



## Ethical Considerations for Instructors Conducting Research on their Students

When conducting research with students as participants there are some ethical considerations that the instructor will need to address during the ethics review process. Instructors will need to include a risk mitigation plan to address the following risks when conducting research on their students:

### 1. Power Differential

The power-over relationships between instructors and students can impact the students' decision to participate in the research. This differential can be managed by keeping the instructors at arm's length from the students by person or time through. The may include but is not limited to:

- Ensuring participants are given free choice to participate in the research without penalty.
- Conducting research on students from another class.
- Ensuring that student contributions are anonymous.
- Using a third party to distribute, collect, and retain the Letters of Information/Consent Forms until grades have been finalized. This will ensure instructors remain unaware of who has consented to participate until after the power differential is no longer present.

### 2. Captive Populations

This term can be applied when participants are dependent on an 'authority figure' (e.g., instructor/researcher) who can infringe on their freedom to make decisions. To mitigate this risk, instructors must ensure student participants are provided with information about the voluntary nature of participation during the recruitment, informed consent, and data collection processes. Student participants must be made aware of their right to withdraw from participation in the research, including their data, with instructors outlining the process for withdrawing and timelines involved. When students are not fully capable of deciding for themselves (e.g., young children), their parents/guardians must be assured of the above rights.

### 3. Participant Burden

The main purpose of formal education is for students to gain knowledge, not to be participants in research. If students are repeatedly asked to participate in research studies, their educational pursuits may be compromised. It may be of value for instructors to consider what other types of research are being conducted with students to diminish the impact of participant burden. Also, instructors should try and design studies that help enrich the students' educational experiences instead of distracting from those experiences.



#### **4. Confidentiality**

Students may have concerns about whether or not their instructors know if they took part in the research. Students may feel their decision not to participate in the research could impact their academic trajectory. Considerations should be made at the early stages of research design to minimize these risks. Instructors must have a plan for who will be collecting informed consent, how Consent Forms will be stored, and to whom and when access will be granted to the Consent Forms. The identities of those students who consented to participate should be concealed until at least after the class or semester ends and grades have been finalized. Any exception to this need for confidentiality requires substantial justification.