



UWG Institutional Review Board

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Classroom-Based Research Projects

The UWG IRB must review all activities that meet the any one of the definitions of human subjects research as outlined by [45 CFR 46](#) prior to the start of the project.

What is Research? Research is defined in [45 CFR 46.102\(I\)](#) as follows: "Research means a systematic investigation, including research development, testing and evaluation, designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge." Research yields valid results through rigid implementation of a fixed protocol. The focus of research is on long-term gains in knowledge. The Office of Human Research Protections (OHRP) offer guidance of how to [determine if a project is research](#) and if it is [human subjects research](#).

What is a human subject? According to 45 CFR 46, a human subject is "a living individual about whom an investigator (whether professional or student) conducting research:

- Obtains information or biospecimens through intervention or interaction with the individual, and uses, studies, or analyzes the information or biospecimens; or
- Obtains, uses, studies, analyzes, or generates identifiable private information or identifiable biospecimens."

The [National Institutes of Health \(NIH\) offers guidance on the definition of human subjects research](#) and determining whether a project meets the definition of human subjects research.

What is classroom-based research? That said, the UWG IRB recognizes that some student projects conducted to fulfill course requirements involve activities that, in a different context, might meet the definition of human subjects research. We recognize that high-impact practices which maximize student engagement and learning often involve hands-on activities. We also recognize that persons who support our students' learning by lending their time, effort, and participation in research-related activities must be protected. Classroom-based research projects are conducted by students and initiated in the classroom. They are intended to mirror human subjects research but may not actually meet the definition of "research."

An activity merely taking place in the classroom does not mean that it does not meet the definition of "research." Classroom activities can be research, and research can be classroom activities. The UWG IRB invites faculty to submit the [Determination of Human Subjects Research Form](#) (D of HSR) for guidance on whether a classroom-based research project requires IRB review. A PDF of the completed form should be emailed to irb@westga.edu. D of HSR



submissions are not required, but such as submission will help faculty to discern the lines between course activities and projects which require IRB oversight.

Must classroom-based research projects be reviewed by the IRB? While the UWG IRB previously accepted classroom-based research project applications, we no longer require review of such projects that are designed to teach students research methods as long as they do not meet the regulatory definition of research. The following are not considered classroom-based research projects and IRB review is required before a student may begin the activity:

- Doctoral dissertations;
- Capstone projects;
- Funded research;
- Research conducted through collaborations external to UWG;
- Master's theses; and
- Honors theses.

In the circumstance of a classroom assignment that would otherwise constitute human subjects research but which does not require IRB review because it is a classroom assignment, the individual faculty members and departments are responsible for overseeing the activities as defined below under faculty responsibilities. This means faculty and departments are responsible for ensuring that the students are adequately trained and that their planned research activities are designed with appropriate and adequate safeguards in place in order to ensure that the activities are within the scope of ethical conduct.

Expectations for Classroom-Based Research Projects Involving Human Subjects

The IRB offers guidance on expectations for classroom-based research projects. We intend that these criteria will assist faculty in balancing the need for rigorous pedagogy and providing optimal protection to the human participants involved in the activity. In order for classroom-based research to not require IRB approval, the following conditions must be met:

- Students working with living people, their private identifiable information, or biospecimens complete the appropriate CITI training. [The UWG IRB offers guidance on CITI training and appropriate courses on our website.](#)
- The risk level of the project is minimal (no more than would be encountered in routine daily activities). For example, researchers should not request sensitive material (e.g., any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research could reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, or reputation). That level of activity is more appropriate for a seasoned researcher with ample training and experience regarding human subject research protections.
- Similarly, unless a student is qualified to do so, there may be no studies that involve interaction with vulnerable subjects (e.g., pregnant women, children, prisoners, or



individuals with impaired decision making). Observational study of protected vulnerable populations can be done with the appropriate protections in place.

- No identifiers are collected.
- The project is limited to surveys/questionnaires/interview procedures, observation of public behavior, or standard educational exercises directly related to the topic(s) being studied. Video recording is not recommended although audio recording is permissible if necessary to the teaching method utilized in the course. If audio recordings are made they should be destroyed before the course ends.
- Surveys/questionnaires, if used, must be completely anonymous if they contain sensitive personal questions (e.g., questions about alcohol/drug use, sexual behavior/attitudes, criminal activity, medical history, grades/test scores) or other personal information.
- No University of West Georgia faculty, staff or student is receiving monetary compensation or any type of support from an external company/organization/agency for collecting, analyzing or reporting the results of this project.
- The project is not conducted on VA premises and does not use VA resources, and is not otherwise subject to oversight by a federal regulatory body.
- Subjects are recruited in a voluntary manner.
- The data are not archived or saved in any way to be used in the future.
- Avoid the use of deception, misinformation, or incomplete information. Again, this level of research activity is more appropriate for a seasoned researcher with ample training and experience regarding debriefings, data withdrawals, and other advanced issues related to consent.
- Provide close oversight of the data, which should remain with the instructor. Ensure that data are timely deidentified and destroyed or returned to the participants.

The end result of the research may be presented in the classroom to peers but may not be used for any publication or public presentation outside of the immediate classroom. The IRB understands that in some classes, presentation at Scholars' Day may be a requirement of the course. In these cases, presentation at such UWG site/event may be considered an extension of the course. If you have questions about presentation at Scholars' Day or another University site/event, reach out to irb@westga.edu.

Faculty Responsibilities

Faculty who require students to do classroom-based research projects assume responsibility for the conduct of those projects, assure that the guidelines outlined here are met, and assure that research that falls outside of these criteria is submitted to the IRB for a regular review. Faculty have the following responsibilities in classroom-based research projects:

- It is the responsibility of faculty to determine whether an assigned project involving humans can be classified as a course-related student project under the criteria above.



Faculty should contact the IRB office for assistance if needed in making this determination.

- It is the responsibility of the faculty to discuss general principles of ethical conduct in research with the students prior to the initiation of the project. Faculty members must ensure students protect the rights and welfare of the individuals who act as participants. Standard research practices such as obtaining consent, ensuring confidentiality, responsible fieldwork, and giving participants a contact name should be employed.
- It is the responsibility of the faculty to work with students to provide documentation to the participants about the activity, its purpose, and the privacy and confidentiality measures you have put in place with your students. We recommend you use this template to do so. This may be an information sheet or a disclosure statement given at the beginning of a survey, questionnaire, or interview. If an information sheet or any recruitment materials are used, these points must be in that document:
 - The student identifies him/herself as a UWG student who is performing the activity to fulfill a course requirement, and the course is specifically identified.
 - The name of the supervising faculty member to contact for questions is provided.
 - The persons who have access to the individual data and/or summarized results are specified (e.g., instructor only, company/organization/agency).
 - Respondents are informed that their participation is completely voluntary and confidential.
- It is the responsibility of the faculty to provide close oversight of the data, which should remain with them. Ensure that data are timely de-identified and destroyed or returned to the participants.

Faculty are welcome to reach out the UWG IRB (irb@westga.edu) with any questions they may have regarding their classroom-based research activities.