

Classroom-Based Research Projects and Student Research

A student research project that fits the definition of research and human subjects has to have IRB review and approval prior to initiating the project. Federal regulations define RESEARCH as a **systematic** investigation designed to develop or contribute to **generalizable knowledge**. Federal regulations define **HUMAN SUBJECTS** as a "living individual about whom an investigator conducting federal research obtains (1) data through intervention or interaction with an individual or (2) identifiable private information." ~ [45 CFR 46.102 \(link is external\)](#)

Available on the Compliance website is a Determination Worksheet to assist Faculty and Students with the definitions to understand if their proposed project fits the definition of research and human subjects.

Western Illinois University (WIU) recognizes that some student projects are conducted solely for educational purposes. If the instructor's intention is to provide students with training about and experiences with research methods, WIU does not consider the classroom project as research and they do not require IRB review. To meet this definition, the risk level of the research is no more than a participant would encounter in daily activities, the data remains within the classroom setting to assist with a discussion, there are no plans to use the data outside the classroom setting and the data will be destroyed when the project is completed. If the instructor and student are not sure how the information will be used it is wise to err on the side of caution and contact the IRB for a determination. Available on the Compliance website is a Determination Worksheet.

In summary, to be considered a classroom project the following conditions need to be true:

- The activity is a classroom assignment for students enrolled in an official course.
- This activity must be assigned and completed in a single term.
- Results are used for teaching and learning purposes.
- Results will not be used outside the classroom.
- Data must be destroyed when the project is completed.
- Research procedures are no more than minimal risk.
- Generally not intended to create new knowledge or lead to a scholarly publication.
- Vulnerable populations are not targeted (e.g. children, prisoners, cognitively impaired persons, (etc.).
- Sensitive information (mental health, sexual attitudes or preferences, alcohol/drug use, contact information, etc.) cannot be identifiable. Data collection needs to be anonymous to the researchers.
- When appropriate, an informed consent or assent process is in place.

Student projects outlined below must have IRB approval prior to initiation.

- Undergraduate Honors Thesis
- Master Degree Program
- Doctoral Degree Program

Student projects outlined below must have IRB approval prior to initiation.

- Present at Undergraduate Research Day or Graduate Research Day
- Publishes Analysis
- Presents or Publish an Abstract or Poster
- Presents Research at an Academic Conference

The following projects may need to have IRB review and the IRB should be consulted to verify if it is needed. The intentions of the projects will be used to make a determination.

- Oral history interviews, biography or some journalistic interviews
- Collection of information about an organization and not specific individuals

Responsibility of Course Instructor: The instructor remains responsible for educating students about the protection of human subjects and providing ethical guidance for all student projects. The instructor should be monitoring the student project progress and reminding students the data cannot be saved and used after the course is completed.

During the design phase, students need to consider how to ethically conduct the research and how to complete the IRB Initial Review Form if the project requires IRB approval. Items to consider when designing a research project:

- Know the required elements of informed consent and how to apply them.
- Create the appropriate consent documents and assent documents.
- Develop appropriate recruitment strategies.
- Identify and minimize potential risks to subjects.
- Assess the risk to benefit factors for the project.
- Guidelines for protecting confidentiality and /or privacy are established and followed.

Students and instructors are encouraged to complete the human subject protection ethic training offered by WIU using the CITI training site if it is a classroom project.

All researchers (students and faculty) engaged in an IRB approved project must have completed the human subject protection ethic training using CITI training site prior to initiating the research project.

IRB review and approval CANNOT be obtained after the study has begun AND data collected. The project needs to fit the classroom project criteria to have this requirement waived.