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Name:	Research Ethics Review for Course-Based Research Activities
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Will your students collect data from human volunteers as part of a course requirement?

Many faculty include course-based research activities (CBRAs) in or out of the physical classroom to enhance student learning, afford students the opportunity to apply theory and methods, and gain skills. CBRAs, with a pedagogical purpose, might include having students learn to use blood pressure monitors (on other students, for example), having students develop and administer a semi-structured interview to employees, or having students conduct focus groups with a group of volunteers from a retirement community.

Honour theses, master's theses, dissertations, independent research projects and similar research endeavors are considered research under the Tri-Council Policy Statement 2 (TCPS2, 2018) and, unless exempt for other reasons, must receive SMU Research Ethics Board (REB) clearance.

Do you need research ethics review for CBRAs involving humans?

The TCPS (2018) application for Art. 2.1 is helpful for determining the circumstances under which research ethics review is required:

“The scope of this Policy is restricted to the review of the ethical conduct of research involving humans. The scope of REB review is limited to those activities defined in this Policy as “research” involving “human participants.” It includes course-based research activities, the primary purpose of which is pedagogical, because of the possible risks to those recruited to participate in such activities, and the fact that, from their perspective, such activities may appear indistinguishable from those that meet this Policy’s definition of research (Application of Article 6.12).

For the purposes of this Policy, “research” is defined as an undertaking intended to extend knowledge through a disciplined inquiry and/or systematic investigation. The term “disciplined inquiry” refers to an inquiry that is conducted with the expectation that the method, results and conclusions will be able to withstand the scrutiny of the relevant research community.” (TCPS 2, 2018, pp. 13-14).

If the course-based student learning activity involves the course students gathering information from each other (e.g., practicing interviewing each other), we believe such activities are outside the purview of the SMU REB.

To determine whether your CBRA requires REB review, consider the following questions:

1) Is there any chance that now or in the future you might want consider the information from the CBRA to be research?

Possibility it's research: Yes or No?

2) Does your CBRA pose greater than minimal risk (e.g., of the physical, psychological, social, or economic variety) for volunteers taking part in the exercise? The TCPS defines minimal risk as follows: "Research in which the probability and magnitude of possible harms implied by participation in the research are no greater than those encountered by participants in those aspects of their everyday life that relate to the research."

Greater than minimal risk: Yes or No?

3) Will your CBRA a) impact the safety, dignity, and welfare of volunteers; b) fail to ensure the individual understand that partaking in the pedagogical activity is purely voluntary; and c) treat volunteers (and/or potential volunteers) in a manner that is either unfair or inequitable?

4) Recognizing that your course-based research activity is for student learning purposes only, will you provide a clear message to the volunteers that this is not research but rather an activity for student leaning purposes?

Clear message that it is not research but rather student learning activity? Yes or No?

If your answer if your answers to the four questions above are 1) no, 2) no, 3) no, and 4) yes, then we believe your CBRA does not require ethics review by the SMU REB. Any other pattern of responses would require that your CBRA be reviewed by the SMU REB.

Note that failure to receive ethics clearance from the SMU REB for CBRA that meet the criteria above will contravene the SMU Policy on Integrity in Research and Scholarship. If you have any questions or concerns regarding the exemption of your CBRA, please contact the Chair of the Research Ethics Board.

We urge faculty instructors to consult with colleagues, department chair, or university administrators to seek guidance about other issues (e.g., risk for students, data security). If your CBRA is exempt from research ethics review, please remember that faculty instructors are the primary contact for any volunteers who take part in your students' activities.