

Guidelines on Course-based Research Involving Human Participants and Students as Researchers

The University of Alberta encourages integration of research and teaching as a part of academic training. Undergraduate and some graduate course, curricula incorporate class projects and other activities in order to develop research skills. These projects may be carried out by individual students, small groups or as a single class project. The Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS2, 2018) and the University of Alberta Human Research Ethics Policy and Procedures (2011) require instructors conducting such projects involving human participants to submit an application to the appropriate Research Ethics Board (REB) and receive ethics approval prior to undertaking any course-based research project.

Course-based research projects or activities are not intended for generalization to other dissemination situations and cannot be disseminated outside of the course.

Course-based research projects and activities vary widely in scope, but may include having students:

1. conduct interviews, administer standard tests, or distribute questionnaires with a focus on developing interview or questionnaire design skills;
2. conduct small research projects where students pose research questions, gather data from human participants, and analyze the data for presentation within the course; and/or
3. engage in other activities that would be considered research within the disciplinary traditions in which the course is being taught.

The guidelines presented here should be used to help the instructor determine whether ethics approval is required for a course-based research project or activity. If ethics approval is required, it would be specific to course-based work and would not cover or authorize any additional use of data beyond the teaching objectives of the course (i.e.: secondary analyses, presentation beyond the course, or publication).

Distinguishing Research from Professional Skill Development

In some course 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 clinical skill development. 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 as well as review processes required by the relevant faculty.

Information-gathering projects or activities within a course are classified as course-based research and would require ethical approval from the REB where:

1. the intent of the activity is to educate students on research processes used to explore and expand existing theories and conceptual knowledge;
2. students compare new techniques, practices, and/or programs with standard approaches to determine which is more effective;
3. the results or findings are written in a format that would be in line with research journals or academic conference presentations; and/or
4. primary data are collected and organized for analysis and dissemination within the course structure (e.g., oral presentations to course members, written report to the course instructor).

Information-gathering projects or activities within a course are classified as Skill Development and do not require ethical approval where:

1. information gathered is for diagnosis, identification of appropriate interventions, or general advice for a client;
2. information gathered is for skill development, which is considered under standard practice within a profession (e.g., observation, interviews, assessment, intervention, evaluation, auditing); and/or
3. 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).

As with course-based research projects or activities, information gathered for skill development cannot be disseminated beyond the course in any form. NOTE: If students wish to present the findings from the course-based research activity at a related conference and/or information dissemination forum that is relevant to the student's area of study, this would be permissible on a case-by-case basis. This should also be articulated in the course-based research ethics application and evaluated by the REB upfront, and/or submitted to the REB as an amendment request.

Appendix I (below) includes examples of projects and activities that would require ethical review.

Limitations on Course-based Research

Course-based research projects or activities must comply with the following criteria:

1. The research projects must be no more than minimal risk. Minimal risk is defined as follows:

If potential participants can reasonably be expected to regard the probability and magnitude of possible harms implied by participation in the research to be no greater than those encountered by the participant in those aspects of his or her everyday life that relate to the research, then the research can be regarded as being within the range of minimal risk.

2. The research participants must be drawn from the general population, capable of giving free and informed consent, and may not include vulnerable participants and/or persons who lack capacity to consent on their own behalf.
3. The student projects must not involve any personal, sensitive or incriminating topics or questions that could place participants at risk.
4. The student projects must not manipulate behaviour of participants beyond the range of “normal” classroom activity or daily life.
5. The student projects must not involve physically invasive contact with the research participants.
6. The student projects must not involve deception.
7. Human participants must be made fully aware that their participation is for the sole purpose of course-based learning on behalf of the students, and that their information will not only be de-identified or anonymized, it will not be disseminated beyond the course in any form or format.
8. In keeping with the above limitations, secondary use of the data generated through a course-based research application for future research will not be permissible.

APPLICATION PROCESS

If a course project or activity is classified as course-based research in accordance with the preceding guidelines, the course instructor must complete an online application form in ARISE. The course-based research application is significantly shorter than a regular ethics application. The researcher should select *REB 1* at **Section 1.1 Question 3.0** and *Instructor Course-based Research* at **Question 6.0**, and then complete **Section 1.6**. The instructor will be asked to explain how s/he will prepare the students for the project with particular reference to ethics issues. It is the responsibility of the instructor to ensure that the students’ assignments conform to the activities outlined in the ethics application. The course syllabus and any applicable consent form templates, interview guides etc must be uploaded in the Documentation section. Ethics approval for course-based research projects or activities must be maintained through the regular annual review process.

Please contact the Research Ethics Office reoffice@ualberta.ca if you have any questions regarding Course-based research.

APPENDIX I: Examples of Research that Do and Do Not Meet the Criteria for Course-based Research, Which May Require REB Approval

1. Projects that have any or all of the following characteristics are course-based research and require REB approval:
 - Projects where primary data are being collected and organized for analysis and distribution or dissemination within the course structure.
 - Projects designed to answer research questions.
 - Projects where students are asked to sign a non-disclosure or confidentiality agreement.
 - Projects where students require consent to use individual identifiers in reports or classroom presentations because of confidentiality or privacy concerns.
 - Projects where “ownership of information” or “product development” as a result of a project may become an issue.

2. Projects that have any or all of the following characteristics are not course-based research and do not require REB approval:
 - Projects where students are conducting information-gathering (e.g., interviews, questionnaires) on themselves during class time.
 - Projects involving the use of records or information that is in the public domain, including the use of anonymous secondary data and surveys or questionnaires that have already been published.
 - Projects involving the use of naturalistic observation where the participants are seeking public visibility and participant confidentiality and anonymity are ensured.
 - Practicum or job training projects where students are fully integrated into the organization’s operational practices and are not conducting research.
 - Projects where the intent is to use the information to provide diagnoses, identification of appropriate interventions or general advice for a client.
 - Projects where the intent is to develop skills which are standard practice within a profession (e.g., observation, assessment, intervention, evaluation, auditing).
 - Projects where 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).