

REB Guideline: Conducting Research as a Course Assignment

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Sometimes instructors require or allow students to conduct research with human participants in order to satisfy course requirements. The requirements for ethics clearance vary depending upon the nature of the assignment, the course instructor's active role in supervising the research, and the level of risk associated with the proposed research.

1. Consistent with the requirements of the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS)*, research is defined as “an undertaking intended to extend knowledge through a disciplined inquiry or systematic investigation” (TCPS2, p. 15) and human participants are defined as “those individuals whose data, or responses to interventions, stimuli or questions by the researcher, are relevant to answering the research questions” (TCPS2, p. 16). Course assignments that do not meet the definition of research with human participants (e.g., assignments that are limited to data that are in the public domain, consultations with individuals for assistance in accessing information that is in the public domain, observations of facets of an organization or institution without collecting data about individuals within the organization, practice using standardized instruments or protocols where no data or analyses will be reported, practicums where the primary purpose is to develop professional skills, or co-op placements) are not subject to REB review. However, if data collected are later proposed for research, it would be considered secondary use of information not originally intended for research and would require REB review (TCPS2, article 2.5).
2. If the course assignment involves data collection within the class only (i.e., gathering data from other students in the same class) with no intention to distribute any information beyond the class, then the course instructor is wholly responsible for the ethical conduct of the research. Clearance is not required from the REB unless the research involves deception or risks of harm that are greater than those encountered by the participants in everyday life (i.e., greater than minimal risk).
3. If the instructor designs a course assignment that involves research with human participants, then prior clearance is required from the REB.
 - a. If the research involves no more than minimal risk, then the instructor can submit an *application for ethics review of course-based research*. Such research projects may involve instructor-designed research (where all students do the same project) or instructor-guided research (where students plan their own research projects while following the parameters established by the instructor and vetted by the REB for recruitment, data collection, data storage and disposal, and reporting of results). Instructors are advised to secure ethics clearance before the start of the course to ensure adequate time for review prior to the course assignment.
 - b. If the research involves more than minimal risk, the full REB must review all details of projects, therefore ethics clearance will not be granted for instructor-guided research involving more than minimal risk without the submission of a full *application for ethics review* (not the application for ethics review of course-based research).
4. Occasionally students may want to conduct research with human participants to fulfill course requirements when the instructor has not planned or anticipated such research and, thus, has not obtained ethics clearance for student research in advance. Under such conditions, the instructor can follow one of the following courses of action:

- a. If the instructor chooses to allow a student to conduct the research to satisfy course requirements, the student must work with the instructor to prepare an individual *application for ethics review*; or
 - b. If an instructor does not wish to allow students to engage in research with human participants in order to satisfy course requirements, then the instructor is encouraged to indicate this explicitly in the course syllabus. Such a statement will help to avoid a situation in which students undertake research on their own initiative, without necessary ethics clearance and without appropriate instructor guidance. A model statement follows:

Protection of Human Participants in Research
National and international guidelines protect the rights of human participants in research. Consistent with these guidelines, no Brock University student may undertake any research involving human participants without the support of a Faculty Supervisor and clearance from the Research Ethics Board. Therefore, students shall not include interviews, observations, or other information that is not publicly available about living humans in the completion of any assignment for this course. To do so will result in disciplinary action. If in doubt, please consult with the course instructor.
5. If the research is for a thesis, project, or major research paper (MRP), then the student and faculty supervisor must submit an *application for ethics review*. No research may begin prior to clearance from the REB.