

Recruiting Students for Research

Background and Ethical Considerations

Many research proposals at Longwood University seek to recruit students from classes or the general student population as research participants. One of the primary concerns in using students as participants is coercion. Regardless of how carefully recruitment is framed, the inherent power imbalance between instructors and students means that students may feel compelled to participate to maintain a positive relationship with the instructor or to avoid potential negative impacts on their grades. Even if instructors assure students that participation is voluntary, the fear of academic repercussions, however subtle, can influence students' decisions.

Informed consent and ongoing voluntariness are critical issues in these situations. Students may struggle to distinguish between typical classroom activities and research-related activities, which can complicate their understanding of their rights as participants. Moreover, even after initially consenting, students may feel hesitant to withdraw if they wish to discontinue participation, fearing consequences. Researchers must emphasize that there will be no negative impact or repercussions if a student decides to withdraw from the study at any time.

Faculty Recruiting Students from Their Own Classes

When an instructor wishes to recruit students from their own class for research (including pedagogical research involving educational records from that class):

- **Avoid Perceived Coercion:**
 - Use a third party to handle recruitment and consent.
 - Avoid presenting the study as part of course activities or curriculum.
 - Allow sufficient time and space for students to review consent materials without the instructor present.
 - Instructors must clearly communicate that participation in research is voluntary and that opting out will not impact a student's grade or academic standing.
- **Students cannot be required to participate in research to meet course requirements.**
 - Alternative assignments or assessments must be provided for students who choose not to participate in research studies, ensuring that all students have equitable opportunities to fulfill course requirements.
- **Timing of Recruitment:** If possible and reasonable for the methodology, wait until after final grades are posted to recruit current students. Certain situations may not allow for

this and investigators will need to provide justification for this recruitment timing in their proposal.

- Review of consent for, and use of, identifiable educational records should not occur until after final grades are posted.

Recruitment by Researchers Outside the Class

If students outside of the class or other researchers wish to recruit participants in a classroom setting:

- Instructor's Neutral Role: The instructor should not be involved in the recruitment or consenting process to avoid biasing student responses.
- Voluntary Participation: Any recruitment must clearly communicate that participation is voluntary, with no current or future negative academic ramifications.

Students Recruiting Other Students

When students are involved in recruiting peers, specific guidelines should minimize coercive dynamics:

- Minimize Peer Pressure: Students recruiting other students (e.g., for a senior project) should ensure that they clearly communicate that non-participation will not affect personal relationships or peer status.
- Transparent Communication: Provide detailed information about the study, emphasize the voluntary nature of participation, and emphasize that participants can withdraw at any time for any reason without penalty.
- Approval: All recruitment materials must be pre-approved by the IRB, including the consent forms and any scripts used by student recruiters.

Instructor Posting Research Opportunities

If an instructor wishes to share research opportunities with students, the following guidelines should be followed:

- Review and Vet Opportunities: Before sharing any research opportunities, the instructor is responsible for reviewing the study's legitimacy, alignment with IRB Research Guidance and Best Practices, and appropriateness for the student population. The instructor should ensure that:
 - The study has received IRB approval or adheres to the Best Practices for Class Projects Involving Human Subjects Data Collection.
 - The recruitment process is ethical and voluntary.
- Posting Research Opportunities: Research opportunities may be shared via neutral platforms such as Canvas, departmental newsletters, or bulletin boards. They should include:

- The contact details of the primary investigator.
- A statement clarifying that participation is entirely voluntary and will not influence grades or academic standing.
- A description of the research purpose and what participation entails in terms of time and participant responsibilities.

General Requirements for Student Recruitment

- **Avoid Coercion:** In all scenarios, instructors must avoid any real or perceived coercion. Coercion can be subtle and may arise if students believe that participation (or lack thereof) could influence their academic or personal standing.
- **Voluntariness:** Participation must always be voluntary, and students should feel free to decline or withdraw without repercussions.
- **IRB Approval:** All projects meeting the definition of 'human subjects' and 'research' that involve students, whether using classroom data or direct recruitment, must be reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB).

Key Considerations for Researchers

Do: Use third parties for recruitment when possible, clearly communicate voluntariness, maintain transparency, and comply with [IRB](#) and [FERPA](#) regulations.

Don't: Use your authority to influence participation, use academic standing as an incentive, or allow recruitment to interfere with normal classroom activities.

Document Attributes

Last approved by IRB: 12/24