

Involving College Students as Research Participants

Background

One concern with involving students as research participants is the possibility that students' agreement to participate is not freely given. In other words, they agree to participate because they expect to "win points" with faculty. For example, they may hope to earn higher grades, recommendations, employment, etc., or they may fear that not participating labels them as uncooperative. One way to minimize the perception of coercion is to advertise the opportunity throughout the department or the school rather than recruiting individual students. Another concern with students as research participants is confidentiality, particularly where faculty and student participants know each other. Participants need to be made aware of their exposure to risks presented by the collection of data on such sensitive subjects as mental health, sexual activity, drug and alcohol use, and they need to be protected from these risks as much as possible.

Policy

Requiring participation in research for course credit is not allowed. Offering course credit as an incentive to participate in research can be controversial unless alternatives to earn extra credit exist (e.g., writing a brief research report). The alternatives must be comparable to taking part in the study in terms of time and effort. The amount of extra credit given for completion of each study procedure or session and for completion of the entire study should be specified in the informed consent. If student records will be needed (i.e., SAT, GRE, student GPA, course enrollment or grades, etc.), approval must be granted from the Registrar's Office indicating that the research is in compliance with FERPA and PPRA before IRB review can be completed.

Other Points to Consider

- You may be recruiting minors, as some freshman college students are under the age of 18.
- Minors may be enrolled—a minor is defined in Iowa as a person under the age of 18; the definition may vary by state. See [State Law Regarding Research Involving Humans](#).
- Parental consent will generally be required to enroll students under the age of 18, unless a waiver of consent is requested and approved by the IRB.
- Minors should not be excluded just because parental consent may be difficult, particularly if they fall into the category of individuals who experience the item under study or members of a population who will likely benefit from the research. Investigators should justify exclusion of minors in the Application for Approval of Research Involving Humans in question 11 (Part D: Participant Selection); for example, there may not be enough minors on campus for a particular study to obtain a sufficient sample size such that generalizations can be made to that population and, therefore, exposing them to any risk in the study is not appropriate.
- Financial rewards should be commensurate with the risks of participation.

Document History

Created/Approved: 5/5/2009
