

## Lesley University Institutional Review Board Guidelines for Students as Research Subjects

Faculty at the University find it appropriate, in certain instances, to seek to conduct research where students serve as subjects. When students are recruited across the University the concerns are similar to those afforded to subjects in the population at large. However, when faculty wish to engage students in the courses they teach, different concerns are raised. These students might be undergraduates, graduate students, or doctoral students. This research may have the development or study of teaching tools and techniques as a focus.

The regulations governing IRB approvals of human subjects research stipulate the conditions under which a project should be regarded as systematic, generalizable research. The regulations are clear about exempting most instances of *ordinary* educational practice from the requirement for IRB review. However, there is a boundary between study of ordinary professional practice with the goal of improving practice, and research which is intended to impact and extend the field and that must be respected.

The first and foremost concern is the protection of human subjects from harm. All the regulations and acceptable practices that govern human subjects research must be observed at all times. It is essential in all instances that subjects' participation is voluntary, free of coercion, and based upon informed consent. When potential subjects are students of faculty, there are risks to confidentiality, privacy, anonymity and freedom from undue pressure to participate.

Faculty are urged to engage in the scholarship of teaching and learning, action research, and reflective practitioner research. Those interests may run counter to complementary pressures to avoid any human subject research in which there is any possibility of less than perfectly free participation and guarantees of complete anonymity.

It is essential that student participation in research be voluntary and based on informed consent. Because of the nature of the faculty-student relationship, extra precautions must be in place to assure that participation is voluntary, with neither extra-benefit for participation, nor penalty for choosing not to participate. Care must be taken to assure that student participation is not coerced.

- Students must be at least 18 years old. Other conditions of voluntary and informed consent continue to apply.
- School-based guidelines for the use of students in research should be part of the curriculum approval process, with oversight by the IRB.
- Faculty should advise students of the faculty's intention to engage in research using student work before the start or on the first day of the course.
- When the researcher is the instructor of the student research subjects, it is necessary to describe in the consent form which assignments and course activities will become research data. It is also necessary to make sure and describe that students are free to decline participation in the research study without any impact on their course participation, and that the instructor will not know, until the completion of the course and submission of course grades, which students decided to participate in the study.

- Faculty researchers (and graduate student researchers) should not access student records, grades, or performance evaluations without prior written consent from the student. Privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity provisions must be made clear as part of the informed consent. However, if student data is fully de-identified so that even the researcher and/or instructor cannot identify students' scores (e.g., such as test scores or course grades) consent may not be required. But, if data consists of student products written in the student's own words that may be quoted or used in publication, the data may not be used without prior written consent.
- Wherever possible, a third party should be involved so that the subjects/students cannot be individually identified by the researcher/instructor. It is advised that this third party present the project to the subjects/students, field any inquiries, and oversee the recruitment, consent, and de-identifying process.
- Where course credit or opportunities for assignment completion are offered, students who choose not to participate must be provided with the option of a suitable and comparable alternative activity to earn credit or for assignment completion.
- Wherever practical, the recruitment of volunteers should be through general announcement to the largest appropriate potential pool of subjects, rather than being restricted to faculty members' own students, whom they will tend to know individually. If a third party can be available in the recruitment process, that is to be preferred.
- Because of the added risks to confidentiality in faculty research with students, special attention should be given to full disclosure of all risks associated with possible violations of confidentiality in the handling of research data. Data should be collected and stored in a manner that minimizes these risks. Students must be allowed to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.
- Students must be provided with a briefing immediately following the completion of the research project. The purposes, rationale and outcomes of the study should be clearly conveyed. Students must be given the opportunity to withdraw data that identifiably represents themselves in the study.

These guidelines developed from: Stokes, W. (2006). *Scholars and Their Students: Studying Teaching and Learning in Your Own Post-Secondary School Classroom* - William Stokes, Ed.D., Dean of Faculty, Lesley University. Annual HRPP Conference: A Commitment to Ethical Research, Washington, D.C., 2006.