

Guidelines for Ethical Review of Course-based Research Projects Involving Human Participants

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# Instructions

Use these Guidelines when applying for Ethical Review of Course-based Projects Involving Human Participants. The applications, guidelines and all other forms are available on the Research Ethics Board [website](http://www.algonquincollege.com/research-ethics-board/).

# Introduction

According to the [Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (2022)](https://ethics.gc.ca/eng/policy-politique_tcps2-eptc2_2022.html), or TCPS 2 (2022), research is defined as an undertaking intended to extend knowledge through a disciplined inquiry and/or systematic investigation, where research is the intended purpose. Course-based research is defined as **minimal risk** research that occurs within the context of a specific course offering and that involves an assigned research activity. Course-based research 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. When course-based research is an expectation within the curriculum, an explicit course learning outcome should be identified on the course outline. Course-based 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.

Course-based 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 course-based 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 Course-based Projects for all of the research assignments planned for the course.

# Limitations

The procedures outlined in this document are limited to Course-based 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 Course-based 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.

# Understanding when course-based research projects require ethical approval

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 minimal risk of disclosure, publication, or use of data outside the classroom or outside the organization being studied;
* Ask student researchers 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; and/or
* *Example*: A statistics course requires students to conduct their own research involving humans in order to teach research methodology and the application of statistics to such methodology. Students are required to design their own research studies, either individually or in groups, and recruit participants and collect and analyze data. This is research involving humans that is conducted solely for pedagogical purposes and is eligible for course-based ethics review.

Projects are subject to ethics review but are **not eligible for course-based research project approval and require full REB approval** if they:

* Are a direct extension of the Professor’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 Capstone Project, Masters or Ph.D. degree.
* *Example #1:* A psychology Professor plans to teach research methodology by having students collect data from human participants that will contribute in part to her own research or another researcher's study. This is not research conducted solely for pedagogical purposes and so must be reviewed by the full REB.
* *Example #2:* A business Professor or program has a partnership arrangement with a marketing agency to conduct marketing research that involves collecting data from consumers. Students will be involved in the marketing research agency's data collection activities to gain experience with marketing research. Since the marketing research is not conducted solely for pedagogical purposes, it must be reviewed by the full REB.

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;
* Are developing 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)
* Gather information as part of the normal relationship between the student and the participants;
* Are considered quality assurance or program evaluation (for example, KPI surveys and program review activities).

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).

**Additional required criteria to be eligible for course-based ethics review.**

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

* The research participants are drawn from the general adult population (or persons able to understand and consent to participate in the research). All participants must be capable of giving free and informed consent, and may not include participants who may be vulnerable in the context of research such as young children and persons who are not legally competent to consent;
* The research does not involve any personal, sensitive or incriminating topics or questions which could place participants at risk and does not manipulate behaviour of participants beyond the range of “normal” classroom activity or daily life;
* The research does not involve physically invasive contact with the research participants;
* The research does not involve deception
* Any offer of payment in relation to research participation does not exceed the normal range of benefits open to the research participants.

**If course-based research does not meet the above criteria, the Professor shall refer to Algonquin College’s Policy RE03 Research Involving Human Participants for alternate application procedures for Research Ethics Board review.**

# 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,](https://www.algonquincollege.com/policies/#re) and the [Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS 2, 2022)](https://ethics.gc.ca/eng/policy-politique_tcps2-eptc2_2022.html). 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 Course-based 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 Change of Protocol form must be submitted. If there are any changes that could change the research project question or substantially change the methods, it is best to contact the REB for further guidance before submitting a new application.

## 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:

“Minimal risk research is defined as research in which the probability and magnitude of possible harms implied by participation in the research is no greater than those encountered by participants in those aspects of their everyday life that relate to the research.” (TCPS 2 (2022)).

Examples of minimal risk:

* The topics are non-controversial and carry little or no risk to the participants;
* The research does not involve any personal, sensitive or incriminating topics or questions which could place participants at risk and does not manipulate behaviour of participants beyond the range of “normal” classroom activity or daily life;
* The research does not involve physically invasive contact with the research participants;
* The research does not involve deception
* Any offer of payment in relation to research participation does not exceed the normal range of benefits open to the research participants.
* The methods are non-invasive, such as the use of questionnaires or interviews; and
* The projects do not involve deception.

If your course-based 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 targeting participants who may be vulnerable in the context of research as per TCSP2 (2022). This can include Indigenous and Aboriginal persons, children, the elderly, students, women, prisoners, those with mental health issues and those with diminished capacity for self-determination, ethnocultural minorities and those who are institutionalized, and people or groups whose circumstances cause them to be vulnerable or marginalized. These participants may need to be afforded special attention in order to be treated justly in research.
* 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 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;
* Indigenous and Aboriginal Research; and
* International Research.

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

# Professor’s Responsibility

The Professor will take the role of the principal investigator and submit a single completed Faculty Application Form for Ethical Review of Course-based Projects to cover the all research assignments for the course. In addition, their responsibilities include:

* Commit to educating, supervising, and mentoring students on the ethical conduct of research
* Complete the TCPS 2: CORE tutorial and submit the certificate of completion to the REB
* Adhere to all procedures for ethical research in accordance with the REB’s requirements, TCPS 2, and the ethical standards set out in the Algonquin College’s [Corporate Policies](https://www.algonquincollege.com/policies/).
* Update the course outline to include graded lessons on ethical research as well as the research itself, ensuring that the proposed project involving humans maximizes the learning experience for students. Develop related course learning outcomes
* Complete the Request for Ethical Approval of Course-based Student Research and submit to the REB for approval
* Upon approval, have each student (or group) complete a Student Application to Involve Human Participants in Research
* Teach a course module on ethical research prior to the commencement of the assignment, including required completion of the TCPS 2: CORE tutorial
* 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.
* 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; Indigenous and Aboriginal Governments, etc.) prior to undertaking the research.
* Ensure that:
  + The proposed project will not be used as one’s own research project
  + Research will only be conducted by students
  + The project will not include participants who may be vulnerable in the context of research
  + The project presents none or minimal risk to participants
  + No sensitive or incriminating topics/questions which could place the participant at risk will be included in the project
  + The project will contain protocols for obtaining informed consent from participants
  + Privacy and confidentiality of the participants will be safeguarded
  + Data collection will be anonymous and confidential
* Any changes to the research project, any adverse or unanticipated events, and other ethical implications will be communicated to the REB as soon as possible
* Dissemination of the results will only be shared within the course context
* Complete the Study Completion form at the conclusion of the project

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

For each separate project, students will submit to the professor, a completed Student Application Form for Ethical Review of Course-based Projects. Note that group projects only require a single application that lists all members of the group as co-investigators. 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 Course-based Projects by the date assigned by the professor. With their application, they must complete the TCPS 2: CORE tutorial and submit their certificate of completion (required for all team members). In addition, students are responsible to monitor all research activities, ensuring they are conducted with the highest ethical standards. When necessary, students are to seek advice and guidance from the Professor to request clarifications, ask questions, communicate concerns, or report any unanticipated events.

Data collection cannot commence without the ethics approval of the student application by the professor. In particular, students will provide information in their application on:

* 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.
* Explaining any other procedures relevant to complying with Algonquin College’s [Corporate Policies](https://www.algonquincollege.com/policies/).

**A Reminder:** All students must provide written evidence from outside agencies (e.g., companies; community agencies, School Districts; Hospitals; Indigenous and 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. Given the large amount of time required to get outside approval, it is strongly urged that students do not conduct research at these agencies.

# Additional Information

Generally, most Course-based 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).