



UG RESEARCH POLICY GUIDELINES

GUIDELINES FOR THE ASSURANCE OF ACADEMIC FREEDOM, CREATIVITY AND INNOVATION

Academic freedom

The University of Ghana by the nature of its core business should provide an environment that fosters the free pursuit of knowledge and artistic creations through teaching, learning, research and dissemination of knowledge and artistic performances. The assurance of academic freedom is critical in pursuance of this goal.

Teaching—*academic staff have the freedom to teach their disciplines and encourage students to pursue knowledge through the critical evaluation of ideas connected to the subject.*

Research—*academic staff have the freedom to pursue their research and artistic creations, subject to the universal principles and methods of scientific enquiry, without interference from the university or the state.*

Research Dissemination—*academic staff are expected to disseminate and publish their research findings without censorship. In this regard, they shall be insulated from any form of discrimination, interference, fear of repression or threat of demotion or denial of promotion from any person or institution within and outside the university set-up or the state.*

Every academic staff has rights under the national constitution and existing international human rights treaties, including various declarations and recommendations such as the UNESCO Recommendation concerning the status of higher education. The university shall, therefore, respect the rights of members of the academic community to enjoy their civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights; especially, the freedom of thought, conscience, religion, expression, assembly, association and movement as well as the right to liberty, dignity and security of the person.

Academic freedom goes with responsibilities. Therefore, academics shall display competence, exercise diligence and be guided by integrity and the highest ethical, professional and scientific standards in data gathering, teaching and research dissemination.

Creativity and innovation

a. Teaching

A core business of academia is teaching. Teaching focuses on two levels: undergraduate and postgraduate. Each level has its unique intellectual and social psychological demands. For example, undergraduates typically come to university with a limited knowledge of the degree area they wish to pursue. However this lack of knowledge is often balanced with a curiosity to learn, and for some, to challenge the orthodoxy. This means teaching must aim to be accessible, dynamic, participatory, and student-centred. Within our context further consideration must be given to large student numbers at undergraduate level and the challenge of achieving dynamic and participatory engagement with large class sizes.

Postgraduates often choose further study in a subject for which they have obtained a degree, although increasingly (given the fact that Ghanaian students do not often get to do the undergraduate degrees they choose) students might choose a different subject for their postgraduate degrees. For the postgraduate cohort, teaching must reflect prior knowledge of subject or prior knowledge of the basic building blocks of learning and research.

For both levels, however, there are crosscutting issues about how students learn that must inform creative and innovative teaching approaches:

- Interspersing long lectures with short class activities that seek to get students involved in the learning process.
- Incorporating visuals in the teaching and learning process. Visual methods have a cognitive and emotional impact and, therefore, stimulate interest and memory. A PowerPoint presentation heavy on text and limited on visual images might not have the same impact as a PowerPoint minimal on text and generous with explanatory images.
- Utilizing full body language in the communication process: eye contact, tone of voice, eloquence and posture are all important dimensions. This means that a lecture delivered by reading notes in a monotonous voice over a two hour period is unlikely to engage students. Methods deemed old-fashioned, such as writing and drawing on the board, as part of a lecture are quite effective because they allow students to focus on the lecturer.
- Participating in the learning process enhances learning and memory and empowers the learner. Therefore, lecturers can adopt a mix of didactic and participatory approaches in class or small group tutoring to enhance the didactic lecture.
- Taking students out of the classroom setting or bringing the community into the classroom setting can also enhance understanding and learning.
- Designing courses that incorporate community service in the teaching and learning process. This offers students the opportunity to put into practice some of the ideas gathered from their courses and the chance to be reflective in terms of their civic duties, social obligations, and teamwork skills.
- Incorporating simulation and role plays as an interactive, hands-on learning process is an equally important means of increasing student learning power and eliciting out of them important ideas on the subject. This way, students do not only learn but contribute to knowledge production in the process of acquiring knowledge; in addition to knowledge acquisition as the main focus of teaching, lecturers should mainstream ethics and skills training into the teaching curriculum.
- Faculty members must update their lectures with current research

Some creative methods can be adapted by lecturers with minimal costs (such as changing lecture content and delivery approaches for existing courses or drawing on social networks via extension work to support community-based teaching). Other methods will require investment by the university, such as making audio-visual equipment available in lecture theatres, retro-fitting large but old lecture theatres with microphones and speakers to enhance participatory learning for undergraduates and making transport available for fieldwork.

b. Research

Creativity and Innovation in research focuses on isolating new and emerging areas of research in each discipline, engaging in multidisciplinary endeavours aimed at solving societal problems, and incorporating such emerging ideas in the course offerings of the university. Being creative and innovative in our research requires pushing the boundaries of knowledge in four interrelated areas: (1) theory; (2) method; (3) practice; and (4) policy.

Theory provides the basic building blocks of research. It constitutes the concepts and ideas that: (a) facilitate the systematic exploration of research questions; (b) shape relevant methodological approaches; and (c) facilitate the production of robust research that addresses existing gaps in knowledge and/or reveals new transformational insights in theory, method and practice.

Robust theory tends to be multi-level, taking into account the complex synergistic interactions between different systems (e.g. ecosystem, cultural systems, social systems, biological systems). Multidisciplinary engagement, therefore, offers the best strategy for understanding these complex synergistic interactions. The emergence of systems approaches and complexity science has placed emphasis on developing theory that (a) draws on insights from different disciplines and (b) takes complexity as a unit of analysis. Creativity and innovation in theory, therefore, requires recognition that:

- (1) Theories are developed and modified by good research; thus they are dynamic and subject to change within each discipline;
- (2) Robust scientific research that seeks to transform is often focused on complex systems interactions that require systems approaches to theorization; *and*
- (3) Systems approach works best within a multidisciplinary framework.

Methods inform the gathering, analysis and interpretation of data and every discipline has its sets of methods that work for its exhaustive range of research interests. Researchers who aim for creative and innovative research methods recognize that: (1) disciplines may dictate inflexible attitudes to methodology and often go beyond their disciplines or draw on critical sub-fields; (2) methods must serve a pragmatic purpose of facilitating data collection, analysis and interpretation that addresses research questions and theoretical framework; (3) mixing methods (quantitatively, qualitatively or both) facilitate a broader understanding of the complex roots and reach of a research problem and lead to a more transformational critical science.

In the academy, research should deal with the twin complementary issues of expanding the frontiers of knowledge for its own sake and engaging in knowledge production that has practical applications. Creative and innovative researchers aim to develop research projects that have practical relevance beyond the academy. This may involve: (1) incorporating practical considerations and goals into the conceptualization of research and during early stages of research development; (2) engaging in the translation of research findings into practical interventions or disseminating research findings to communities that can implement practical interventions; (3) developing collaborative partnerships with stakeholders and/or funders that support research-led practice.

Policy often facilitates the implementation of large scale interventions in a range of domains: social, developmental, health, economics and so on. Increasingly policymakers must rely on research evidence to develop and implement policies. Creativity and innovation would include advancing the policy relevance of one's work for the policy, research and other subject specific communities: (1) building policy considerations into the development of a research project; (2) investing in publications that speak to a policy audience (either in policy journals or through policy briefs); (3) developing relationships with local policymakers in order to facilitate productive collaborations based on mutual trust, respect and transparency.