IRB Frequently Asked Questions

Q: Is researcher training required?

A: Yes. All researchers on a proposal must go through the appropriate CITI Training course before submitting the paperwork to the IRB. This training is completed on-line and at the researcher's own pace. Instructions for how to complete the training can be found on the IRB website (www.ut.edu/irb).

Q: Do I need IRB oversight for a class project?

A: Allowing students to conduct research is an exciting opportunity for both them and the instructor. Some class projects will not need the oversight of the IRB, but others may require such oversight. You may not need to have your students apply to the IRB if the project:

1. Does not add to the general knowledge of the discipline
2. Will not be presented outside the context of the University of Tampa
3. Has no foreseeable risk to the parties involved, and the data of interest are not of a sensitive nature

The document "Policy on Classroom Projects Involving Human Participants" contains more information concerning this issue. Please consult that guide for additional information. If in doubt about your particular project, please contact the IRB.

Q: Do I need IRB oversight for administrative data gathering?

A: The IRB does not review administrative data gathering that has no scientific purpose, but that is used internally at UT and solely for the betterment of the program or the students involved.

Q: What is the relationship between the IRB and the Office of Sponsored Programs?

A: If seeking externally funded research that involves the use of human subjects, then IRB approval needs to be acquired prior to proposal approval by the Office of Sponsored Programs.

Q: What are the different risk categories?

A: The University of Tampa IRB considers applications within three risk categories: exempt, expedited, and full:

1. The ***Exempt Risk Category***, generally speaking, involves research on normal adult participants, where the anonymity of responses is assured, and the data gathered is not of a sensitive nature. The participant is free of foreseeable risk. The term "exempt" is somewhat misleading because exempt proposals must be submitted to the IRB and be granted exemption status before data collection of subject recruitment begins.

2. The ***Expedited Risk Category*** involves research where anonymity cannot be assured, involves deception, or that involves children under some circumstances. The participant is placed under no more risk than they would typically encounter in everyday life.

3. The ***Full Risk Category*** involves all other research (e.g., research that involves certain special populations, involves asking questions of a sensitive nature, or that places the participant in more than minimal physical, psychological, or other risk).

The University of Tampa IRB Guidelines contain a fuller explanation for each risk category.

Q: What are the procedures to follow depending on the risk category?

A: Once you have determined the risk category of your research, you need to follow the appropriate procedures with the IRB:

1. ***Exempt Risk Category***: Fill out the Exempt Risk IRB Application Form. In order for the research to be considered Exempt, the IRB chair must concur, with the oversight of one other member. All members of the IRB will be advised of proposals accepted as exempt. Minimum approval time: 4 working days.

2. ***Expedited Risk Category***: The completed Expedited and Full Risk IRB Application Form is reviewed by the Chair and two members of the IRB appointed by the Chair, and approved unless one or both of the reviewers recommends disapproval or more information, in which case the proposal is sent for full review. All members of the IRB will be advised of proposals accepted as expedited. Proposals subject to expedited review cannot be disapproved. Minimum approval time: 8 working days.

3. ***Full Risk Category***: The completed Expedited and Full Risk IRB Application Form requires the input from all members of the IRB. Minimum approval time: 16 working days.

The approval times are estimates only. It is more important for the IRB to provide accurate oversight of research conducted by UT members than speed at processing proposals.

Q: What are some tips concerning the proposal process that might help me with my application?

A: The IRB reviews many different proposals throughout the year. The following are some guidelines that we have collected to assist with writing proposals:

1. **Proofread!** Sometimes researchers are so excited to get their research started that what they submit to the IRB is not as carefully edited as it could be. This is particularly crucial for the forms that participants will see (e.g., questionnaires and informed consents). Please be as careful proofreading your proposal as we hope students are before submitting a paper. One issue that we have noted is the cutting and pasting of information

between similar proposals. While this makes sense to do when appropriate, please make sure that the material makes sense in its new context.

2. **Be complete!** Researchers know everything about their research project. Before reading the proposal, members of the IRB probably know very little, if anything, about the research. Therefore it is crucial that the researcher be as complete as possible, on every question, as they are filling out the proposal. This is particularly true in describing the procedures that the participants will undergo. The IRB committee needs to have a complete understanding of these in order to assess if both the researchers and participants are properly protected in the experimental protocol.
3. **Do not expect instantaneous approvals!** While the IRB works as expeditiously as possible, we must allow the committee proper time to consider if the proper protections are in place for both the researcher and participants.
4. **Proofread!** Just like with student papers, proofreading twice can never hurt. Consider having a colleague read over your proposal.

Q: Is there a difference between the terms 'confidential' and 'anonymous?'

A: YES! We often see researchers use these two terms interchangeably on their forms, but there is a difference. Confidentiality has to do with who can see the data after its collection. If just the researcher can see the data, then it is confidential. Anonymity has to do with whether the data can be traced back to the individual participant. Anonymous data cannot be traced. That means that data could be confidential but not anonymous (i.e., data that have individual identifiers, but is not shared by the researchers) or not confidential but anonymous (i.e., data without identifiers, but that is publicly shared).

Q: How can I ensure anonymity, particularly with questionnaire data?

A: If at all possible, ensuring anonymity of participants is desirable. Having participants fill out your questionnaire on-line may be the best way to do this. If paper-based forms must be used, then consider how best to ensure that no one can trace individual responses to an individual. One useful option is to have participants place their responses in an individual envelope, and the envelope is handed to the researcher. The researcher will then hold on to all envelopes until they are ready to enter the data. All envelopes are opened at the same time.

One concern that the IRB sometimes has with data collection and anonymity is what we refer to as “triangulation” of participants. Researchers often ask demographic information on their questionnaires, which of course can be valuable while analyzing the data. However, sometimes the questions, or more often a combination of questions on a single questionnaire, could be used to isolate a particular individual. For example, perhaps a researcher is investigating different management styles. While having employees at a company answer a questionnaire, they obtain certain demographic information. Even though no names are attached to the questionnaires, an individual employee could be identified if the demographic information was specific enough (e.g., perhaps there is only one Hispanic female of a particular age in a certain part of the company). In writing demographic questions, then, be aware of this issue. Only include the necessary questions and categories in order to do your intended analyses.

Q: Can participants be offered extra credit in a class for participating in an experiment?

A: Yes, but with an important point: If extra credit is offered for doing an experiment, an equivalent amount of extra credit for a similar amount of work must be offered for those students who might not wish to participate in the experiment. The concern is if extra credit is only given for the experiment itself, then students may feel compelled to do the experiment. That would be an unfair inducement. One example of an equivalent extra credit assignment is to read a short passage and perhaps write a paragraph summary while the other students are participating in the experiment.

If anonymity of data is assured, then one must also consider how the assignment of extra credit can occur while still ensuring that anonymity. If doing an on-line survey, participants could be asked to email a screenshot of the final screen in order to provide evidence of completing the survey. If the survey was paper-based, then perhaps have the participant submit two forms, so that the name is never attached directly to the data.

Q: I would like to collect data in either BAC or PSY classes. May I?

A: To recruit participants with these students you must seek permission. The Baccalaureate Experience Office has a form to fill out, and the Psychology Department has a policy they follow in order to ensure fair and equal access to those who ask.

Q: My research involves giving the participant an incentive. Is that okay?

A: In general, yes, but there is a policy that must be followed, depending on the value of the incentive. This policy is available from the Provost's office.

Questions not answered by this document may be directed to **irb@ut.edu**.