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*The National Center for Teacher Education*

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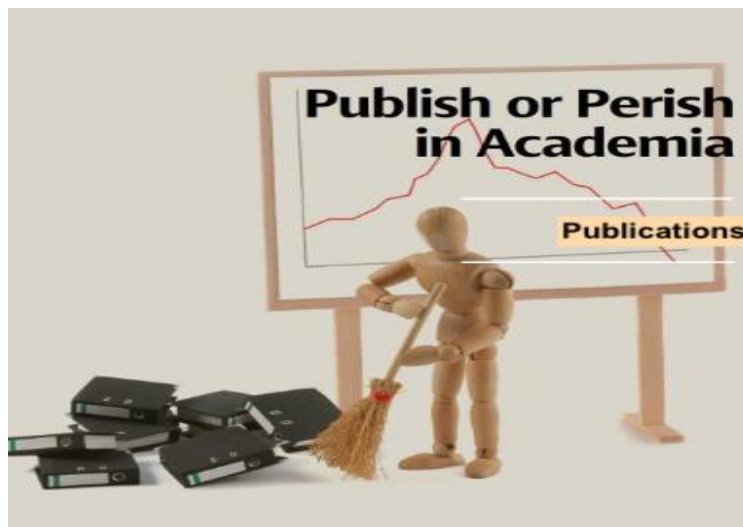
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## Strengthening Ethical Standards: How Can Philippine Higher Education Institutions Implement CMO 15 s.2019?

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(Source: <https://designer.microsoft.com/>)

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of each Higher Education Institution (HEI) plays a vital role in educational research as a process in ensuring the ethical and responsible conduct of research. The Commission on Higher Education Memorandum Order No.15, series of 2019, requires graduate students to produce and publish research in a peer-reviewed journal. Thus, in the production of research by graduate school students, they need to seek the assistance of their university's research ethics committee. Given the time constraint, limited and expensive reliable online resources, and dual and sometimes multiple roles of a graduate student (e.g., mother-teacher-researcher), this policy brief examines the implications of the CMO 15 s.2019, highlighting ethical concerns on research production. There are several reasons why each university must create an Institutional Review Board (IRB). The following are the key policy recommendations: (1) Each HEI must have a research IRB with an ample number of expert reviewers; (2) streamline clear criteria, guidelines, and submission processes; and (3) set a reasonable time frame for a review, evaluation, and revision of the proposal. As CMO No.15 s.2019 requires, these important suggestions should be executed and reviewed, resulting in high-quality research publications for publishing.

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Higher education institutions play an integral role in shaping ethical consciousness, knowledge production, and innovation to meet the challenges of quality education, which is one of the goals of sustainable development. In 2019, the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) in the Philippines released a memorandum order on policies, standards, and guidelines for graduate programs. In the CMO No. 15 s. 2019, section 9, Master's Degree and Doctoral Degree Programs with the required publication are needed to publish in peer-reviewed journals or juried creative work internationally/nationally (CHED Memo No. 15, 2019).

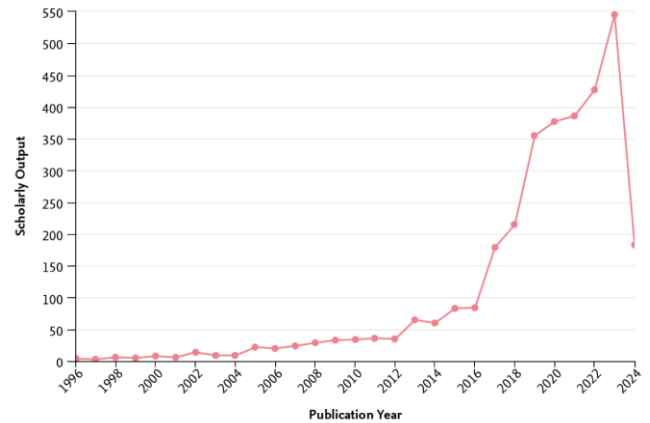
The policies and standards for graduate programs in education for teachers and other education professionals, also known as the CHED Memorandum Order No. 53 series of 2007 under section 17, states that all curricular requirements for a master's degree must be completed within seven (7) years after the student's first enrollment in the master's program, and those for doctoral degrees must be completed within nine (9) years after the student's first enrollment in the doctoral program (CMO No. 53, 2007). Some factors, such as the age of enrollment in graduate school, financial circumstances, gender, and marital status, might be attributed to the delay in completion (Bueno, 2017). Recent modifications to Philippine policy, such as the CMO 15 s. 2019, have changed to mandate that graduate students publish in reputable publications or provide proof of their research findings, which may lengthen the time required to earn a degree.

It has long been known how important research is to society and how prosperity and competitiveness are related to it (Coriat, 2019). Graduate students may be reluctant to go into difficult subjects or highly specialized local issues that are less likely to be accepted for publication when they are pressured to publish (Jordão, 2019). Landgrave (2019) goes on to say that students are vulnerable to abuse because of their unwavering focus on publication at all costs. Due to the new nature of graduate school concerning the CHED Memorandum Order, these practices endangered the student researchers and the future of research which predatory journals exploit.

Peer-reviewed journals play an essential part in preserving ethical standards in scientific publishing. Although the research phase is the focus of ethical review clearance, ethical considerations also apply to the publishing phase. Avoiding duplicate publications, guaranteeing authorship transparency, declaring conflicts of

interest, and swiftly fixing post-publication errors are some examples of ethical publishing concerns (Mbabe et al., 2021). Furthermore, encouraging moral behavior and putting in place efficient procedures for handling research misconduct uphold the caliber and integrity of the research record, including peer-reviewed journal archives (Gasparyan, 2017).

Figure 1. Philippine Educational Research Productivity Between 1996 and 2024



Notes: Indicator: Scopus Data, Education Discipline, Data: (SciVal, 2024)

Figure 1 illustrates the scholarly output of the Philippines in Scopus data, specifically in the field of education. The data indicates that approximately 3,256 papers were published between 1996 and 2024. Notably, the production of educational research was relatively low, with less than 50 papers published from 1996 to 2012. However, there has been a significant increase in research output since 2016, with approximately 545 papers published in 2023. According to the Retraction Watch Database, the Philippines has documented 69 article retractions due to ethical concerns over publishing (Retraction Database, 2024). Furthermore, a recent government report highlighted the insufficient capability of Philippine universities to generate high-quality research (Second Congressional Commission on Education, 2024), which could lead to paper mill publication and be the reason for retraction. Thus, a stringent policy is needed to filter all papers that have undergone ethics review.

Graduate school research initiatives are greatly influenced by the processes and results of ethical reviews. Researchers in the Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS) frequently see these procedures as difficult (Carniel et al.,

2023), and they can cause delays because of bottlenecks in the manual review process (Sholikah et al., 2022). Supervisors can, however, use them as helpful tools to help students improve participant connections and methodology, which will increase the quantity and quality of research findings (Romano, 2016). Research outcomes can be enhanced, and the process streamlined by acknowledging the importance of ethical review, resolving reviewers' concerns, and getting the research study ready for review (Davies et al., 2019). Graduate students can successfully overcome potential obstacles and ensure the ethical conduct of their research by properly interacting with ethical review processes.

Universities in the Philippines with Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) face difficulties evaluating the large number of research papers submitted every semester or academic year. These difficulties include laborious and time-consuming review procedures, unclear policies and norms, restrictions on capacity-building initiatives, and the quantity of accepted research grant applications (Lasco et al., 2021). Several graduate students have brought attention to training and support shortages, as well as inadequacies in their comprehension and application process of ethical concepts in their research projects (Makola & Ntoyanto-Tyatantsi, 2023). On the other hand, postgraduate students face challenges in navigating the research ethics application process (Brindley et al., 2020). Due to the ratio of reviewers and the number of research per semester or school year, a researcher needs to wait for two or three months before receiving the ethical clearance. Due to these challenges, the research becomes irrelevant and untimely over the course of the ethical review process.

### **Policy Recommendations**

Thus, in the implementation of the CMO No.15 series of 2019, they must consider the following recommendations concerning expediting the review processes on ethics in research.

- **Each HEI must have a research ethics committee review board with ample expert reviewers.**

Many peer-reviewed and juried creative publications ask for authors' ethics compliance as a requirement for publication application and submission. The Institutional Review Board of the Higher Education Institution must identify the ratio of designated reviewers or review panels for different types of research studies. Through a proper ratio of reviewers and

research, the IRB of each HEI will have a smooth allocation of resources and will speed up the review process.

- **Streamline clear criteria, guidelines, and submission processes.**

The Institutional Review Board of HEI in the Philippines must ensure that the researchers have a list of clear criteria, guidelines, and submissions for the ethical review process. Through this, the researcher will be guided in preparing accurate documents to reduce the need for revisions. Universities must also produce an online platform where all members of the academic institutions are aware of the processes, have easy access to submissions and applications, and tracking of the ethical review.

- **Set a reasonable time frame for a review, evaluation, and revision of the proposal.**

The Institutional Review Board of each HEI must set a reasonable time frame for a review, evaluation, and revision of the proposal. Reviewers must allocate one to two (1-2) weeks for the review of the proposal. Over this period, they will be given ample time to check the content and provide initial feedback. After the initial review, the reviewers must schedule one (1) week to comprehensively evaluate the proposal study. Provide one to two (1-2) weeks for the researcher/s to revise the proposal based on the provided feedback. Once the researcher/s completes the revisions, the review committee will allow one (1) week for the final review to ensure changes based on the evaluation and provide the researcher/s the final approval or the ethical clearance. Thus, four to six (4-6) weeks for the review, evaluation, revision, and approval is more reasonable for a research proposal. The recommended time frame is based on a semestral basis; if an HEI offers a trimester school year, the time frame may be adjusted accordingly.

### **Conclusion**

This policy brief examines the implications of the CMO 15 s.2019, highlighting ethical concerns on research production. To ensure the production of high-quality educational research, HEIs create an Institutional Review Board (IRB) before recognizing published research as compliant with graduation requirements. The policy brief recommends strengthening the IRB to respond to the requirements of CMO No.15 s.2019 while aiding other HEIs without an IRB in establishing one. It involves increasing the number of expert reviewers, establishing clear criteria, and implementing a suitable timetable for review. Therefore, this policy brief helps to implement the

review processes on research ethics, leading to high-quality research production and publication as mandated by CMO No.15 s.2019.

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The EPRDO is a specialized research center in the University focused on policy research and studies on teacher education. It is established to provide research-based policy recommendations to policymakers. It also serves as the clearing house for all data relevant to teacher education in the Philippines and beyond.

#### **Vision**

The Philippine Normal University through the EPRDO aims to be an innovation hub of teacher education research and educational policy studies.

#### **Mission**

To strengthen the culture of excellence in teacher education research and educational policy studies.

#### **Objectives**

The EPRDO shall manage the University's research production, enhance human resource capabilities, and share expertise with other Teacher Education Institutions (TEIs) in the area of teacher education research

#### **Strategies**

1. Establish and maintain a web-based university research portal that facilitates an automated research management system and also serves as the database of teacher education policies and teacher education research in the country and Southeast Asia.
2. Share research expertise and competence in teacher education research with other TEIs throughout the country;
3. Develop and disseminate the University research agenda
4. Design and implement the research capability program for faculty and staff;
5. Manage the University's research production, particularly the conduct of educational policy studies in education and teacher education; and
6. Serve as the implementing arm for research incentives and research ethics review.

#### **Values**

SYNERGY (Working collaboratively as a team)  
EFFICIENCY (Delivering research services efficiently)



EXCELLENCE (Achieving high-quality research outputs)  
PRODUCTIVITY (increasing research production of the  
University)

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