

Procedure: Students as Research Subjects

Background:

Students recruited as research subjects are vulnerable to coercion due to the inherent power differential between students and faculty. Therefore, consideration must be given to eliminate or reduce the risk of undue influence by faculty recruiting students to their research projects. One of the principles of the regulations governing the use of human subjects in research is that the subject's participation is voluntary. Federal regulations (e.g., 45 §CFR 46.116) are explicit: "An investigator shall seek such consent only under circumstances that provide the prospective subject or the representative sufficient opportunity to consider whether or not to participate and to minimize the possibility of coercion or undue influence." However, the student-teacher relationship raises the question of whether the student feels that they can decline to participate. Students often feel compelled to participate in their teacher's research, believing that failure to do so may negatively impact their grade.

Procedure Statement:

Research involving Students:

The purpose of this procedure is to provide guidance to faculty who engage students in their research projects. The University students have the same rights as any other potential subject to participate in a research project, irrespective of the degree of risk, provided all of the following conditions exist:

- A. Recruitment should not be conducted in ways that students may reasonably perceive to be undue influence.
- B. The research must not bestow upon participating University subjects any competitive academic or occupational advantage over other students who do not volunteer. The researchers must not impose any academic or occupational penalty on those not volunteering.
- C. Due to the potential for perceived or undue influence to participate, University students who desire to participate in the research must not be under the direct supervision of anyone who has access to identified data (e.g., researchers, those collecting data).
- D. Generally, researchers may not access classroom performance evaluations, grades, and information in a (current) student's records without prior written permission from the student, regardless of the access an investigator may have in his/her academic role.

- E. When research activities by the students are not part of the required class activities, the instructor should arrange to have the data collected by an independent third party, so that the instructor does not know who participated and does not have access to the identifiable data or identity of participants for any purpose until grades have been assigned and entered. For instructors using pre- and post- tests to determine efficacy of a particular curriculum, a colleague or third party should obtain the consent forms and distribute the tests when the instructor is not present (a graduate teaching assistant in the class in which the student/subject is enrolled does not qualify as a third party for collecting the data on behalf of the instructor).
- F. When course credit or extra credit is given to students who participate in research as part of a course requirement, students are to be given other options for fulfilling the research component, for example; short papers, special projects, book reports, and brief quizzes on additional readings, research seminars, or completing a similar project. These projects must be comparable in terms of time, effort and educational benefit to participation as a research subject to ensure that students are not being coerced into becoming subjects. Alternatives offered to student subjects need prior CPHS approval. Departments seeking to use student subject pools and offering projects including pre- and/or post-testing also require CPHS approval.
- G. Solicitation of volunteer student subjects for research must be done in a non-coercive manner. To avoid undue influence, subjects should be recruited by a general announcement, central posting or announcement mechanism and should include a clearly written description of the project and a statement of the proposed student participation. In addition to being provided with the traditional information and consent forms, the student should also be provided with the name and contact information of a neutral third party to contact should they feel coerced at any time during the process.
- H. Whenever possible, researchers should avoid data collection during regular class meetings. When study participation consumes a significant portion of a class section, loss of instructional time for both participants and non-participants may be considered a loss of benefits. Also, when research participation is expected during the same session at which participation is invited, students may be unduly influenced to take part due to peer pressure, perceived stigmatization from non-participation, or a sense of having otherwise wasted time by attending that day's class.
- I. Since there are special risks of confidentiality in the close environment of the university, special attention should be given to full disclosure of these risks in the consenting of a student to participate. The plan for handling consent forms and research data should also be designed to minimize the risk that confidentiality will be breached (e.g., signed consent forms can be collected and filed separately from the anonymous test instrument). When instruments call for the disclosure of information, which participants may view as personal or sensitive, data should be collected in a manner that minimizes the chance of one participant learning the response of another.

- J. The use of mass testing (classroom scenario) is strongly discouraged. Whenever possible, students should be allowed to access web-based research related activities via designated or personal computers.
- K. Like other research volunteers, students who become research participants must be allowed to withdraw from the study at any time. The informed consent statement should make clear the consequences of withdrawing from a project prior to completion. In general, it is favorable to give credit if the subject withdraws, unless the student withdraws immediately or there is evidence of bad faith on the part of the student.
- L. If the research is one where data are collected from a group project or perhaps a videotape of the group interaction, each student's consent is necessary for the use of that data in the instructor's research. If one student does not consent, these data may be used only if the non-consenting student's data can be effectively excluded.
- M. When deception is used students have the right to full disclosure as soon as possible. *Two consenting presentations are required*, the **first** of which will normally take place during the pretesting period; the **final informed consent** will be presented at the *debriefing*. Whenever possible a teaching opportunity in the form of an "educational debriefing" should be employed. Students should know something about the rationale for the study, the process of data collection, and intent of the researcher. In exceptional circumstances, the full or true purpose of the research may not be revealed to the subjects until the completion of data collection. In such cases, students must not be subjected to undue stress or embarrassment and must have the right to full disclosure of the purpose of the study as soon as possible after the data have been collected. During the debriefing students must be given an opportunity to decide whether the researcher(s) can use the data collected.
- N. Research conducted by graduate students in a class in which the researcher teaches, assists in the class or does any grading should be subject to the same restraints described above.

Researchers Recruiting from Their Own Courses:

A. Potential for Undue Influence:

Instructors have inherent power over students (e.g., through their responsibility for assigning grades). Because of this power relationship, it is likely that some students will feel pressure to comply with requests made by their instructors. This is true independent of whether the instructors actually try to pressure the students. For example, when instructors ask students to participate in research projects, some students may worry that not participating could influence the instructor's opinion of them or that their grade might be affected. Such potential concerns are problematic regardless of whether the instructor actually should think negatively of nonparticipation or whether the students' grades actually would be affected. Students' perceptions that such negative consequences could happen are enough to make them feel pressure to participate.

B. Reducing the Potential for Undue Influence:

In the rare instances in which recruiting from one's own class is permissible, researchers are expected to minimize the potential for students to feel pressured to participate. There are various strategies for minimizing the potential pressure to participate. One way that researchers have reduced the potential to cause undue influence is to design the study so that the instructor is blind to the identity of the participants (at least until after the final grades have been assigned). For example, a researcher can run the study and keep any identifying information from the instructor. If a researcher designs a study in this way these points are crucial:

1. Before being asked to participate, potential subjects should be informed that the instructor will not know who did and who did not participate (at least until after the final grades have been assigned).
2. The research should be designed so that the instructor cannot infer who participated through indirect means (e.g., by seeing who walks into the laboratory, by getting a list of who earned extra credit for participating in the study).
3. In short, due to the potential for undue influence, researchers generally should avoid recruiting subjects from their own classes. When recruiting from their own class is the only feasible way to do a study, researchers are expected to design the research in such a way that the potential for students to feel pressure is minimized.

C. Exceptions:

There are cases in which the research cannot be feasibly completed without recruiting students from a particular course. For example, if the research project concerns a teaching method that will be implemented in the course, then the only possible subject pool comes from the students enrolled in that course. If a research project has a reasonable chance of yielding benefits, and the only feasible way to complete the study is to recruit in the researcher's course, the research may be permissible if the researcher is able to sufficiently reduce the potential for students to feel pressure to participate.

Procedure:

A. Review of Research Proposals Including Students:

Due to the number of research projects using nursing students as subjects, a committee will review and approve requests for student participation. The purpose of the review will be based solely on issues of power and coercion. The science of the research project will not be addressed. The committee will be composed of the Associate Dean for Research, the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs, one clinical track and one tenure-track or tenured faculty members and two student representatives (BSN and PhD).

Prior to IRB approval, faculty must submit the following materials via email to the Associate Dean for Research: 1) written description of the research proposal including all data collection instruments and the informed consent or verbal online script, 2) an explanation of how power dynamics that may exert undue influence on students' participation will be handled, and 3) a copy of the recruitment materials (flyers, postings, etc.).