Guidance for Researchers Doing Research on the Educational Activities (Scholarship of Teaching and Learning)

Faculty sometimes wish to complete research related to their teaching techniques and educational activities to determine their effectiveness. The first question this faculty member needs to answer is, "Is it research that requires IRB review?" Not all research falls under IRB purview. The research that does fall under IRB purview is defined as:

> "a systematic investigation designed to contribute to generalizable knowledge"

When the subject is educational effectiveness, what constitutes generalizability can be a gray area. Wanting to publish or present the results of a project at a conference does not automatically meet the definition of generalizable knowledge. Developing or contributing to generalizable knowledge means that the purpose of the systematic investigation is dissemination of findings such that they may apply to other people, places, or settings. The central question is, "Has the research been designed in such a way that the findings may apply to many different educational settings outside of this professor's classroom?"

If the study does not meet this definition of research, no IRB review is required, and data collection may proceed.

If the proposal meets the definition of research, IRB review is required, and typically falls under exempt status (which means that once the IRB has determined it is eligible for that status, no further review is required). There are many different types of educational research, and of the most common types are discussed below:

1. **Education provided to college students at a classroom at Fairfield University.**
2. **Educational activities involving individuals who are members of the general public at a community setting such as a church or senior center.**
3. **Educational activities involving nurses, nursing assistants, and physicians located in a hospital or primary care setting.**

Type 1: Education provided to college students at a classroom at Fairfield University:

Generally this type of protocol falls under the Exemption Category 1 [46.101(b)(1)], which is for research that involves normal educational practices that are not likely to adversely impact students' opportunity to learn required educational content or the assessment of educators who provide instruction.

Best Practices: A researcher should be careful to ensure that student participation in research activities is VOLUNTARY. In addition, faculty should guard against data collection techniques that may be perceived as coercive, such as waiting in the classroom and observing the data being collected or offering excessive incentives. Offering a direct benefit like course credit without an equivalent alternative option for them is considered coercive.

In addition, students must have the opportunity to opt out of educational research without any impact on their course grade. Data should be collected in such a way that student confidentiality should be maintained. Issues of confidentiality can sometimes arise when administering pre and post-test surveys. These types of data should be linked through the generation of a code number, rather than a student name, to ensure confidentiality. In order for a protocol to be exempt from further review, faculty should ensure that the questions being asked of students fall into the category of "minimal risk" questions. Questions that may be emotionally upsetting or that ask students to disclose participation in illicit activity (e.g., alcohol or drug use) involve risk, and therefore may not qualify for exempt status if there is any link between the subject's identity and their response or may require what is called "limited IRB review" to ensure procedures are in place to protect the research participants. It is also essential to differentiate between activities that are an established part of the class (e.g., nursing students doing simulations as part of the course requirements) and those that are the research part that is being proposed (e.g., answering surveys about their experiences). These are all issues you must address explicitly in your proposal.

Please review the IRB Handout on "Research Involving Students as Participants" for further information about best practices and protections. In addition, there are many excellent resources for faculty conducting research in the scholarship of teaching and learning, such as:

http://teachpsych.org/Resources/Documents/otrp/resources/martin14.pdf

https://www4.uwm.edu/sotl/steps_to_success/upload/LS-IRB-white-paper-dec7.pdf

Type 2: Educational activities involving individuals who are members of the general public in a community setting such as a church or senior center

The setting of the data collection can affect the exemption category a researcher should select. If the researcher is collecting data about educational activities in a setting where educational activities regularly occur – even if it is outside of a university classroom, it can qualify for Exemption Category 1 [46.101.(b)(1) (educational research)].

However, if the educational activities are located in a community setting where educational activities do **not**

regularly occur, the study does not qualify for Exemption Category 1 but it may fall into Exemption Category 2 [46.101.(b)(2) (surveys/interviews] or Exemption Category 3 [46.101.(b)(3) (benign behavioral interventions)].

Best practices: Researchers should make clear to participants that participation in research activities is voluntary, and that opting out of research does not alter their ability to utilize community resources in any way. Data should be collected in a way that guards against the perception of coercion, to ensure participation is voluntary. This issue can be particularly important to ensure the rights of research participants who might be vulnerable to coercion in those circumstances, such as people seeking public assistance or resources of a community program. Questions that may be emotionally upsetting or that that ask participants to disclose engaging in illicit activity (e.g., alcohol or drug use) involve risk, and therefore may not qualify for exempt status if there is a link between the subject's identity and their response. All of these issues should be addressed explicitly in your proposal.

Type 3: Educational activities involving nurses, nursing assistants, and physicians located in a hospital or primary care setting

A study of this type might provide education to nurses about how to evaluate pain in cognitively impaired older adults, then ask them to answer a series of questions evaluating their knowledge of this topic.

Generally speaking, these educational activities do **not** fall into Exemption Category 1 [46.101 (b)(1) (educational research)], because they do not have students as research participants in an established educational setting, but instead have working professionals and/or employees outside of an educational setting.

Studies of this sort may qualify for Exemption Category 2 [46.101.(b)(2) (surveys/interviews without manipulations or interventions] or Exemption Category 3 [46.101.(b)(3) (benign behavioral interventions)]. For Exemptions Categories 2 and 2, data collection is limited to surveys, interviews, and other verbal (oral or written) responses, or observation of the subjects (including audiovisual recording).

Sometimes the educational intervention might ask a healthcare professional to perform a task in a different way, and this may sometimes render the study not eligible for review under Exemption Category 2 or 3. An example of this might be providing education to a nurse about a different way to perform a dressing change, and examining the impact of making the practice change. These studies do not **only** involve the use of a survey or test or verbal responses, but involve participants making a change in practice. Some of these projects might qualify as Quality Improvement Projects (see additional information on the IRB's information page about this). Other projects may involve a change in practice that constitutes additional risk for participants, and therefore these types of protocols are not considered to be exempt. In addition, sometimes researchers may ask healthcare professional to disclose elements of their practice or their personal thoughts which may be professionally damaging. An example of this might be asking a nurse to disclose the number of medication errors made before and after an educational intervention. Again, these types of activities involve additional risk, and would not be considered exempt, and would need to be

submitted under a different appropriate category such as expedited or full board review.