



Cover image from *Ethics in Social Science Research* (Lahman, 2017)

Advancing Culturally Responsive Ethics in Social Science Research

UNC qualitative methodologist Maria K. E. Lahman prepares researchers to move beyond procedural compliance and practice culturally responsive ethics



Dr. Maria K. E. Lahman

Maria K. E. Lahman, Ph.D., has spent more than two decades helping researchers design studies that protect participants while strengthening scholarship. As a qualitative methodologist in the University of Northern Colorado's Applied Statistics and Research Methods program, her work bridges research ethics, methodological innovation, and Institutional Review Board leadership to help scholars conduct research that is both rigorous and culturally responsive.

Her scholarship centers on culturally responsive research ethics – an approach that pushes investigators and review boards beyond procedural compliance toward relational, context-aware research practices.

Through her teaching, publications, and leadership as a longtime IRB co-chair at UNC, Dr. Lahman has helped shape how scholars think about ethical research design.

Centering People in Research Ethics

Dr. Lahman's research agenda emphasizes the ethical responsibilities researchers carry when working with human participants. Her work explores how ethics review processes, informed consent practices and naming decisions influence trust, dignity, and representation in research.

In her book [Ethics in Social Science Research](#), Dr. Lahman encourages researchers to practice [cultural humility](#) when designing studies and interacting with participants. Her scholarship on [pseudonyms](#) highlights how even seemingly small methodological choices – such as how participants are named in research reports – can carry ethical implications for privacy, identity, and reader interpretation.

She has also collaborated with former ASRM students and colleagues including Dr. Suzy, [Dr. Tyler Kincaid](#), and [Dr. Eric Teman](#) on research examining culturally responsive approaches to research ethics review.

Mentoring the Next Generation of Ethical Researchers

Dr. Lahman's mentorship has influenced scholars who now apply ethical research principles across disciplines.

One example is [Kevin B. Gittner](#), Ph.D., a former IRB intern and teaching assistant in Dr. Lahman's research ethics course. Today, Dr. Gittner serves as an Assistant Professor of Biostatistics and Epidemiology at Kennesaw State University's Wellstar College of Health and Human Services. His appointment spans both public health and data science, reflecting his interdisciplinary expertise and the applied nature of his methodological work. Since joining Kennesaw State in 2021, he has become known for a mentoring style that blends statistical rigor with a deep commitment to student development and community-engaged research.

At Kennesaw State, Dr. Gittner mentors students across three active research labs that combine methodological training with applied public health research.

These labs include:

- **Human Studies Lab** – Conducts medical and public health research using advanced data analysis; Dr. Gittner mentors eight students at all levels, reinforcing methodological skills in longitudinal, epidemiological, and behavioral datasets.



Dr. Kevin B. Gittner

- **INTEGHRAL Lab (Innovative Global Health Research and Learning)** – Collaborates on research centered in Kampala, Uganda, supporting underprivileged girls and addressing global health inequities.
- **Data Quality and Survey Methods Lab** – Co-led with Assistant Professor **Lauren Matheny (another outstanding graduate of ASRM)**, this lab focuses on survey design, measurement, missing-data techniques, and instrument evaluation, recently receiving internal seed funding.



Collaborative student learning

This [three-lab structure](#) positions Dr. Gittner as a campus-wide methodological resource, helping students learn to “explain their findings to the layperson” while developing the analytic and professional skills required for public-facing research careers. Dr. Gittner’s interdisciplinary work reflects the ethics-centered training he developed during his time at UNC.

Continuing the Ethics Conversation

Dr. Gittner continues to collaborate with UNC scholars, including Dr. Lahman and ASRM graduate Dr. Carlene Brown, on a research ethics handbook chapter currently in press.

At Kennesaw State, he has also:

- Developed a **research ethics course** for health and data science students
- Served as a member of the university’s [Institutional Review Board](#)
- Integrated ethical decision-making into recruitment plans, data-quality protocols, and cross-cultural health research projects
- Modeled research transparency across student-led projects, including survey documentation and analytic reproducibility
- Created an AI Research Ethics course, which has been a **guide to Dr. Lahman’s recent creation of a similar course** for UNC

Through these efforts, Dr. Gittner helps students understand not only how to conduct research but also how to communicate findings responsibly and transparently.

Why Ethical Research Matters Today

As emerging technologies reshape research practices, Dr. Lahman’s work remains especially relevant.

The increasing use of artificial intelligence in qualitative and mixed-methods research raises new ethical questions about privacy, analytic transparency and responsible data use. Dr. Lahman's guidance encourages scholars to document analytic decisions, reflect on positionality, and consider how technological tools influence interpretation.

Her work also emphasizes that inclusion and equity in research require more than representation.

From consent language to pseudonym practices, Dr. Lahman demonstrates that ethical research is itself a methodological commitment.

Looking Forward

For Dr. Lahman, ethical research begins long before data collection.

Researchers must design ethical considerations into their studies from the start – identifying potential risks, engaging communities respectfully, and representing participants with dignity in both text and visuals.

That philosophy defines her work at UNC.

By training scholars to integrate ethics into every stage of research design, Dr. Lahman's program prepares methodologists who can produce work that is not only rigorous, but also responsible and transformative.