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## Concerning “Development of a rationality inventory”

The aim of the project is to investigate rationality. This is to be done by conducting a test of rationality and meta-cognition on a number of students who attend two courses taught by Dr. Biegler, in connection with those classes. The Norwegian National Committee for Research Ethics in the Social Sciences and Humanities (NESH) has been asked to give a research ethical evaluation of three alternative procedures for carrying out this research, each of which is specified in the letter from Dr. Biegler: (1) demanding participation by all students in the research part of the project as well as in the part that relates to the course as such; (2) making all participation voluntary; (3) making the rationality test compulsory as part of the course, while keeping the meta-cognition test voluntary.

NESH discussed the project on 23 January 2012. NESH finds that, of the three options specified, (1) would not be research ethically defensible because it violates the basic requirement of voluntary informed consent by research participants. The argument proffered in the letter against alternative (2), i.e. that one thus risks ending up with too few participants for the results to be valid, is not a consideration which can be given much weight *per se* if research ethical considerations otherwise go against the procedure. However, NESH finds that a procedure in line with alternative (3) can be recommended as a responsible strategy, as long as the following five conditions are met:

1. The research must be carried out in a way that respects the demand for voluntary informed consent. It is therefore a matter of some importance that the students receive a copy of the *consent form* some time in advance of the session, so that each individual has an opportunity to reflect on whether s/he wants to partake in the research.
2. The demand for voluntary informed consent means both that there must be a clear distinction between data generated as part of teaching the course and data generated with a view to conducting research, and that this distinction is clear to all who are

asked to participate in the research part of the project. This is a condition for the consent being *informed*.


3. Correspondingly, the consent is *voluntary* only if all potential participants get the clear and reasonable message that a choice not to participate in the research will have no negative consequences for them. Towards that end, the individual student's non-/participation in the research part of the activity must not be registered, and the students must not be given due cause to suspect that non-/participation is registered on an individual level.


Should it prove impossible to carry out the project in line with these considerations, NESH recommends that students are not recruited through the researcher's own course, but rather through communication with the broader student population or, alternatively, with an even wider population segment.

4. The received documents do not provide unequivocal information as to which data the students will be given access to. Concerning the students' processing of the generated data as part of the course, NESH presupposes (i) that the students only gain access to the course-related rationality score data, and (ii) that the information to which they get access does not include data which permit re-identification of individual students.
5. Finally (and within the strictures provided by the previous four conditions), NESH recommends that the research results are communicated back to the students in the relevant classes.

With these caveats, NESH can recommend that the research project is carried out.

On behalf of NESH,

  
Bjørn Hvinden  
Committee leader, NESH

  
Hallvard J. Fossheim  
Director, NESH