Carleton University | Research

Carleton Research Ethics Board Update

The purpose of this newsletter is to provide you with periodic updates on REB activities, new policies and forms, and other pertinent information to enhance your awareness of the ethical principles and best practices for conducting human participants' research. We also include guidance and support on how to prepare and submit your ethics applications, as well as how to manage your ongoing protocols.

Visit Office of Research Ethics Website

Classroom Recruitment by Professors and Instructors

Where a professor or instructor seeks to recruit their own students in a research project, the REB is concerned that students not be influenced to take part because of the instructor's responsibility for grading. The worry is not just that grading be unaffected by a student agreeing or refusing to take part in the study, but also that students not *believe* that their choice not to participate might affect their grade or some other aspect of the course or the teacher-student relationship.

Accordingly, an instructor should not be able to know or find out which students are taking part in a study, at least until grades are finalized and approved, and students are confident that their non-participation will not be known to the instructor. So, in developing a plan for research involving students, please let us know how you propose to structure your recruitment and data collection to ensure that you will not know who was or was not in the study, at least until the course is over and ideally ever. This means that you should not review any survey responses, and certainly not any audio or video recording of students, until after grades are finalized. In addition, as added protection, please let us know whether and how you propose to de-identify survey responses, so that your knowledge of participants is as limited as possible.

Keeping Research Data Safe and Accessible

This is a message we are sending on behalf of Carleton's Research Data Management Committee.

For researchers at Carleton University receiving funding from the Tri-Agencies (CIHR, NSERC, SSHRC), effective research data practices are fundamental to ensuring research project findings are safe and accessible to disseminate and reuse later, when possible. Having a plan will also enhance your research ethics applications.

To begin or enhance your data management plan, access Carleton's Research Data Management resources.

Tip for Preparing Your Ethics Form

In sections 3A and 3B of the CUREB Form, we ask for information about the proposed study's goal, purpose, and benefits. In one or both sections, we often see very extensive scholarly and scientific information and background about the academic question, often apparently cut and pasted from a grant application or other document prepared for a different purpose.

These sections are intended to give only a brief statement of the goals and purpose of the study so that we understand generally what the study is about and can assess whether the study methods subsequently described are reasonably likely to answer the research question posed. Two or three sentences is almost always sufficient to give us that summary background and purpose. A lengthy or technical justification of the study aims are not necessary. In the Form, we are primarily concerned about what participants will be asked to do and how will they, and their information, be treated.

Accordingly, please keep these descriptions reasonably short and do not cut and paste lengthy passages about the study from elsewhere. Also, we do not require references or lists of citations from the relevant literature

Tracked Changes and Comments in Submission Documents

When submitting forms or other submission documents, we need to review only finalized documents. We often receive forms or documents containing tracked changes or comments that seem to indicate that the document may be still in progress because questions or other draft wording is being exchanged among research team members. Such documents leave us uncertain whether we are receiving the final version or whether there are more changes to come. Accordingly, please make sure that all editing marks, tracked changes, and comments are resolved among team members and removed from documents before submission.

Some Options for Obtaining Consent

Written consent, using our regular Consent Form Template is the norm; however, alternative forms of consent, including oral consent, may be acceptable if reasonable in the circumstances.

For example, for a Qualtrics or other online survey, you may simply include the consent text on the first page with a button that says “I Agree” or similar that links the respondent to the survey questions. There is a Survey Consent Template on our website that you can use as a model.

Or, we have also have an Oral Consent Template that you can use to prepare a consent script for reading to interviewees or other respondents when sending out and returning a written consent form is inconvenient or impractical, particularly for low risk surveys.

Even when the usual Consent Form Template is to be used for a remote interaction, if it is impractical to ask the respondent to receive the form, sign, scan and email back the signed form, other options will be considered by the REB. For example, an email back from the participant, with an unsigned copy of the consent form but confirming their consent in the body of the email, may be acceptable in some circumstances with appropriate justification. Other options are also possible however the process should always include an opportunity for the prospective participant to ask questions and seek clarification about any aspect of the study.