**Doing Fieldwork in TRS: Guidelines for Students**

*(Updated December 2013)*

INTRODUCTION

Several of our modules require you to do fieldwork, and you may also choose to do fieldwork for your dissertation. Fieldwork gives you the opportunity to explore religion in the ‘real world’. It helps to contextualise and evidence your learning throughout your degree programme. You will also develop important management, research and recording skills which will be valuable additions to your CV.

Fieldwork is an important part of the TRS degree programme at Leeds, and we hope you will enjoy it and gain valuable skills.

By ‘fieldwork’ we mean:

* doing research in locations other than those where you would normally study (e.g. in places of worship)

AND/OR

* doing research by gathering information from, or about, real live people.

Doing fieldwork raises issues that book-based research does not, and it is important that you think about these issues. The module leaders and the people assessing your work will need evidence that you have thought about them.

There are two main areas you need to think about: **health and safety** and **the ethics of research.**

**When submitting work for assessment which contains fieldwork data you will be required to complete a checklist (see end of this document) to demonstrate that you have thought about, and acted upon, issues concerning health and safety and ethics.**

**A. Health and Safety (Risk Assessments)**

For modules that involve (or might involve) fieldwork, your module tutor will have completed a risk assessment. A risk assessment is a common process that you will come across in the world of work beyond university. A copy of the module risk assessment will be available on the module area of the VLE. The risk assessment will include statements about what you, the student, have to do in order to minimise any risk to you and others – as well as statements about what your tutors will do.

Where your fieldwork is more complex or higher risk you may be required to adapt and sign the risk assessment to demonstrate you have engaged with the issues. In most instances, your attendance at the relevant seminar or lecture will be taken to mean that you have read, understood, and agreed to the requirements of the risk assessment.

There are rarely fieldwork risk assessments in place for overseas research (which you may wish to conduct as part of a period studying abroad for instance). Therefore, if you wish to undertake fieldwork whilst abroad this must be discussed in advance with the relevant module leader.

*I****t is your responsibility to read the risk assessment and to follow the guidance it gives. If you have any questions or concerns about it, ask your module tutor.***

**ACTION: Read the risk assessment and make sure you understand what is expected of you**

**B. Ethics**

All research at the University, whoever is doing it, has to be conducted in an ethical manner. This means thinking about the implications of your research for the people you are researching (your ‘research subjects’) – treating them with respect, and working to ensure that it does not harm them.

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In fieldwork in TRS, there are three main ethical issues that are likely to arise:

* (**Informed) Consent.** Researchers should try to make sure that the people involved in their research know what the research is about, have agreed to be involved, and have the opportunity to stop taking part in the research. Sometimes gaining informed consent is not possible, or not practical (e.g. when observing a mass public event) but you owe it to your ‘research subjects’ to try to do this.
* **Confidentiality.** ‘Research subjects’ should be able to trust the researcher not to reveal anything about them that they do not want to be made public. Normally, information about or from individuals should be confidential and should be *anonymised* when written up– no names should be given when you write up your work. You need to make sure that you have permission to use somebody’s name if you want to do so.
* **Data storage**. In order to keep information confidential it is important to store it carefully. Keeping names separately from notes for instance reduces the chance of information being accidentally disclosed by leaving a notebook open in a café. Electronic data should be password protected and time limited (e.g. so it won’t be found on a laptop you’ve handed on to a friend!). All data should be stored in your University user area.

Fortunately, there are some standard ways of dealing with all these ethical issues. Here are the most common kinds of fieldwork students in TRS undertake, and some guidelines for you about how to approach the ethical issues involved.

**Fieldwork with children and vulnerable adults**

Please note that there are additional ethical requirements in any fieldwork involving vulnerable adults of children aged **under 18.** You should consult with your module tutor or dissertation supervisor to make appropriate arrangements for individual ethical approval for any research involving vulnerable groups.

**1. Visiting places of worship or other public places**

You do not need anyone’s permission to attend a public event, to look around a building which is open to the public, to read publically available notice boards, and so forth. Questions only arise when you are talking to people – either in informal, brief conversations or in more extended interviews.

We recommend that you:

* Tell people what you are doing *before* you enter into conversation.
* Have a completed copy of the *module information sheet* available, and your University ID (student card). Be prepared to show these to people to evidence who you are.
* If it is clear that your informal conversations are leading to material which you may wish to directly quote in your report then you must treat the conversation as an interview and follow the guidelines below in section 4.
* If you participate in, rather than observe, a meeting, or if you attend a meeting which is not public (e.g. you have to be invited) then you should refer to the guidelines below in section 2.

**ACTION: Complete and print the *module information sheet* from the VLE**

**Work out what to say to people about what you are doing**

**Ensure you have your student card or other university ID**

**Ask your module tutor if you are not sure or experience difficulties**

**If you plan to participate, or attend a ‘closed’ event, refer to section 2.**

**If you plan to conduct an interview, refer to the guidelines below in section 4.**

**Store your notes carefully and, where possible, remove identifying information e.g. names.**

**Store all electronic data in a password protected and time limited storage area – this will usually be your University account**

**2. Attending and/or taking part in meetings**

Attending or taking part in a meeting can be different to visiting a public building or attending a public event such as an act of worship. The meeting may be ‘closed’ or it may be harder to be an observer in a small gathering. In cases such as this you should:

* obtain permission from an organiser or convener before attending, or as soon as you realise there may be additional challenges
* provide a copy of the information sheet to the organiser and to anyone else who requests the information.

The organiser may choose to introduce you at the start of any session so that participants are aware of your presence. You should introduce yourself and briefly explain your project before making any overt contribution to a meeting so that participants are aware of your dual role and can then choose to moderate their own contribution with that in mind.  You could display posters in the setting where the research was to take place, but only if this was felt to be appropriate by the person(s) organising or facilitating the event.

The need to be more overt and to provide fuller information and gain proper consents rises as the sensitivities of the issues being discussed increases. If you experience any difficulties you should withdraw and seek the advice of your module tutor.

**ACTION: Complete and print the *module information sheet* from the VLE**

**Work out what to say to people about what you are doing**

**Ensure you have your student card or other university ID**

**Ask your module tutor if you are not sure or experience difficulties**

**Attempt to make contact with an organiser/convenor before attending**

**Plan your fieldwork carefully to allow for potential challenges**

**Store your notes carefully and, where possible, remove identifying information e.g. names.**

**Store all electronic data in a password protected and time limited storage area – usually your University account**

**3. Questionnaires and Surveys**

A questionnaire or survey is a good way of collecting some forms of information. A good survey is difficult to design, administer and analyse. You should plan your survey carefully, and make a sensible judgement about the number of responses you can collate and analyse. The ethical issues for this type of fieldwork are the same as for observations and interviews, but it is possible to deal with them more straightforwardly.

We recommend that you:

* Put at the top of the questionnaire a brief summary of what your research is about, making it clear that the questionnaire is voluntary and anonymous*:*
  + ‘This questionnaire is part of a research project on xxx, which I am undertaking as part of my Theology and Religious Studies degree at the University of Leeds. I hope you will agree to complete it. You do not have to answer all the questions. The questionnaire is anonymous’.
* Include your contact information, and that of the module tutor
* Keep the returned questionnaire separately from any contact information e.g. email address, and delete this contact information immediately

**ACTION: Ask the module tutor/dissertation supervisor to check the questionnaire before you use it**

**Store paper copies carefully and remove any identifying information e.g. names.**

**Store all electronic data in a password protected and time limited storage area - usually your University account**

**4. Interviews**

Interviews can provide detailed and valuable information but it is particularly important to have informed consent for interviews.

We recommend that you:

* Give all interviewees a copy of the completed *module information sheet*
  + For most modules, this will be available on the VLE.
  + For dissertations, you may have to modify the sheet for your own use.
* Ask all interviewees to agree to take part in the research, and make sure they know:
  + they can pull out of the interview or the research at any point
  + their answers will be used as part of your fieldwork report or other writing
  + whether or not their name will be used, and how long their contact details will be stored
* Usually, agreement should be given in writing via the *module consent sheet.*
  + This is available on the VLE. *You may need to amend it*, especially for your dissertation.
  + If the *module consent sheet* is not used you will be required to justify this decision
* Do not keep a written or electronic record of anyone’s name or contact details *unless* you are likely to need to contact them again or this has been agreed with the interviewee

**ACTION: Complete and print the module information sheet and the module consent sheet from the VLE**

**If you amend the sheets ask your module tutor/dissertation supervisor to approve these changes**

**Ask the module tutor if you do not understand any aspect of the sheet**

**Decide how you are going to store and organise the records of the interviews (for example, are you going to give the interviewees ‘false names’ or numbers, so you can keep track of each one?)**

**Store your notes carefully and remove identifying information e.g. names**

**Only keep identifying information if this has been agreed with the interviewee**

**Store all electronic data in a password protected and time limited storage area - usually your University account**

**Ethical Declaration for work submitted for assessment**

Before conducting my research I attended appropriate lectures and seminars and/or discussed ethical issues with my module tutor/dissertation supervisor

Yes No

If ‘no’ please explain your decision

I gained informed consent from participants where appropriate

Yes No

If ‘no’ please explain your decision

I have anonymised data unless I have specific permission to use an individual’s name

Yes No

If ‘no’ please explain your decision

I have stored all data securely, particularly contact details and other personal data

Yes No

If ‘no’ please explain your decision