

Title: Guidelines Respecting Students as Research Participants

Enrolment in a university credit course places a student in a context where they are inevitably subject to the influence of power relationships on voluntary choice. Students who are invited to act as participants in research should not be concerned that a decision to decline the opportunity to participate in research will in any way impact their grades. Arguably, students who are invited to act as research participants in courses in which they are enrolled could qualify as members of captive or vulnerable populations, as defined by the Tri-Council Policy Statement:

The voluntariness of consent is important because it respects human dignity and means that individuals have chosen to participate in research according to their own values, preferences and wishes.

The approach to recruitment is an important element in assuring voluntariness. In particular, how, when and where participants are approached and who recruits them are important elements in assuring (or undermining) voluntariness. In considering the voluntariness of consent, REBs and researchers should be cognizant of situations where undue influence, coercion or the offer of incentives may undermine the voluntariness of a participant's consent to participate in research.

Undue influence and manipulation may arise when prospective participants are recruited by individuals in a position of authority. The influence of power relationships (e.g., employers and employees, teachers and students, commanding officers and members of the military or correctional officers and prisoners) on the voluntariness of consent should be judged from the perspective of prospective participants, since the individuals being recruited may feel constrained to follow the wishes of those who have some form of control over them. This control may be physical, psychological, financial or professional, for example, and may involve offering some form of inducement or threatening some form of deprivation. In such situations, the control exerted in a power relationship may place undue pressure on the prospective participants. At the extreme, there can be no voluntariness if consent is secured by the order of authorities.

~TCPS2, Chapter 3, Article 3.1

To address undue influence between researchers and students enrolled in their classes who are invited to act as research participants, we offer the following guidelines.

Guidelines:

1. In general, those involved in course delivery—faculty members (full-time and contractual), graduate and undergraduate students—should, where possible, seek alternatives to recruiting students currently registered in their own classes for use as research participants. Where circumstances merit exception to this rule, they should be clearly articulated to the REB.
2. Data obtained through normal instructional practice may be approved by the REB for research purposes provided that it is used in a way that protects the confidentiality of all involved. Such information will normally qualify as secondary data and its use in research will be subject to the restrictions and provisions relevant to the secondary use of data (see *TCPS2*, Chapter 5, Section D). Researchers can enhance the anonymity of such data by aggregating it across courses, sections, and years.
3. Academic compensation for participation in research, while traditional in some disciplines, is appropriate only in the following situations: when participation is voluntary, when students who opt out have alternative ways of earning the marks that would be apportioned for participation in research, and when serving as a research participant can reasonably be expected to result in educational benefits.

The benefits of serving as a research participant may include the following:

- i. familiarizing participants with research methods.
- ii. debriefing participants afterward in such a way that they have an opportunity to learn about the research in which they have been involved.
- iii. helping participants to understand what it means to be a research participant, which is particularly valuable for students who may later become involved in their own human participant research.

The means by which students are recruited as research participants, how compensation for participation is allocated, and what kind of alternatives to participation are offered, are likely to be discipline-specific. Departments using such measures are encouraged to develop their own guideline regarding the use of students as research participants and to have it approved by the REB.

Author: ___REB___
REB Chair: ___K. Burnett___
Date of approval: ___May 21, 2021___