

## Ethics Questionnaire

Cognizant of the diversity, fluidity, and unpredictability of anthropological research situations, the AAA Code of Ethics (2009) states:

“No code or set of guidelines can anticipate unique circumstances or direct actions in specific situations. The individual anthropologist must be willing to make carefully considered ethical choices and be prepared to make clear the assumptions, facts and issues on which those choices are based.”

In this spirit, the questions that follow are intended as areas for reflection and decision-making as you formulate your project and as you implement it. We ask you to begin thinking through the possible ethical issues that might arise in the specific research situation that you envision. The following documents convey the prevailing disciplinary consensus on ethics in anthropological research:

AAA Code of Ethics (2009) <http://www.aaanet.org/profdev/ethics/>

AAA Statement on Ethics (2012) [http://www.aaanet.org/coe/code\\_of\\_ethics.pdf](http://www.aaanet.org/coe/code_of_ethics.pdf)

Committee on Ethics Briefing Papers on Common Dilemmas Faced by Anthropologists  
Conducting Research in Field Situations

<http://www.aaanet.org/cmtes/ethics/CoE-Fieldwork-Dilemmas.cfm>

### Definitions

Minimal risk: Minimal risk is the probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort ordinarily encountered in daily life.

More than minimal risk: More than minimal risk is defined by a probability of serious harm, including: physical harm; loss of or damage to economic livelihood; political repercussions on vulnerable individuals in situations characterized by conflict or displacement; social repercussions, including reinforced stigmatization of vulnerable participants, or serious and lasting damage to reputation and standing. More than minimal risk also refers to breaches of confidentiality that might be difficult or impossible to avoid during fieldwork or the dissemination of information.

Informed Consent: See the AAA Statement on Ethics (2012), section 3: Anthropological researchers working with living human communities must obtain the voluntary and informed consent of research participants. Ordinarily such consent is given prior to the research, but it may also be obtained retroactively if so warranted by the research context, process, and relations. The consent process should be a part of project design and continue through implementation as an ongoing dialogue and negotiation with research participants. Normally, the observation of activities and events in fully public spaces is not subject to prior consent. Minimally, informed consent includes sharing with potential participants the research goals, methods, funding sources

or sponsors, expected outcomes, anticipated impacts of the research, and the rights and responsibilities of research participants. It must also include establishing expectations regarding anonymity and credit. Researchers must present to research participants the possible impacts of participation, and make clear that despite their best efforts, confidentiality may be compromised or outcomes may differ from those anticipated. These expectations apply to all field data, regardless of medium. Visual media in particular, because of their nature, must be carefully used, referenced, and contextualized.

Anthropologists working with biological communities or cultural resources have an obligation to ensure that they have secured appropriate permissions or permits prior to the conduct of research. Consultation with groups or communities affected by this or any other type of research should be an important element of the design of such projects and should continue as an important element of the design of such projects and should continue as work progresses or circumstances change. It is explicitly understood that defining what constitutes an affected community is a dynamic and necessary process.”

Vulnerable populations: These include children, prisoners, refugees, illegal immigrants, homeless people, or other displaced populations, the seriously ill, mentally or cognitively compromised adults. Other categories of persons would also be considered vulnerable in their own local contexts, for example, uninitiated men and low-caste individuals within caste systems.

Sensitive materials: These include issues and practices that individuals view as sensitive and that are likely to be subject to special restrictions in everyday discourse; illegal conduct would constitute sensitive material, as would information that could reasonably place the subject at risk of criminal or civil liability, incur political sanctions, or be damaging to the subject’s financial standing, employability, or reputation; substance abuse, sexuality, and other practices of the body are often considered sensitive topics. As with vulnerability, the definition of sensitive materials is to some extent dependent upon local contexts, and researchers need to be alert and responsive to the moral codes operative in particular situations.

**PLEASE COMPLETE AND SUBMIT THE MATERIAL REQUESTED ON THE FOLLOWING PAGES**

## Brief Description of the Project

### Responsibilities to People and Non-human Animals

#### 1. Risks and Vulnerable Populations:

- a. Please check the appropriate boxes:

I believe that my project will involve:

Minimal risk

More than minimal risk

No contact with vulnerable populations

Contact with vulnerable populations

- b. Please describe the primary locations where you expect to conduct your research. Indicate any pertinent information, such as geographical location, institutional or organizational setting, and/or type of community (cultural, political, online, etc.)
- c. For each site, describe the primary methods you will use: participant-observation, interviews, surveys, etc. If you expect to conduct interviews, please indicate if they will be relatively informal and unstructured or relatively formal and structured. Please also discuss if you will be videotaping, filming, or recording in any form social interactions or events.
- d. For each site, describe the categories of participants you anticipate to involve in your project with attention to their relative social positions within the specific locale in which the research is to be conducted. If you believe that any of these categories include particularly vulnerable individuals, please explain in detail the nature of this vulnerability.
- e. For each site, discuss the participants' expectations of confidentiality. Please indicate how you plan to ensure confidentiality of information you obtain from research participants during fieldwork, writing process, and dissemination of research.
- f. For each site, describe any potential risks that your project might pose to the research subjects, with attention to the magnitude and probability of harm. If your project addresses what research participants may regard as sensitive issues, this should be

taken into account in your assessment of risks. Please take into consideration the definitions above, as well as the relevant items in the FAQ section.

- g. Describe how you will try to minimize the types of risk that you have identified, above. What measures do you intend to take to prevent your research from harming the safety, dignity, or privacy of people who participate?
- h. Will you be working with non-human animals? If so, what measures will you take to ensure that your research does not harm the safety, psychological well-being or survival of individuals or the species?
- i. If conducting archaeological research, does your project relate to any material which may be culturally sensitive for stakeholders or which may involve NAGPRA related items? If this is the case, how are you, or the project with which you are affiliated, taking steps to consult with stakeholder groups as to the form your research is taking? Will there be any particular steps taken to ensure that the handling of material remains is in line with any special treatment required by descendant communities?

## 2. Transparency and Consent

- a. **Self-representation:** Anthropologists have a responsibility to be honest and transparent about the nature and goals of their research. They must neither conceal nor misrepresent their research agendas, though precisely how they convey them will depend on the particular situation. Please describe how you intend to present yourself and your research to potential participants.
- b. **Consent:** Whether you plan to obtain oral or written consent, the process should include a description of any potential risks and benefits to participants and a brief description of your plans to ensure confidentiality, including preservation and accessibility of records during and after the research. Whatever your procedures for obtaining consent, keep in mind that agreements are fluid and may change with the relationships of which they are part. As the AAA Code of Ethics (2009) notes, “the informed consent process is dynamic and continuous; the process should be initiated in the project design and continue through implementation by way of dialogue and negotiation with those studied.”

Do you plan to secure written and/or oral consent? In your answer, please include a discussion of how might your procedures for securing consent need to be adapted over the course of your research, based on the needs and desires of your research participants?

**Written Consent:** If you plan to secure written consent, include a copy of the written consent form to be used. Note that a copy should be given to the research participant. If consent will be obtained electronically please explain the procedure by which consent will be obtained.

**Oral Consent:** If you plan to rely primarily on oral consent, please explain why you think written consent is inappropriate and include an example of the sort of statement you would use.

### **Treatment and Dissemination of Materials**

As noted in the AAA Code of Ethics (2009), it is your responsibility as a researcher to determine in advance whether your hosts/providers of information wish to remain anonymous or to receive recognition, and to make every effort to comply with those wishes. You must also make clear to participants that despite your best efforts, anonymity may be compromised or recognition may fail to materialize.

- a. Please describe how you plan to store your research materials during and after fieldwork, in order to insure that any confidentiality you have promised is not compromised. How will you, to the best of your ability, protect the anonymity of interlocutors who wish to remain so?
- b. As stated in the AAA Code of Ethics, anthropologists have a dual responsibility: to make the results of our research available to interested parties, including research participants; *and* to be alert to the possible harm(s) such dissemination may pose, especially to our research participants. As the Code notes, “The results of anthropological research are complex, subject to multiple interpretations and susceptible to differing and unintended uses. Anthropologists have an ethical obligation to consider the potential impact of both their research and the communication or dissemination of the results of their research on all directly or indirectly involved.” Please explain how you expect to share your research findings and how you will address any likely social or political harm the dissemination of your research may pose to your research population (directly or indirectly).
- c. If conducting archaeological research, how will records and materials of research be preserved?
- d. If conducting archaeological research, are you certain that the material you are working with is protected from commercialization?
- e. In the case of archaeological research or if appropriate to ethnographic research, are there plans developed by you or by the project you are working with to ensure public

dissemination to local and stakeholder communities about the research you are conducting?

## FAQ

Q: How do I determine if my project poses risks or assess the level of risk it poses?

A: Any social encounter poses some degree of risk, and cultural anthropological knowledge is produced through social encounters. In both planning and conducting your project, you need to ask yourself if the risk of harm or discomfort to participants in the research is higher in either its probability or magnitude than what they might expect to encounter in daily life. The AAA Statement on Ethics (2012), states as its first principle:

“A primary ethical obligation shared by anthropologists is to do no harm. It is imperative that, before any anthropological work be undertaken in communities, with non-human primates or other animals, at archaeological and paleoanthropological sites --each researcher think through the possible ways that the research might cause harm. Among the most serious harms that anthropologists should seek to avoid are harm to dignity, and to bodily and material well-being, especially when research is conducted among vulnerable populations. Anthropologists should not only avoid causing direct and immediate harm but also should weigh carefully the potential consequences and inadvertent impacts of their work. When it conflicts with other responsibilities, this primary obligation can supersede the goal of seeking new knowledge and can lead to decisions to not undertake or to discontinue a project. In addition, given the irreplaceable nature of the archaeological record, the conservation, protection and stewardship of that record is the principal ethical obligation of archaeologists. Determining harms and their avoidance in any given situation is ongoing and must be sustained throughout the course of any project.”

Q: Is deception ever acceptable in ethnographic research?

A: Anthropologists should not use deception as an integral feature of research or rely on it as a technique to justify the value of the study. The AAA Statement on Ethics (2012), section 2, states:

“Researchers who mislead participants about the nature of the research and/or its sponsors; who omit significant information that might bear on a participant’s decision to engage in the research; or who otherwise engage in clandestine or secretive research that manipulates or deceives research participants about the sponsorship, purpose, goals or implications of the research, do not satisfy ethical requirements for openness, honesty, transparency and fully informed consent.”

This definition of deception excludes behaviors motivated by local standards and conventions for regulating communication, such as politeness, indirection, and other forms of consideration. Anthropologists should follow local etiquette, which may mandate forms of oblique communication.

Q: What do I need to know about confidentiality?

A: See the AAA 2012 Statement on Ethics, section 6:

“Researchers have an ethical responsibility to take precautions that raw data and collected materials will not be used or unauthorized ends. To the extent possible at the time of data collection, the researcher is responsible for considering and communicating likely or foreseeable uses of collected data and materials as part of the process of informed consent or obtaining permission. Researchers are also responsible for consulting with research participants regarding their views of generation, use and preservation of research records. This includes informing research participants whether data and materials might be transferred to or accessed by other parties; how they might be transformed or used to identify participants; and how they will be stored and how long they will be preserved.

Researchers have a responsibility to use appropriate methods to ensure the confidentiality and security of field notes, recordings, samples or other primary data and the identities of participants. The use of digitalization and digital media for data storage and preservation is of particular concern given the relative ease of duplication and circulation. Ethical decisions regarding the preservation of research materials must balance obligations to maintain data integrity with responsibilities to protect research participants and their communities against future harmful impacts.”

Q: How do I assess and deal with ethical risks that may arise unexpectedly during fieldwork?

A: Please see the AAA Statement on Ethics (2012) for a comprehensive discussion of this, in particular sections (1) “Do No Harm”; (2) “Be Open and Honest Regarding Your Work;” and (4) “Weigh Competing Ethical Obligations Due Collaborators and Affected Parties.”

You should also be in touch with your faculty advisor for advice on how to deal with complex ethical issues that arise during fieldwork.

Q: How do I assess potential ethical risks of archaeological research?

A: Usually this will be resolved by asking the director of the fieldwork project or collection you are working with if there are any ethical issues associated with the research. All archaeological fieldwork directors should be in compliance with the ethical standards of their respective disciplines (Society for American Archaeology, Society for Historical Archaeology etc.). You should ensure that any project you are working with is not intending to go against the wishes of local community stakeholders and that it is not engaging in the excavation of archaeological remains with the intent to profit from the sale of any excavated artifacts.