Karin Pfeffer	Update on reviewing and decision-making process, add information about Ethical Review Tool, formatting
5.0	27-11-2024	Masome Shariat & Fran Meissner	Update on the composition of the Geo Ethics Committee, description of member's roles, reviewing and decision-making process, formatting The updates to the composition reflect the Faculty Board's approval on April 8, 2024, to elect the Chair of the GeoEC through a vote by the committee members, replacing the previous structure where the Chair was the Research Portfolio Holder.

## CONTENTS

Introduction .....	4
The composition of the Geo Ethics Committee.....	4
Membership responsibilities and rights .....	4
Description of member’s roles .....	5
Responsibilities of the GeoEC and the researcher .....	5
Reviewing and decision-making process .....	6
The general operation of the GeoEC .....	7

## 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 Geo Ethics Committee

The composition of the Geo Ethics Committee (GeoEC) consists of :

- Research support officer acts as the professional secretary;
- At least three tenured scientific staff members from the Faculty of ITC;
- One ITC PhD candidate;
- One researcher from another UT faculty.

The call for new members is announced via a “General Announcement” to all the ITC Faculty. The selection of a new GeoEC member is done by the committee members, who have interviewed together with the GeoEC’s secretary the different candidates. The selection always aims for diversity not solely in gender, career stage, and ethnicity but also in disciplinary expertise.

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

The chair and the vice-chair of the committee are selected from among the tenured GeoEC members. They are elected through an anonymous vote by the committee members.

## Membership responsibilities and rights

A member has a seat in the committee in a personal capacity based on their expertise. The GeoEC members are accountable to the chair of the committee. The appointment is for four years, after which reappointment for the same period can occur once.

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 day-to-day management of a committee consists of the chair, the vice-chair, and the professional secretary. The faculty board meets when necessary.
- The secretary of the GeoEC is responsible for documenting and reporting the discussions and decisions made during meetings, particularly those related to the appointment and dismissal of committee members. The secretary is accountable to the chair of the GeoEC
- The secretary archives the committee's advice and ensures that the statistics of all outcomes (positive advice, negative advice, or ongoing) are reported annually to the Faculty Board and UwEC.
- The secretary is the primary contact between the GeoEC and other domain-specific ethics committees at the UT, ensuring coordination and information flow.
- The chair and the co-chair represent the ethics committee in the University-wide Ethics Committee (UwEC).

## Responsibilities of the GeoEC and the researcher

The scientific quality of the research is the responsibility of the researcher(s) or the research team leading the research. The GeoEC issues advice to the researcher concerning the submitted research proposal and the request for advice. As part of it, the GeoEC 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 GeoEC does not provide ethics "approvals" or "rejections." Nonetheless, if "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 by GeoEC.

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 GeoEC, it is a proposal that does not need to be reassessed by the committee. However, if changes have been made later on due to additional factors that the researcher considers are major and can have an ethical impact, it is suggested that these are again consulted with the GeoEC.

It should be noted if the GeoEC finds an application to be outside of the expertise of its reviewers, it cannot give ethics advice on such a project. The GeoEC may refer the application to another EC within the UT after informing the researcher(s). The GeoEC may alternatively suggest that the research team seeks advice from external experts (e.g., for medical research). Ultimately, it is the research team's responsibility to determine whether the research project should be submitted to other specialized ethics committees or advisors external to the UT.

## Reviewing and decision-making process

- A researcher submits the GEO ethics committee's questionnaire for ethical review in the UT Ethics Review Tool. The GeoEC 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.
- At least one GeoEC member reviews the questionnaire. 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 GeoEC member requested additional information about the research project in order to conduct a diligent review the timeline for reviewing the application may be longer - depending both on the speed of resubmission and the availability of the reviewer.
- If the case is deemed complex, the GeoEC member can request a second opinion from another member or request to have it discussed at a GeoEC meeting with all other members.
- If the case relates to two or more domains or is considered to have potential moderate or high risks and is deemed too complex to be evaluated by one specific domain committee, it may be submitted to the university-wide committee. The secretary informs the researchers about the new status of the request that has been upgraded to the UwEC.
- In case the initial reviewer is not available, the GeoEC secretary will find an alternative reviewer for the submission.
- The secretary of the GeoEC is responsible for managing submissions, assigning reviewers, and extracting data on the ethics submissions for a report. The GeoEC secretary is the first contact point in case of any technical problems in the web application.
- 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 GeoEC will give the lead researcher or the designated researcher for the respective aspect of the research the opportunity to discuss the advice further in a meeting with 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 GeoEC is responsible for keeping 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 secretary archives the committee's advice.

## The general operation of the GeoEC

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, unless external parties were invited by the committee to join (part of) the meeting.

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

The GeoEC 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 enter the reviewing process as soon as the GeoEC members are back in service.

The GeoEC reports annually on its activities to the dean of the ITC faculty and the UwEC via the GeoEC's chair. According to the UT Research Ethics Policy, the annual report should contain at least: the number of ethical reviews per research domain, rejections, complaints, specific ethical issues, quality of the reviews and review process, and the composition of the ethics committee at the reporting date and changes (if any) during the reporting period. These data will be anonymized, not disclosing any personal information from the researchers who submitted ethics applications. The reports will be kept with all relevant documents in a GeoEC dedicated folder on UT servers.