

GUIDELINES FOR ETHICAL RESEARCH ACTIVITIES IN TAUGHT UNITS

Preamble

Most student research-related activity does not require full review by a Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) because research activity associated with a (coursework) Taught Unit is focussed upon learning how to conduct research rather than the conduct of research itself. Such activity does not meet the definition of research outlined in the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007)*¹ (*National Statement*):

‘Research’ ...includes work of direct relevance to the needs of commerce, industry, and to the public and voluntary sectors; scholarship; the invention and generation of ideas, images, performances, artefacts, including design, where these lead to new or substantially improved insights; and the use of existing knowledge in experimental development to produce new or substantially improved materials, devices, products and processes, including design and construction. It excludes routine testing and routine analysis of materials, components and processes such as for the maintenance of national standards, as distinct from the development of new analytical techniques. It also excludes the development of teaching materials that do not embody original research.

Note: It is important to differentiate between undertaking research and learning professional practice or research techniques. For example, students may learn how to take blood pressure or blood samples in order to develop their skills rather than as part of a systematic data collection. Similarly, students practising their interviewing techniques or survey taking without systematically collecting data would be viewed as learning research techniques rather than conducting research. All taught unit research activity where there is no intention to publish, where risk is negligible and where participants are not vulnerable (e.g. not children) does not need HREC approval though it is expected that the activity otherwise conforms to the HREC guidelines

Obligations of faculties and schools in relation to UG research activity

It is the responsibility of the relevant academic unit to ensure that any activity undertaken by students as part of their course requirements is not beyond their competence and does not place participants in danger. Any such activity should not place the student, the participant/subject or the institution at risk. The HREC recommends that undergraduate (UG) students do not seek vulnerable populations for taught unit activity. The Associate Dean (Teaching and Learning) of each Faculty is responsible for deciding whether the activity is appropriate, and whether further review is required. The HREC secretariat is happy to advise if necessary.

Where suitable, faculties may design the course to include a component of ethics review, such as completion of an ethics application form. Such a form would not be forwarded to the HREC for review, but might be reviewed either as a classroom activity or as part of the assessment requirements.

¹ See: http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/files_nhmrc/publications/attachments/e72_national_statement_140130.pdf

Obligations in relation to HDR/Honours research activity

Faculties should refer all activity that meets the definition of research to the HREC for review and approval. With respect to students, this will apply when the research activity forms a major component of the degree (e.g. Honours or HDR work at Master's and Doctoral level).

Obligations of UG and postgraduate coursework students

As stated earlier, undergraduate or postgraduate coursework students² do not normally need to apply for approval from the ACU Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) for Taught Unit (coursework) research activities as coursework students should not engage in research related activities of such risk or complexity as would require formal ethics review.

There is a difference between learning professional practice, learning how to conduct research and actually conducting research.

Undergraduate and postgraduate coursework students are expected to act ethically and in accordance with the requirements of the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research*, regardless of whether or not they require formal ethics approval (see *Taught Unit Guidelines*).

Where students are engaging with other persons to obtain data for their taught unit projects, they are expected to:

1. act with courtesy and respect
2. obtain consent using a standard consent form and/or information sheet where appropriate³ (see attached)
3. not pressure people to participate in their activity
4. not engage with vulnerable groups
5. not collect information that they do not need, particularly if the information is private or sensitive
6. adhere to all relevant safety protocols⁴

NOTE: Undergraduate or coursework students should apply for HREC approval when:

- the research activity forms a major component of the degree, such as in the case of Honours students
- there is an intention to publish the results
- the research activity involves vulnerable participants or risk

Students should be advised by their supervisor as to the appropriate level of review.

² That is non Higher Degree Research (HDR) students.

³ A signed consent form is not required for anonymous research, such as anonymous on-line survey.

⁴ See: http://www.acu.edu.au/policy/hr/health_safety_and_well-being

Information Sheet

PROJECT TITLE:
SUPERVISOR:
STUDENT RESEARCHER:
STUDENT'S DEGREE:

Dear Participant

You have been asked to participate in this project as part of the coursework and assessment requirements for *(give name of subject.....)*.

The purpose of this project is to *(give details)*.

Should you agree to participate, you will be asked to *(give details of what participation will involve, eg. answer some questions, give a sample of your nail clippings, walk on a treadmill for 10 minutes)*. Your involvement should take no longer than *(estimate expected time commitment)*. You are under no obligation to participate in this project, and may withdraw at any time.

If you have any queries relating to your participation that cannot be answered by the student, or if you would like any further information or have any concerns about your participation, please contact *(give name and contact details of relevant responsible staff member.....)*.

The information you provide will form the basis of an assessment task for the student(s) and the data collected will be destroyed at the conclusion of the semester.⁵ Any data collected will be de-identified as soon as possible *(delete if this is not applicable, for example for an oral history)*.

The research activity has been designed to meet the ethical standards outlined in the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* and the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research*, and in accordance with the University's ethical guidelines. You will only be asked to sign a consent form if the data is collected in a format that could identify you. Otherwise, your participation will indicate that you have consented to participate. Please keep this letter as record and for information.

Thank-you for your time.

⁵ If you wish to retain the data for the purpose of future publication, you will need to apply for HREC approval.

CONSENT FORM

Copy for Researcher / Copy for Participant to Keep

TITLE OF PROJECT:.....
(You may use a brief and informative title)

(NAME OF)SUPERVISOR:.....

(NAME OF) STUDENT RESEARCHER :.....

I *(the participant)* have read *(or, where appropriate, have had read to me)* and understood the information provided in the Letter to Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this *(specify the activity, length of time required and whether the activity/activities will be digitally recorded)*, realising that I can withdraw my consent at any time *(without adverse consequences)*. I agree that research data collected for the study may be published or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify me in any way.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT:

SIGNATURE DATE

SIGNATURE OF SUPERVISOR):.....

DATE:.....

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER:.....

DATE:.....