

IRB requirements for selected special circumstances  
*Guidance for researchers*

**Circumstance #1: Research on intimate or potentially upsetting issues (some example issues include: intimate sexual activity, abortion, rape, etc., but this is not intended to be an exhaustive list):**

When participating in research on sensitive topics, participants may be distressed due to being asked to think about the topic itself. Therefore, when doing such research, researchers need to 1) inform participants of the content of the questions and 2) tell participants that they can skip any questions they would feel uncomfortable answering. For example:

*In this questionnaire, you will be asked some questions about \_\_\_\_\_, a topic that you may or may not find upsetting. As such, you may choose to skip any questions or stop participation if you feel uncomfortable or troubled at any time.*

In addition, in the Debriefing Sheet, participants should be given information about counseling services so they have a referral in the event they were upset by material presented in the research. The following language is recommended by the MSJ Wellness Center:

*As you have been told before, you may or may not feel uncomfortable or troubled by the issues brought up by some of the procedures in this experiment. Either way of feeling is a normal reaction. If thinking about these issues has caused you to feel uncomfortable and/or troubled and you would like to speak to someone about your feelings, I encourage you to contact the Wellness Center at 244-4949 (or any other provider of your choice). The Wellness Center is located on campus and has a qualified staff. Their services are strictly confidential and free of charge to all students.*

**Circumstance #2: Request for a waiver of informed consent:**

*Taken from CFR §46.116 General requirements for informed consent.*

(c) An IRB may approve a consent procedure which does not include, or which alters, some or all of the elements of informed consent set forth above, or waive the requirement to obtain informed consent provided the IRB finds and documents that:

(1) The research or demonstration project is to be conducted by or subject to the approval of state or local government officials and is designed to study, evaluate, or otherwise examine: (i) public benefit or service programs; (ii) procedures for obtaining benefits or services under those programs; (iii) possible changes in or alternatives to those programs or procedures; or (iv) possible changes in methods or levels of payment for benefits or services under those programs; and

(2) The research could not practicably be carried out without the waiver or alteration.

(d) An IRB may approve a consent procedure which does not include, or which alters, some or all of the elements of informed consent set forth in this section, or waive the requirements to obtain informed consent provided the IRB finds and documents that:

- (1) The research involves no more than minimal risk to the subjects;
- (2) The waiver or alteration will not adversely affect the rights and welfare of the subjects;
- (3) The research could not practicably be carried out without the waiver or alteration; and
- (4) Whenever appropriate, the subjects will be provided with additional pertinent information after participation.

*\*\* Note that waivers of informed consent are not granted merely because a researcher did not obtain IRB approval prior to data collection and wants to later conduct analysis on information already obtained. Nonetheless, if a researcher believes he/she qualifies for a waiver of informed consent, he/she must **make a request for the waiver** in the IRB form.*

### **Circumstance #3: Conducting online surveys:**

On occasion, researchers may find it easier and/or cost effective to ask participants to complete online surveys. When this occurs, the researcher should take steps to ensure that survey responses are anonymous. These steps include first determining whether the survey site uses SSL encryption to secure responses. Secondly, the researcher needs to make sure that IP addresses are not collected from survey respondents. Please check with your specific online survey provider if you have questions about these functions.

In addition to protecting survey responses out on the internet, there are some circumstances in which evidence left on the participant's personal computer of responding to a survey online may be problematic. One place where this evidence can be left is in an individual's browser history – shows most recent internet sites visited. If, for example, the survey is for victims of domestic violence, it would be dangerous if evidence of that survey was left on a personal computer to be found by one's abusive partner. In such problematic circumstances, the following instructions can be provided to help respondents use private browsing sessions to prevent evidence of participation from being left on a computer. (Note that the specific links below are instructions available for various internet browsers present at the time this document was written and may need to be updated depending on when the researcher conducts the survey.)

*Whenever you go to a website, traces of where you have been are left on your computer. If you want to prevent those traces from being left while participating in this survey, we encourage you to go to the survey **after** enabling private browsing. If you are uncertain how to do that, follow the instructions provided in one of the links below. Just click on the link that pertains to the browser you intend to use to get to the survey.*

*If you use Internet Explorer (IE) 8, go to:*

<http://windows.microsoft.com/en-XM/windows-vista/InPrivate-frequently-asked-questions>

*If you use Internet Explorer (IE) 9, go to:*

<http://windows.microsoft.com/en-US/internet-explorer/products/ie-9/features/in-private>

*If you use Internet Explorer (IE) 10, go to:*

<http://browsers.about.com/od/internetexplorertutorials/ss/How-To-Activate-Inprivate-Browsing-Mode-In-Internet-Explorer-10.htm>

*If you use Internet Explorer (IE) 11, go to:*

<http://browsers.about.com/od/internetexplorertutorials/ss/How-To-Activate-Inprivate-Browsing-Mode-In-Internet-Explorer-11.htm>

*If you use Firefox, go to:*

<http://support.mozilla.com/en-US/kb/Private%20Browsing>

*If you use Safari, go to:*

<http://browsers.about.com/od/safari/ss/private-browsing-safari-5-osx.htm>

*If you use Google Chrome, go to:*

<http://www.google.com/support/chrome/bin/answer.py?hl=en&answer=95464>

*If you use Microsoft Edge, go to:*

<http://windows.microsoft.com/en-us/windows-10/browse-inprivate-in-microsoft-edge>

#### **Circumstance #4: Research on illegal and/or risky activity:**

When participating in research on illegal behaviors, participants may be placed at risk if they simply admit to engaging in illegal activity. Therefore, when doing such research, researchers need to 1) inform participants of the content of the questions (i.e., that you will be asking about illegal behavior) and 2) tell participants that they can skip any questions they would feel uncomfortable answering.