

# STUDENTS IN RESEARCH GUIDELINES

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In some research situations, use of students as participants is integral to a research protocol. This is particularly true of research into teaching methods, curricula and other areas related to the scholarship of teaching and learning. In addition, some disciplines rely on college students as their primary research participants because students are a convenient population and easy to recruit. Although many of the issues related to research participation are the same for college students as other populations, several issues warrant special attention.

An underlying principle of the regulations governing use of human subjects in research is that the subject's participation is voluntary and based upon full and accurate information. This is derived from the Belmont Report principle of *Respect for Persons*. The student-teacher relationship raises the issue of voluntary participation. Though the researcher may be careful to avoid potentially coercive interactions, the nature of the relationship is such that additional safeguards may be necessary. Students might volunteer to participate with the belief that doing so will place them in a favorable situation (e.g., better grade, good recommendation, employment possibilities), or that failure to participate will negatively affect their relationship with the investigator or faculty for academic outcomes (e.g. lower grade, less favorable recommendation, being perceived as uncooperative).

Care should be taken to eliminate or reduce the risk of undue influence or coercion due to the power differential. The following guidelines are offered to assist departments and faculty that engage in research projects involving students as research participants. These guidelines are derived from the Code of Federal Regulations Title 45, Part 46 – Protection of Human Subjects, Section 46.111 and the policies in place at many other American Universities.

Note that it is possible to propose alternative methods to those described in the guidelines if adequate rationale for deviations is provided so that IRB reviewers can make an informed decision.

## **Guidelines for Best Practice:**

### **Recruitment and advertising:**

Recruitment of students as research participants should minimize the possibility of undue influence of the faculty/PI's higher status on a student's decision to participate.

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- Investigators are discouraged from enrolling students whom they directly supervise.
- Soliciting individual students is discouraged. Instead it is preferred that investigators post general announcements such as flyers so that students can choose to make contact.
- Investigators should provide alternative assignments if study participation is part of a class grade. The alternative assignment should be commensurate in terms of effort and time. Investigators should detail the percentage of grade effected by credit (If it is not extra)
- The informed consent document should clearly state that grades, potential letters of recommendation, and other opportunities will not be affected by a student's decision to participate.
- The protocol must specifically describe the screening procedures that will be used to verify that potential participants are 18 years of age or older. If students under the age of 18 are recruited the protocol must explain how parental/guardian permission will be obtained.
- All recruitment documents must be provided to the IRB (flyers, SONA descriptions, general announcement emails...)

## **Privacy:**

Also a result of the Belmont Report principle of *Respect for Persons*, participant privacy should be respected. Classroom conditions may make it difficult for investigators to keep an individual's participation private. This could pose more risk to participants than necessary, such as if they are asked to complete a survey about a sensitive topic and would be concerned others would see their responses. Consideration should be given to the following to minimize potential risks.

- Consideration should be given as to whether conducting the research outside of class is preferable or possible
- When research needs to be done in the classroom the PI should clarify what activities are part of research (voluntary participation) and which are not.
- When collecting information in person (such as in the classroom) it is preferred that an independent third party do so (graduate teaching assistants for the courses in question are not third parties). An independent third party can be a

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professor or graduate student who is not involved in the education of potential participants.

## **Confidentiality:**

In line with the Belmont Report principle of Beneficence, confidentiality of information should be ensured to the best of the investigators' abilities. Since there are special risks of confidentiality in the close environment of the university, special attention should be given to full disclosure of potential risks in the consenting of a student to participate. The following should also be considered:

- Accessing student records requires either written signed consent or a FERPA (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act) waiver. The consent form needs to state which records are being accessed.
- It should be made clear that collection of sensitive information with legal impact will not affect the student's standing (illicit drug use...). This should be stated in the consent form.

## **Contact information:**

In addition to being provided with the traditional information and consent forms, student participants should also be provided with the name and contact information of the IRB chairperson in case they need to contact someone independent of the research study.

## **Payments:**

It is recommended that investigators consider the implications of student participants' early withdrawal from studies and how best to proceed with payment. General rules are not possible given the variety of research studies and payment options. Investigators should respect participants' decisions not to participate or to withdraw early from the research as part of the expectation of participation being voluntary.