

Faculty Oversight of Student Research

WOU supports the use of high-quality education experiences for students. These experiences may include participating in established class research projects or designing and conducting research projects that involve human subjects. Not all of these activities necessarily fall within the purview of the Institutional Review Board (IRB). This document seeks to clarify if and when instructors must secure IRB approval for student class projects involving human subjects.

When is IRB Review necessary?

The role of the IRB is to ensure that research projects involving human subjects are conducted in accordance with accepted ethical and governmental standards related to the protection of human subjects. Although the IRB requires that a faculty member supervise all student research projects, direct IRB review of student projects is only necessary under certain circumstances. Student class projects involving human subjects may include faculty-designed activities that students carry out or student designed activities. In the event that the student class assignment is intended to collect information that will contribute to generalizable knowledge or if there is any chance of publication beyond WOU, then the activity is considered research and is subject to IRB application, approval, and oversight. If a faculty member believes that there is any potential for dissemination of class project activities beyond WOU (for example if there is the potential for students to present research at a local, state or national conference, as a result of research activities conducted within a course), then that faculty member is responsible for completing an IRB application or supervising the student completion of an IRB application.

Student theses, honors projects, and independent study projects are by their nature intended to add to generalizable knowledge and not contained within the formal classroom environment. These projects, if they involve human subjects, are always subject to IRB oversight. All such projects must involve a sponsoring/supervising faculty member who must carefully review, approve and sign the IRB application before forwarding it to the IRB.

In some cases class projects may involve risks to participants, either physical harm, or potential psychological, social, economic, or legal harm (for example data collection about sexual activity, use of alcohol or illegal drugs, or involvement in illegal activities). Such projects do require oversight, as do projects that involve categories of human subjects subject to special protections such as minors, pregnant women, incarcerated, or otherwise vulnerable (such as cognitively impaired) persons. IRB approval is required for class projects that have increased risks to participants or focus on protected groups, regardless of whether the project seeks to contribute to generalizable knowledge or not. Moreover, any class project that would require full board approval should be submitted to the IRB for approval.

When is IRB Review NOT necessary?

If student class projects are not systematic data collection efforts involving human subjects that are intended to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge and thus do not meet the

federal regulatory definition of research, and if they involve minimal risk to human participants and do not involve members of vulnerable populations, they do not fall under the jurisdiction of the IRB and DO NOT require IRB application, approval, or oversight. These include *Academic Showcase* projects that pose minimal risk, do not involve vulnerable populations, and are not intended for dissemination beyond WOU.

In summary, class projects that are not subject to IRB oversight meet the following conditions:

- Involves minimal or no risk to participants; and
- Participants do not include members of vulnerable populations such as children and/or impaired adults; and
- Findings are only to be distributed within the classroom and/or institutional setting (not outside of WOU). *Academic Excellence Showcase* presentations are considered part of the institutional setting.
- If findings from *Academic Excellence Showcase* are to be published in any external publication, then IRB review is required.

The IRB is unable to provide approval of a research project after the data collection period has begun. As a result, it is essential that all researchers seek IRB approval in advance if they anticipate any dissemination of their findings outside of the institutional setting (e.g., at a conference, via publication, on the World Wide Web). Any data collected prior to receipt of the approval letter from the IRB will not be considered approved data and can limit the ability of the researchers to publish their activities or complete graduation requirements.

Ethical Guidelines for Student Research

Regardless of whether IRB oversight is required or not, all instructors should hold and demonstrate ethical standards in class projects. Instructors are expected to actively supervise student research projects and to educate their students about the ethical guidelines related to the protection of human subjects. These ethical guidelines may include:

- Reviewing students' plans for classroom or group projects and suggesting improvements in design and protections for confidentiality.
- Suggesting that students take the CITI online training on human subject protection before collecting information from others, even if the class project is not subject to IRB approval.
- Explaining ways in which students should be attentive to the welfare of individuals in vulnerable situations, such as young children, prisoners, or the cognitively impaired, or when there is any possibility of physical harm.
- Explaining ways in which students should be attentive to the welfare of individuals in situations in which students will pose sensitive questions including topics related to sexual activity, victimization, use of alcohol or illegal drugs, or involvement in illegal activity.

- When written questionnaires are to be used, suggesting that information be printed on them explaining the use of the data for coursework and including the name and contact number of the instructor.
- Suggesting anonymous data collection whenever possible so that the data are not linked to individuals.
- Suggesting that information identifying individuals be kept separately from the information collected from those individuals.
- Suggesting destruction of non-research data at the end of the course or within a short time afterward.
- Instructing students about the privacy and security vulnerabilities associated with networked computers.

Adapted from the University of Minnesota

If you have questions or concerns, please contact:

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