

Reflections on FutureLearn research ethics

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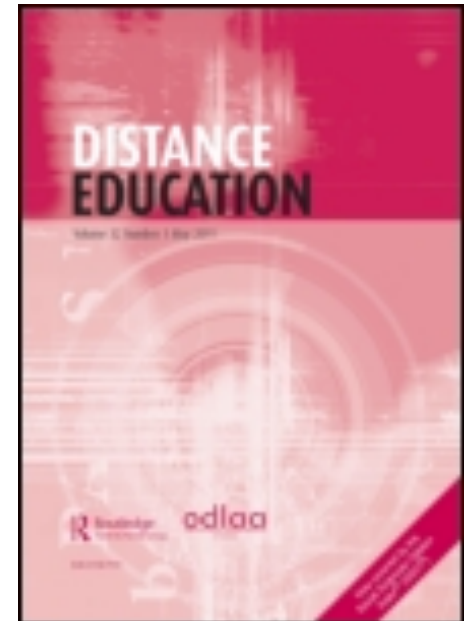


The Open University

ETHICS AND MOOCs

Marshall, S. (2014). Exploring the ethical implications of MOOCs. *Distance Education*, 35,2, 250-262.

"ethical concerns... include academic duties of care and integrity, commercial exploitation of learners, as well as research ethics concerns arising from the analytical and other work being done by academics and institutions."



HEURISTICS FOR RESEARCH ETHICS

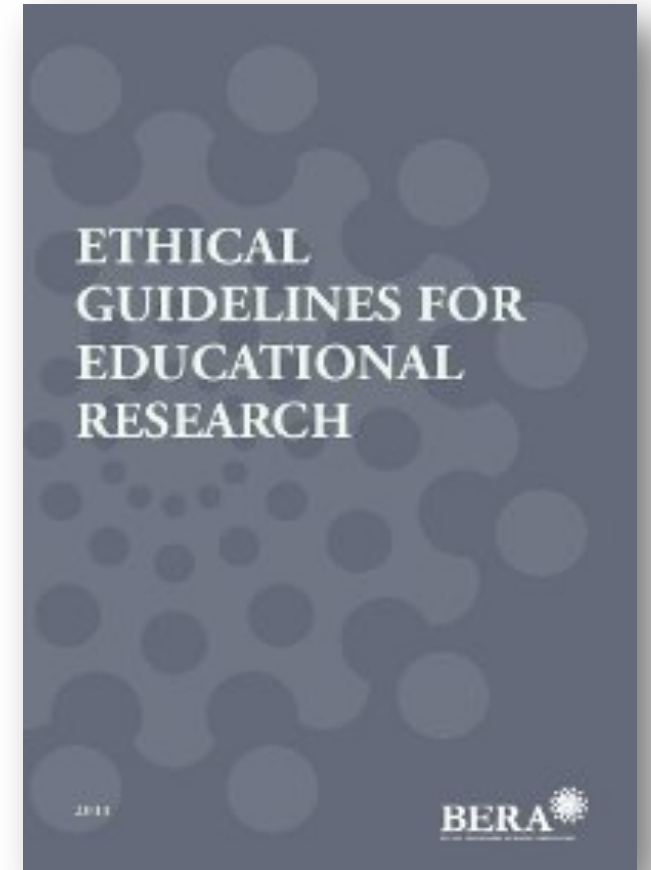
Marshall, S. (2014). Exploring the ethical implications of MOOCs. *Distance Education*, 35,2, 250-262.

- (1) ... If there is a research component, consider how the pedagogical integrity of the MOOC is being maintained.
- (2) Plan the nature of the research or experiment before the MOOC begins. Ensure that only essential data are collected or retained.
- (3) **Design an informed consent process** that must be engaged with before students can participate in the MOOC.
- (4) Seek external review and formal ethics approval for the research being undertaken.
- (5) **Inform students at regular junctures** of the research, most importantly at the beginning and end of the MOOC.
- (6) Acknowledge that students control the way their work is used and that they **have absolutely clear statement about copyright whenever they submit material**.
- (7) Proceed very carefully if using data from MOOCs without student consent
- (8) Consider ways to involve students in the exploration of and reflection on their experiences
- (9) Share the findings of your research with the MOOC participants

Devised in February 2014

Through collaboration amongst
FutureLearn partners

Based on BERA *Ethical Guidelines for
Educational Research*



"By taking part in a free open online course, where they are informed that activities may be monitored for research purposes, participants can be assumed to have given consent for participation according to those guidelines, so **opt-in consent for each participant is not required**. It follows that learners can opt out from further participation only by unregistering from FutureLearn."

Should learners be asked to give explicit consent?

"Research into participation in FutureLearn courses presents particular challenges with regard to obtaining consent. Participants must be clearly informed that their participation and interactions may be monitored and analysed for research."

Do we inform learners clearly that their interactions may be monitored and analysed for research?

Register

By clicking Register I agree to the [Conditions and Privacy Policy](#) and the [Code of Conduct](#)

8. Use of your data and content for research

8.1 We and our University Partners carry out studies of learner activities and content for academic research, to understand the learner experience, and to improve our courses.

8.2 All research studies by us and our University Partners are subject to a code of [research ethics](#). This includes a commitment to maintaining all data that can identify learners in secure locations and only to conduct research on anonymised data. Neither we nor our University Partners will sell or give to any other party data that identifies individual learners.

8.3 You consent that we and our University Partners may use your data for research studies that include anonymised data of your interaction with the website, including learner content.

8.4 Where the research requires disclosure of specific learner content, we will provide the University Partner with the name of the author of the item of content, so that he or she can be acknowledged under the terms of the licence in section 7.11.

[Terms and conditions](#)

5 Use of Your Information

5.1 By accessing the Website, using the Online Courses and Content, posting notes, replies, assignments and other materials, you agree that your information may be used by us and by technology partners and course and content providers chosen by us for any of the following purposes:

(a) to provide, maintain, protect and improve the quality of the Website and the Online Courses and Content we offer, including by conducting anonymised market research, and to protect us and our users;

[Privacy policy](#)

RESEARCH ETHICS GUIDELINES: CONSENT

Pre-course survey



This survey is being conducted in order to learn more about the people who have chosen to study this course. The aim is to provide a better experience for our learners and to use our findings to help others.

The survey should only take about 5 minutes to complete. For more information about how your answers will be used and stored, please take a look at our [FAQs](#) and [Privacy Policy](#). You can exit the survey at any time using the button in the top right-hand corner of the screen.

During the survey, you will be asked if you would like to participate in further research. This is entirely optional.

Filling in and submitting the survey indicates that you have read and understood the information above, and that you consent to be part of this research. If you have questions regarding this study, you can contact us by email at feedback@futurelearn.com.

Pre-course survey

Falls survey

Next week, we are going to explore fear of falling in more detail. In preparation, you may like to fill in this survey.

...

This survey is based on the ProFaNE Falls Efficacy Scale International. **The data will be collected anonymously and may be used to evaluate the impact of this course.**

[Click here to go to the fear of falling survey](#) and remember to make a note of your score.

"**Learners own content** they create on the FutureLearn platform, which they license to FutureLearn and partners forever and irrevocably."

"Participants in courses have a **moral right of identity** with materials created in their name."

"Learner-created content is published under a Creative Commons Licence (Attribution-**Non Commercial**-NoDerivs)"

FutureLearn has devised a procedure to help a partner identify the author of a learner content item from the anonymised data, only for the purpose of acknowledging the author in a research publication or presentation.

Should we seek permission from learners to publish their contributions?

- (1) Inform learners clearly at the start of the course that research may be carried out on their data, in anonymised form, and that this is a consequence of their taking the course
- (1) For studies of learner experience, consider recruiting a sample of learners through a notice in the pre-course email – with a link to a partner-provided information and consent page.
- (1) Consider contacting by email any learners whose comments/replies you wish to use in an academic publication or presentation, to ask them if they consent for their comments to be used, either with acknowledgement or anonymised.