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Conestoga College encourages students to learn research methodologies and techniques through individual or group projects. Although some of these projects may not fit the standard definition of research intended for publication, the potential for risk to their participants warrants review of a Research Ethics Board (REB).

This REB guideline applies to all student course-based projects that are considered to be research involving human participants.

#### **A. A Working Definition of Student Course-based Research**

Although varied in scope, student course-based research may include:

- Students conducting interviews, administering standard tests, or distributing questionnaires to develop interview or questionnaire design skills;
- Students conducting ‘mini’ research projects where students pose research questions, gather data from human participants, and analyse the data for presentation.

#### **B. Research versus Professional Skill Development**

If students are only required to use information-gathering procedures and practices for educational purposes outside the context of a research framework, the information-gathering projects are not subject to the REB review as long as they align with the appropriate standards of conduct and review-processes required by the relevant faculty.

The following criteria can be used to assess if the information-gathering activities within a college course are for research or educational purposes:

Information-gathering activities are classified as **research** if:

- The intent is to educate students on research processes used to explore and expand existing theories and conceptual knowledge;
- Students compare new techniques, practices, programs with standard approaches to determine which is more effective;
- The results or findings are written in a format that would be acceptable for a research journal or academic conference presentation; or
- Primary data are collected and organized for analysis and distribution, or dissemination.

Information-gathering activities are classified as **skill development** if:

- The intent is to use the information to provide advice, diagnosis, identification of appropriate interventions, or general advice for a client (e.g. student consulting assignments),
- The intent is to develop skills which are considered standard practice within a profession (e.g. observation, assessment, intervention, evaluation, auditing); or

- The information-gathering processes are part of the normal relationship between the student and the participants (e.g. classroom teacher and students, nurse and patient, lawyer and client).

### **C. Guidelines for Student Research**

If a class project falls under the definition of research, the instructors should complete a *Request for Ethical Approval of a Course-Based Research Project* form and submit it to the College REB for approval.

Requests for approval of course-based research projects must comply with the following criteria:

- The research projects must be no more than minimal risk.

Definition of “minimal risk”: 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 subject 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 (Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical conduct for research involving humans, 2010).

- The student projects must not involve any personal, sensitive or incriminating topics or questions which could place participants at more than minimal risk.
- The research participants must be drawn from the general population, capable of giving free and informed consent to the research project in question, and may not include vulnerable participants such as children, persons who are not legally competent to consent, mentally incompetent persons, legal wards or the therapeutically dependent.
- The student projects must not involve deception.

### **D. The Application Process**

1. The Course Instructor (CI) takes the responsibility for supervising students who are conducting course-based research projects involving humans. If more than one instructor teaches the same course, one course instructor is identified as Faculty Supervisor (FS) for all sections of the course-based project.
2. Each CI who has students participating in the project completes the [online tutorial](#) for the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (TCPS). This is only required the first time an instructor conducts a course-based research project involving human participants.
3. The CI who has taken the role of the FS completes and signs a [Request for Approval of Course-Based Research Projects](#) form (labelled Form A) accompanied by the course outline and submits it to the REB.
4. The REB must approve the Course-Based Research Project before instructors proceed.
5. Upon the REB approval, each CI should have their students complete an [Application to Involve Human Participants in Research](#) form for each separate research project for the course.
6. The FS uses the reviewer's evaluation [checklist](#) to ensure that the applications are complete and in compliance with all applicable ethics review requirements. The FS may direct their questions to the REB. A member of the REB may be available to discuss the application process with the class prior to filling out individual forms, if necessary.
7. In the Consent Form, the Information Letter, or the script for oral consent used for a student project the following statement should be inserted: *This project is an opportunity to give students experience*

*in doing research; it is training and teaching exercise. Please note that if you decide not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, my grade in the course will not be affected.*

8. If the student projects are to be carried out at other institutions or agencies (such as schools, hospitals, government agencies etc.) the CI and students should be aware that approvals granting permission to access premises or to obtain private information from the other institution must be obtained if so required.
9. Copies of all students' forms and accompanying materials submitted to CIs must be sent to the FS for review once the course is complete. The FS is responsible for keeping these documents for three years and to make the documents available for audit by the REB on request. Alternatively, the FS may request that the REB review forms annually for QA purposes. Both the FS and the REB could keep samples of these documents. Originals could then be returned to students or held for one year as per College policy regarding student assignments.
10. It is the responsibility of the FS to submit to the Research Ethics Coordinator an [Annual Review form](#).
11. Ethical approval for class projects is maintained for three years provided that there are no changes to the course assignments. If changes are made, a [Change Request](#) form must be completed and submitted to the Research Ethics Coordinator. New course applications must be re-submitted at the end of each academic year. All sections of the course, whether on campus or not, must follow the procedures and all instructors must ensure that these policies are complied with.

**Inquiries:** Course instructors who have questions or need clarifications concerning the definition of student course-based research and/or interpretation of these guidelines should contact the Research Ethics Coordinator [rebcoordinator@conestogac.on.ca](mailto:rebcoordinator@conestogac.on.ca).

#### **Examples of Projects and Activities**

1. Projects are subject to ethics review and may be approved as course-based research projects if they:
  - collect and organize primary data for analysis and distribution or dissemination;
  - involve a risk of disclosure, publication, or use of data outside the classroom or outside the organization being studied;
  - ask students to sign a non-disclosure or confidentiality agreement;
  - they require students consent to use individual identifiers in reports or classroom presentations because of confidentiality or privacy concerns; or
  - have a potential issue with "ownership of information" or "product development" as a result of a project.
2. Projects are subject to ethics review but are not eligible for course-based research project approval if they:
  - are a direct extension of the course instructor's research;
  - involve more than minimal risk as defined by the Tri-Council Policy Statement;
  - involve the collection of data which will subsequently be used towards the completion of a Ph.D. or Masters degree.
3. Projects are not required to undergo ethics review if they:
  - use records or information that is in the public domain, including the use of anonymous secondary data and surveys or questionnaires that have already been published;
  - use naturalistic observation where the participants are seeking public visibility and participant confidentiality and anonymity are ensured;

- are practice or job training projects where students are fully integrated into the organization's operational practices and are not conducting research;
- intend to use the information to provide advice, diagnosis, identification of appropriate interventions or general advice for a client;
- intend to develop skills which are standard practice within a profession;
- gather information as part of the normal relationship between the student and the participants; or
- are considered quality assurance or program evaluation (refer to CCITAL REB Operating Guideline: Definition of Research; REB Scope of Responsibilities).

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