

Best Practices for Faculty Mentors of Student Research

Faculty mentors play an essential role in ensuring that student research is conducted safely, ethically, and in compliance with institutional and federal standards. **When students conduct research under faculty supervision, the faculty mentor holds full responsibility for the development, oversight, and ethical conduct of the project.** Regardless of whether the faculty member is listed as *Faculty Mentor* or *Principal Investigator (PI)*, they are accountable for ensuring that all research activities meet professional, institutional, and regulatory expectations. At all times, decisions about role designation and supervision must prioritize the rights, welfare, and dignity of research participants above instructional or training goals.

Core Responsibilities

Faculty mentors are responsible for:

- Guiding the development of the research question and methodology to ensure projects are feasible, ethical, and appropriately scaled to student ability.
- Reinforcing that the rights and welfare of participants must always come first.
- Reviewing and approving proposals to ensure they meet professional and [institutional standards](#) **before** submission to the IRB.
- Determining whether students have sufficient training, experience, and support to complete the proposed research responsibly; redirecting them when a project exceeds their current capabilities.
- Overseeing all aspects of the study to ensure approved procedures are followed and co-investigators conduct themselves ethically.
- Manage IRB communications promptly, including amendments, adverse events, and deviations.
- Maintain all required records and approvals.

Role Designation

- **Minimal Risk Research:**

Faculty may be listed as either *PI* or *Faculty Mentor*. In both cases, they retain full responsibility for ethical conduct and oversight.

- **Research Involving Greater Than Minimal Risk:**

When research involves greater than minimal risk to participants, the faculty mentor must serve as the PI, with students listed as co-investigators.

- [Participant vulnerability](#) and the use of sensitive information do not automatically render a study greater than minimal risk. However, these factors may increase the likelihood of harm and therefore require careful assessment of risk. When research involving [vulnerable participants](#) or sensitive information exceeds minimal risk, increases the potential for harm, or limits participants' ability to protect their own interests, the faculty mentor must serve as PI and provide active oversight to ensure participant rights, welfare, and dignity are fully protected. The mentor must:
 - Document their experience in both research and supervising projects.

- Describe the training and preparation of student researchers that qualifies them to conduct the research.
- Provide a mentoring plan outlining supervision, communication, and quality assurance.
- Include an emergency and adverse event plan, if applicable.
- Indicate where they will be during data collection; for heightened-risk work, mentors should be physically nearby or otherwise immediately available.

Supervision and Safety

Heightened risk requires active, hands-on supervision. Faculty mentors should:

- Be closely involved in participant recruitment and data collection planning.
- Review consent forms, scripts, and materials for sensitivity and clarity.
- Ensure all research occurs in safe, professional settings with clear communication channels for reporting problems.
- Intervene in a reasonably timely manner in the event of participant distress, unanticipated problems, or deviations from protocol.

Student Preparation

Mentors must ensure that students:

- Complete required human subjects and safety training.
- Understand emergency procedures, reporting obligations, and confidentiality limits.
- Are emotionally and professionally ready to engage with sensitive material or participant experiences.

Document Attributes

Last approved by IRB: April 2026