Research Ethics
Undergraduate Students as Researchers

Student Bill of Research Rights and Responsibilities:
Responsibilities of Undergraduate Students as Researchers for Class Assignments that include Data Collection involving Human Participants

This document is the companion piece to the Student Bill of Research Rights and Responsibilities: Students' Rights as Research Participants. It reflects the Research Ethics Board's (REB) current interpretation of Tri-Council Policy on data collection involving human participants undertaken by undergraduate students at Ryerson University and focuses on the REB's interpretation of how to implement the ethical review of class research projects following the Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS).

The document defines research, distinguishes professional practice from research, defines what undergraduate student research involving human participants is, makes the distinction between primary and secondary data collection, provides a general definition of "minimal risk," explains the need for ethics reviews, and lists the required information for undergraduate student research projects that need to be reviewed by the faculty member. The Board hopes that this document will assist students, faculty, and staff at Ryerson and facilitate compliance with the Tri-Council Policy.

What is Research?
According to the TCPS, research "involves a systematic investigation to establish facts, principles or generalizable knowledge."

How is Professional Practice distinguished from Research?
Students engaged in professional practice are not considered to be engaged in research. Professional practice should follow the ethical standards and guidelines of the relevant profession rather than the Requirements for Undergraduate Student Research Projects set forth below.

An undergraduate student is engaged in professional practice when learning or doing the work of the profession. In general, professional practice for undergraduate students involves the development of skills which are considered standard practice within a profession or field and includes information-gathering processes that are typically a part of the normal relationship between a student in a field and the people the student interacts with in that context. Examples of this include clinical practice in nursing, the collection of information for journalistic purposes, marketing surveys, the provision of advice to a client, and the process of evaluating or auditing in conjunction with professional course work or field placement.

Not withstanding the above, if an undergraduate course involves teaching how to conduct research as part of professional practice and includes students conducting a research project involving human participants (e.g., in a research methods course) and the research process for a professional in the field would normally involve an ethics review, then the Requirements for Undergraduate Student Research Projects that follow must be adhered to.

What is Undergraduate Student Research Involving Human Participants?
Undergraduate student research involving human participants is work done by an undergraduate student as a course assignment that entails data collection involving humans for the purpose of obtaining either primary or secondary data on research participants. The participants need not be the focus of the research. The undergraduate student research results are not intended to be disseminated beyond the faculty member and students of the course, or beyond a presentation to the University community as an example of student research as part of a course.

What are Primary and Secondary Data Collection?
Primary data collection involves direct contact with, or observation of, one or more people for the purpose of collecting data from or about them.

Secondary data collection involves accessing information that has already been obtained about human participants, either individually or in aggregate form. Secondary data which contains personal identifiers is participant to the Requirements for Undergraduate Student Research Projects that follow. Secondary data which do not contain personal identifiers are exempt from these requirements. Secondary data - whether it does or does not contain personal identifiers - may be used only when original consent was obtained which allows the information to be used in this manner.

What is Minimal Risk?
According to the TCPS, "the standard of minimal risk is commonly 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 within the range of minimal risk."

**The Need for Ethics Review**

All undergraduate student research projects must be conducted in accordance with the Tri-Council Policy. Those projects requiring one must pass an ethics review. Each research protocol for which an ethics review is required must be reviewed by the faculty member teaching the related course. The project may proceed once the student research project has met all of the relevant listed requirements. If the student research project deviates from the following requirements or contains noted exceptions and the faculty member believes that the project has merit, then the faculty member must forward it to the School/Department or Faculty Committee for formal review and approval. Each such Committee will develop a set of procedures appropriate to the relevant fields, keeping in mind the requirement of adhering to TCPS policy. School/Department or Faculty Ethics Committees should feel free to consult with the University's REB with regard to any matter related to their role.

**Summary of Applicability of Requirements for Ethics Review**

The requirements described in this document do not apply to the following classroom activities: professional practice and undergraduate student research involving human participants which uses only secondary data containing no personal identifiers. The requirements do apply to undergraduate student research involving human participants and which involves (a) primary data collection; (b) secondary data which contain personal identifiers; and/or (c) a research project in the context of a course that teaches how to conduct research, where the research process for a professional in the field would normally involve an ethics review.

**Requirements for Undergraduate Student Research Projects that are to be reviewed by a Faculty Member**

The Undergraduate Student Research Project must have all of the following qualities:

**General Requirements**

- There must be no more than minimal risk to the participants.
- The research procedures must not involve any therapeutic interventions.
- There must be no deception.

**Methods of Obtaining Consent:**

Consent must be obtained in one of two ways: (a) in writing, by having each participant sign a consent form or (b) by having a statement in the consent information to the effect that the participant agrees that by returning the questionnaire or answering the researcher's questions, etc., they agree to allow the information they provide to be used in the research project.

The following consent information must be included, either in a Consent Form or Information Sheet:

**Free and Informed Consent**

- Participants must be informed of the purpose of the research.
- Participants must be informed who the researcher(s) is/are.
- Participants must be informed of who to contact for further information (this can be the researcher(s)). A telephone number must be included.
- If the study is funded, the funder must be named.
- Participants must be informed of the procedures to be followed and the time commitment expected.
- Participants must be informed of the risks & benefits involved in participation, and how the risks will be minimized.
- Participants must be informed that participation is voluntary.
- Participants must be informed that whether or not they participate in the study will not influence their academic performance (if the participant is a Ryerson student), academic standing (if the participant is a Ryerson student), or their future relations with Ryerson.
- Participants must be informed that they may choose not to answer certain questions and may withdraw at any time without penalty or prejudice.
- Participants must be informed what the findings will be used for.
- Participants must be informed of who to contact if they have a complaint or concern about the research. It is recommended that this person generally be the student's program Chair or the Chair's designate.
Privacy and Confidentiality

- Participants must be informed that the information collected will be anonymous or confidential.
- When the information collected will not be anonymous, participants must be informed that data that identify individuals will be separated from the names of individuals through the coding of data. (Coding keys must be kept separate from the data.)
- In studies that include participation in a focus group or other non-private group discussion, participants must be informed that while confidentiality can be maintained by the researcher, its maintenance cannot be guaranteed by the other members of the discussion group.
- Participants must be informed whether the findings will be presented in aggregate (summary) form only, or whether individual responses will be identifiable.
- Participants must be informed as to how the data will be securely stored and for how long it will be stored before destruction.
- For studies funded by the major public granting councils, a statement must be included indicating that "The data, without any information that could be used to identify you personally, may be used by other researchers in the future."
- Participants must be informed if there is any possibility of commercialization of research findings.
- If the research results will be made available to the participants, they must be informed of this and of how the results will be made available.

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