

Instructions for conducting research in the classroom
Guidance for professors and student researchers

Issue #1a: Eliminating social coercion to participate due to distributing research questionnaires during the class period (researchers collecting data in the classroom who are not the instructor of the course):

It is a very common and efficient method of collecting data to distribute questionnaires in the classroom; however, there are precautions that need to be in place to prevent students from feeling that they have to complete the questionnaire simply because it was distributed in the classroom. To eliminate this potential, these researchers should incorporate the following guidelines into their design/proposals:

- When distributing questionnaires during class, distribute them to all students, informing students that they can return the questionnaire blank if they don't want to participate. (This eliminates a student being identified as not wanting to participate by declining receipt of the questionnaire.)
- Verbally instruct students that participation is voluntary and that their course grade is not tied to participating in the research.
 - o However, if a professor wants to give course credit in exchange for participating in the research, this is allowed, but only if the instructor offers a **comparable*** alternative to participating. This preserves the voluntary nature of participating. *See Issue #3 for guidance on comparable alternatives.*

Issue #1b: Eliminating social coercion to participate due to distributing research questionnaires during the class period (for faculty researchers collecting data in their own classrooms):

Extra protection from social coercion needs to be in place when a faculty member is collecting data in his/her own classroom because faculty members hold a position of power that is not present with student researchers. Thus, to eliminate this potential, these researchers should incorporate the following guidelines into their design/proposals:

- Incorporate all of the guidelines listed above in Issue 1a
- The faculty researcher must not be present in the classroom when students are completing questionnaires/participating. This prevents social pressure due to the presence of the faculty member being in the room. A common practice here is to have the faculty member excuse him/herself into the hallway while students are participating and assigning a student to bring the faculty member back into the room once participation is over (for example, once questionnaires are turned in).

Issue #2: Dealing with identifiability potential due to demographic questions asked

It can be challenging to conduct research in the classroom on a campus with small class sizes, and issues arise in those settings that don't arise on campuses with large classes. The main issue that arises has to do with collecting data that is anonymous. When the researcher has access to students in a particular class because either the researcher is the instructor of the course or a student in the course, it is possible that certain demographic questions can render some of the data identifiable (for example, because most MSJ students are Caucasian and traditional students, it would be easy for one of the two researchers mentioned above to pick out which student identified herself as a 45 y.o. Asian female). We, on the Institutional Review Board at Mount St. Joseph University do not want to prevent researchers from collecting demographic data to describe their samples; however, we have an obligation to protect the identity of research subjects and, at the very least, inform them that answering certain questions could make their data identifiable.

So, when collecting data in situations in which demographic questions could cause data to become identifiable (not limited to those listed above – another circumstance could include data collection of very small sample sizes), we offer two options:

Option #1: Accept that the data you are collecting are identifiable, and submit an Expedited IRB proposal, incorporating all of the extra protections that are required for handling data that is confidential, but not anonymous. This includes having subjects complete Informed Consent forms instead of merely inserting an Informed Consent statement at the top of the questionnaire.

Option #2: Complete a proposal for an Exempt project and insert the following statement at the beginning of the Demographics section of your questionnaire:

“Demographic questions such as age, gender, race, etc. help tremendously in understanding the people we are surveying. And, although measures have been taken to protect your identity, there is the potential that answering certain demographic questions could identify your responses as your own. Therefore, you may skip any of the following questions you don't feel comfortable answering.”

Issue #3: Eliminating coercion to participate when course credit is offered in exchange for participating in research

(Note that the following procedure is required of the individual who is giving the course credit. So, if a researcher is conducting a study and not providing course credit, but an instructor of one of the courses in which the researcher is collecting data decides to offer course credit, the instructor, not the researcher, is held responsible for being familiar with and abiding by the following procedure.)

On occasion, professors may choose to offer course credit in exchange for participating in research. This is common practice, particularly in the social sciences, because not only does it aid researchers in acquiring participants, but it also provides students with first-hand experience with scientific research, a perspective that cannot be fully appreciated by simply reading about research participation in a textbook. However, when this occurs, there are precautions that need to be in place in order to prevent the participation requirement from inadvertently creating coercion to participate in research. According to the American Psychological Association *Ethical Guidelines for Research*, “When participation is a course requirement or an opportunity for extra credit, the prospective participant is given the choice of equitable alternative activities.”

To preserve the voluntary nature of participation when professors provide course credit for participating in research, a comparable or equitable alternative to earning the course credit must be provided so that a student who does not want to participate can also get the offered course credit. A commonly offered alternative is to assign the student to write a short paper instead of participating in the research; however, the time and effort required to complete such an assignment is likely not comparable to participating in most research projects conducted with college undergraduates, as these projects tend to be quite brief with respect to time involved and also require no additional effort. A modification of this scenario that would provide comparable options to students would be to require that students either a) participate in a research project and write a brief paper about the experience or b) read a short article and write a brief paper about the article.

The above offered suggestion is certainly not the only way to be in compliance with IRB regulations regarding the need for voluntary participation. If additional guidance is needed and/or other scenarios are being considered, we recommend that the instructor consult with a member of the IRB to ensure compliance.

Issue #4: Recruiting students in the classroom to participate in research conducted outside of class time

Some research projects require that participants participate in a project outside of class time. When this occurs, it is common practice for the project to be introduced and for sign-up sheets to be distributed during class time. If a researcher chooses to recruit students during class time (and this is allowed by the course instructor), the researcher must include the recruitment materials in his/her submission to the IRB for review. These materials should include, but are not limited to:

- a description of the study to be read aloud to the class that includes an assurance that despite recruitment occurring in the classroom, participation is voluntary

- a copy of the sign-up sheet distributed

Furthermore, because sign-up sheets will typically include names and contact information for the potential participants, they should be handled as confidential materials (i.e., stored in a secure location & destroyed after completion of the study), and this handling should be described in the IRB form.