




Research Ethics in Researchers' Work



Dr. Pirjo Nikander
Dept. of Sociology & Social Psychology
University of Tampere

The case of Tampere, Finland

- n University level policy concerning teaching ethics: recent developments
- n Practical example: Teaching research ethics to doctoral students in social sciences

Research Ethics in Researchers' Work (2006)

- n Lessons learnt & future development in education of research ethics

Initiatives taken by the university:

- n Education in research ethics is considered a central part of the university research strategy
- n April 2005: The university set out to map the general atmosphere and existing teaching practice in the field of research ethics
- n Report 2005: Focus particularly on doctoral schooling and supervision practice in seminars
 - n Interviews of professors from different faculties
 - n Focus on existing teaching practice, future needs, potential problem areas and the general mentality in the departments
 - n Outlines some practical suggestions

Reflections on a teaching experience:

- n 31.1.-24.2.2005, Tampere Graduate Centre for Social Sciences
- n Organisers: Dr. Pirjo Nikander & Dr. Arja Kuula, Finnish Social Science Data Archive
- n Participants from social and health sciences and education)

http://www.fsd.uta.fi/laki_ja_etiikka/kurssi.html

Goals & starting points:

- n To raise the ethical consciousness of students
- n To engage participants in active discussion
- n To make the course contents immediately relevant to participants' doctoral theses
 - n Help in the actual writing up of thesis
- n To cover ethical aspects of the whole research process: from topic selection to publication and after
- n To provide the students (and the university) with a practical web-based resource on ethics
- n To map the current practice of education in research ethics in different departments

Teaching methods in use:

- n Lectures by the two responsible teachers + visiting lecturers
- n A written assignment prior to the course + an oral presentation on how the course & discussion & materials have helped solve questions specific to topic
- n Conversational lectures
- n Literature lists by subject area + the web page to secure individual work after the course

http://www.fsd.uta.fi/laki_ja_etiikka/etiikkaresurssit.html

Lessons learnt:

- n Course sorely needed
- n Course now added to the basic course selection in the Tampere Graduate Centre for Social Sciences
- n Course provided a space for focussed discussion on a range of ethical questions
- n The lecture + hands-on format worked well
- n Balance between the general and the specific: tight-rope
- n Excellent feedback from students
- n Timing of the course up to students: met their acute or anticipated needs better

In sum

- n Positive: the course achieved all points the University has set as key objectives vis-à-vis research ethics:
 - n To create (or try out) a systematic model for the teaching of research ethics
 - n To increase knowledge and consciousness of research ethics
 - n To increase information distribution on ethics and good research practice

In sum:

- n Negative: the course format, as it now stands, does not allow for large numbers of doctoral students
- n Ideal hand-holding, spoon-feeding not cost-effective in the long-run
- n Does not (at present time) reach too far outside social sciences
- n Who participates on a voluntary basis? Or are we again healing the fit and ethically healthy?

Future developments:

- n Course taught again in Fall 2007, possibly also in English
- n New plans of the university of Tampere
 - n Inter-faculty education in research ethics
- n A model consisting of joint general lectures, followed by more subject-specific teaching on departmental level, followed by joint discussion to close