

**Faculty of Education  
Research Ethics Board**

**ETHICS CONSIDERATIONS IN RESEARCH  
INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS AS COMPONENTS OF COURSE WORK**

All research involving human participants conducted by any member<sup>1</sup> of the university community **must** meet the university's standards for research involving human subjects. ALL instructors are responsible for ensuring that their students are aware of and meet the university's ethical standards. As a condition of employment, all instructors undertake to scrutinize the course-related research proposals of all their students.

Research which is part of course requirements must adhere to the UWO REB Guidelines for Undergraduate Research <http://www.uwo.ca/research/ethics/undergrad.htm> regardless of whether or not there will be a published record.

**\*\*\*\*The following information is taken from the UWO Guideline 1-G-007\*\*\*\***

Many courses include class projects and activities designed to develop research skills. These projects may be carried out by individual students, small groups or as a single class project. The University of Western Ontario wishes to encourage learning of research methodologies and techniques by students. Class exercises may not fit the standard definition of research in the sense that the results are not intended for publication or for generalization to other situations. However, the potential for risk to subjects who participate in research class exercises requires the protocol and consent information be reviewed by a research ethics board (REB).

Student research activities vary in scope, but may include:

- having students conduct interviews, administer standard tests, or distribute questionnaires to develop interview or questionnaire design skills;
- conduct 'mini' research projects where students pose research questions, gather data from human participants, and analyse the data for presentation; or
- other activities that would be considered research within the disciplinary traditions in which the course is being taught.

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<sup>1</sup> *This includes all instructors AND all students in ALL courses offered in the B.Ed./Dip.Ed. Program, in the graduate programs and in Continuing Teacher Education, where the research being conducted is part of any course or program being taken at the university, or is in any way connected to university employment.*

## **Distinguishing Research from Case/Professional Skill Development**

In some class situations the information gathering procedures and practices students are expected to use are required exclusively for pedagogic purposes. They are not conducted within the context of, or embedded within, a research framework. For example, professional faculties have students conduct interviews as part of skill development or individual knowledge acquisition. *Information gathering projects within these situations are not subject to REB review requirements: however they must align with the appropriate professional standards or codes of conduct and review processes required by the relevant Faculty.*

The following criteria can be used to assess whether information-gathering activities within a university course are part of a research project or are for the teaching of professional skills or pedagogic purposes.

### **a) Information gathering activities are classified as research when:**

- the intent is to educate students on research processes used to explore and expand existing theories, methodologies and conceptual knowledge;
- students compare new techniques, practices, programs with standard approaches to determine which is more effective;
- the results or findings are written in a format that would be acceptable for a research journal or academic conference presentation; or
- primary data is collected and organized for analysis and distribution or dissemination.

Example: Students are asked to design a survey, ask friends to complete the survey, enter the data and analyze the data as part of a class exercise to learn about research processes.

### **b) Information gathering activities are classified as skill development and not research when:**

- the intent is to use the information to provide advice, diagnosis, identification of appropriate interventions, or general advice for a client,
- the intent is to develop skills which are considered standard practice within a profession (e.g., observation, assessment, intervention, evaluation, auditing); or
- the information gathering processes are part of the normal relationship between the student and the participants (e.g., classroom teacher and students, nurse and patient, lawyer and client)

Example: As part of a Reflective Practice Project, a teacher organizes a subject-area parents' night and then reflects upon this activity via a self-assessment. The assessment is only used for the purpose of the Additional Qualifications course.

Instructors who are uncertain as to whether a learning activity or project falls outside the scope of the criteria outlined in this document should contact the Office of Research Ethics at 661-3036, or [ethics@uwo.ca](mailto:ethics@uwo.ca)

If the learning activity is deemed to be research, it must be submitted to a UWO sanctioned Research Ethics Board for review and approval before the research begins. Please see <http://www.uwo.ca/research/ethics/undergrad.htm> for forms and guidelines. The Faculty of Education Sub-Research Ethics Board is available to review minimal risk proposals.

Instructors and students who are members of the Ontario College of Teachers are also bound by the ethical requirements of the Standards of Professional Practice, and by Regulation 437, made under the Ontario College of Teachers Act 1996, which defines professional misconduct.

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## ETHICAL REQUIREMENTS FOR RESEARCH WITH HUMAN SUBJECTS

The following is a brief summary of ethics guidelines.

**General treatment of human participants:** All human participants who may be involved in the research must be treated in a professional, honest and ethical manner.

**Institutional access:** Where research is to be conducted at an institutional site (such as a school), written permission from the person(s) responsible for that site (in the case of a school this would usually be the principal, and the local Board of Education) must be obtained before the research may begin, and any ethics requirements the institution may have must also be obeyed.

**Information:** All prospective human participants must be provided with a written explanation of the nature of the research, prior to obtaining their consent to participate. This explanation should include (a) a clear statement regarding the extent, nature and implications of their participation, (b) a clear indication that participation is voluntary and that they may withdraw at any time or decline to answer any specific questions with no effect on their academic status or employment, and (c) contact information in

the event of questions or concerns.

**Informed consent:** In most circumstances written consent must be obtained from human participants before commencing data collection. This consent must be obtained without any possibility of coercion *or perception of coercion*. Where a power relationship (such as instructor-student) exists, particular care must be taken in this regard. Completion of a questionnaire may be assumed to constitute written consent, provided the participants are clearly given the freedom to decline to participate. Where the research project involves only such activities as would normally be undertaken and for which consent is not required (such as regular classroom instruction), no consent is required for participation in the activities, but consent must be obtained before data collected in such activities can be used for research purposes.

**Confidentiality:** All data collected must be regarded as confidential and every effort must be made to ensure that participants are not identified either directly or indirectly in either verbal or written reports.

**Minors:** Where consent is required and the participant is a minor, the written consent of a parent or guardian must be obtained *in addition to* that of the participant (where the minor is capable of understanding the nature of the research and consenting thereto). Please note that the use of passive consent is not acceptable.

**Language:** All written and verbal information for participants, and parents or guardians where applicable, should be provided in appropriately accessible language, including the use of a translator or interpreter where necessary.

## ETHICS ISSUES FOR TEACHERS

Research in education frequently involves children in school, who are both a highly vulnerable population and a captive audience. It is, therefore, imperative that we are especially careful in assessing the ethical standards of our research. Faculty of Education students conducting research for Continuing Teacher Education and graduate courses are often classroom teachers, and occasionally the nature of the research involves study of their own practice; where teachers conduct research in their own classrooms and/or schools, the students are human subjects, and care must be taken to avoid unethical practice. It should be possible to answer all of the following questions in the affirmative:

- Are the instructional methods and procedures in this study those which would normally be followed, i.e., what would have been happening in the classroom anyway?
- Are the data collected and reported either aggregate or anonymous, so that no individual student could possibly be identified?
- If individual student work is to be reproduced, will permission be obtained from the student and/or guardian?
- Are you sure there is no possibility of physical harm to students?
- Are you sure there is no possible risk of emotional harm or potential damage to trust relationships?
- Are you sure there is no possible risk of academic harm to any students?
- Is the process of obtaining consent such that the research participant (student, teacher, parent etc.) does not feel compelled or obligated to participate?