



## Guidelines for Ethical Review of In-Class Projects Involving Human Participants

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## **Instructions:**

Use these Guidelines when applying for Ethical Review of In-Class Projects Involving Human Participants. The applications, guidelines and all other forms are available on the Research Ethics Board [website](#).

## **Introduction:**

In-class project activities are intended solely for pedagogical purposes and are normally required of students. The objective is to provide students with exposure to research methods in their field of study.

As part of their teaching strategies related to research, many instructors assign class projects and activities in which students must collect data from human participants. These projects may be carried out by individual students, small groups, or as a single class project. In-class research assignments vary in scope, but may include:

- students conducting interviews, administering standard tests, or distributing questionnaires outside the class to hone their interviewing or questionnaire-design skills,
- students conducting “mini” research projects where they pose research questions, gather data from human participants, and analyze the data for class presentations or reports,
- other activities considered research within the discipline in which the course is taught.

In-class research projects may not fit the standard definition of research in that the results are not intended for publication or generalization to other situations, however the potential for risks to participants requires that the protocols and consent processes of in-class research be reviewed by the Algonquin College Research Ethics Board (REB). Rather than require individual students to complete and submit individual applications for ethical approval of their projects, professors may be able to complete the Faculty Application Form for Ethical Review of In-Class Projects for all of the research assignments planned for the course.

## **Limitations:**

The procedures outlined in this document are limited to in-class research activities, not larger-scale projects required to fulfill the requirements for a thesis. In these cases students must complete a full ethics application. Also excluded from this process are in-class research activities in which students work on a larger-scale project, such as their instructor’s or another faculty member’s own research program. In these cases, students must be identified as research assistants or co-investigators on the ethics application for the larger research project.

## General Conditions

The application for Ethical Review of Course-based Research involving Human Participants must be signed by the faculty member and the Departmental Chair or Dean. These signatures attest to the fact that the learning activities described in the application have received the approval of the Faculty/School curriculum committee and that they conform to the ethical principles outlined in Algonquin College's [Directives for Research](#), and the [Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans \(TCPS 2, 2014\)](#). If the program is also bound by other professional codes of ethics or conduct, the signatures attest to adherence to those codes as well.

Ethical approval of in-class research will be granted for one academic year and must be renewed annually, providing that there are no changes. If there is a change in the course instructor, research activities or procedures, a new application must be submitted.

## Distinguishing Research from Professional Skill Development:

The following criteria may be used to assess whether information gathering activities within a course are considered to be research or to be for the purpose of teaching professional skills. In-class assignments are considered research and are subject to ethics review when:

- 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 is collected and organized for analysis and distribution or dissemination.

In-class assignments are considered skill development and not subject to REB review when:

- the intent is to use the information to provide advice, diagnosis, identification of appropriate interventions, or general advice for a client,
- 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 process is part of the normal relationship between the student and the participants (e.g., teacher and students, nurse and patient, lawyer and client)
- If you are unsure whether a learning activity or project falls outside the scope of the procedures outlined in this document, you should contact the REB Chair at [REBChair@algonquincollege.com](mailto:REBChair@algonquincollege.com).

## Minimal Risk Research

Ethical approval of course-based research involving human participants is limited to those types of assignments that pose minimal risk to participants, as defined in the Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS 2, 2014):

“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 participant in those aspects of his or her everyday life that relate to the research.”

Examples of minimal risk:

- Participants are competent adults, youth or children;
- Participants live freely in the community (i.e., are not captive, e.g., in prison or hospital);
- The topics are non-controversial and carry little or no risk to the participants;
- The methods are non-invasive, such as the use of questionnaires or interviews; and
- The projects do not involve deception.
- Research not considered minimal risk

If your in-class project involves any of the following circumstances, the ethical review must be conducted by the REB and is not eligible for a delegated review.

Examples that may elevate the participant risk above minimal:

- Studies which could put participants at political, physical, psychological, or economic risk;
- Studies involving serious deception (examples: giving negative feedback about an important aspect of self; creating a fearful environment; convincing someone they have a serious medical condition; covert recording of individuals with the intent of obtaining consent after the fact);
- Studies involving vulnerable populations (e.g. children; physically, cognitively, or mentally challenged individuals; economically marginalized individuals);
- Studies in which there is an existing employer/professional relationship between the researcher and participants (e.g. manager-employer, therapist-client);
- Studies which acquire sensitive or personal information;
- Studies involving more than minimal stress or anxiety;
- Studies in which the investigator does not intend to obtain written consent;
- Studies in which there is a significant difference in language and/or cultural sensitivities between the institutions, researchers and subject;
- Studies in which there are significant risks to researchers inherent in the context of the research activity;
- Studies which involve novel or ethically challenging research;
- Aboriginal Research; and
- International Research.

Further information on research risks levels is available on the REB website.

## Professor's Responsibility

The instructor will take the role of the principal investigator and submit a single completed Faculty Application Form for Ethical Review of In-Class Projects to cover the all research assignments for the course.

The instructor will prepare students to undertake the research assignment(s) for this course, in compliance with the ethical standards set out in the Algonquin College's [Directives for Research](#), including:

- Explaining the nature and purpose of the research project to participants.
- Recommending recruitment strategies (e.g., by letter; through an organization; presentation to a group; etc.), and safeguards to ensure that no coercion is used if there is the potential of a relationship between the students and the participants.
- Obtaining free and informed consent from participants.
- Explaining the voluntary nature of participation and the participants' right to withdraw at any time without consequences.
- Assessing any potential risks and/or benefits related to the study and explaining them to participants (research assignments must be minimal risk).
- Describing compensation offered to subjects (if applicable).
- Addressing anonymity with participants (i.e., protection of the identity of participants along a continuum, from complete to no protection, as appropriate and as agreed to by participants).
- Addressing confidentiality issues with participants (i.e., identity as well as data, including secure storage of, and controlled access to the data and personal information).
- Explaining how the results will be reported.
- Explaining how and when the data will be destroyed.
- Making it clear that permission must be obtained from all outside agencies that will be involved in the study (e.g., companies; community agencies; School Districts; Hospital; Aboriginal Governments, etc.) prior to undertaking the research.
- Explaining any other procedures relevant to complying with the Algonquin College's [Directives for Research](#).

The instructor will provide a sample of a completed Participant Consent Form for the students to follow in developing their own consent forms for their research assignments. Students will submit a draft Participant Consent Form to the instructor for review and feedback.

All documents related to approving the ethical acceptability of each student's research assignment must be retained by the instructor for a period of two years.

For each separate project, students will submit to the professor, a completed Student Application Form for Ethical Review of In-Class Projects. Note that group projects only require a single application that lists all members of the group as co-investigators. Alternatively, professors may develop their own form or format for students to follow in developing their research proposals for ethical review, however the format must include all elements on the standard application form and must be approved by the REB (attach any alternative forms or formats). Professors, to the best of their abilities, must ensure that students' applications meet the basic requirements for ethical approval.

## Student's Responsibility

Students must provide the professor with their completed Student Application Form for Ethical Review of In-Class Projects by the date assigned by the professor. Data collection cannot commence without the approval by the professor.

**A Reminder:** All students must provide written evidence from outside agencies (e.g., companies; community agencies, School Districts; Hospitals; Aboriginal Governments or communities) granting approval to carry out research that involve such agencies. A copy must be sent to the REB Administrator at [REBAdmin@algonquincollege.com](mailto:REBAdmin@algonquincollege.com), and will be kept on file with the professor's application.

## When to Forward a Student's Application to the Human Research Ethics Board

Most in-class research projects involve procedures that pose minimal risk and can be reviewed comfortably by the professor. On occasion, if a professor receives an application that raises issues they are unsure of, the application must be forwarded REB Chair for review.

As a professor, the REB urges you to automatically reject applications containing the following:

- Any indication of potential for more than minimal risk to the participants, whether psychological, emotional, physical, economic, etc.;
- Any use of deception;
- Any questions about intimate or sensitive aspects of the participants' behaviour or life history (e.g., sexual behavior or childhood abuse); and / or
- Excessive inducements to participate that may compromise voluntary participation. This may include excessive compensation or the suggestion that participants will benefit later on (example: a primary-school student whose study habits will improve via participation).

The above lists do not anticipate all possible situations. If unsure about a particular student project or procedure, please contact the REB Chair at [REBChair@algonquincollege.com](mailto:REBChair@algonquincollege.com).

## Tips and Tricks for Students and Professors

- If conducting on-line surveys, use Fluidsurveys, not SurveyMonkey. This is due to where data is housed (Canada vs United States).
- Rather than video-recording focus groups, use audio-recording. If audio-recording, personal cells phones or tablets cannot be used. A dedicated recording device must be used.
- Avoid interviewing vulnerable populations (such as children, or those incompetent to consent) when possible.
- Questionnaires should generally not ask for someone's name, age, or sex, but if necessary, consider alternatives. For age, ask for an age range. For sex, ask for gender, and include an option for "transgendered", and "prefer not to identify". Other questions to consider are country of origin (consider asking region such as North America, Europe or Asia).
- Don't personal information, such as email, phone number or address, absolutely necessary.