

In support of teaching and learning, Suffolk County Community College continues to encourage new and innovative classroom activities. The following are institutional definitions and guidelines faculty should review when designing class assignments that integrate the use of questionnaires, surveys, interviews, or other interactions with individuals, such as those commonly used in research method courses.

For instances where clarity or additional discussion is needed, faculty are encouraged to contact Dr. Helen Wittmann, IRB co-chair at 631.451.4828 or [wittmah@sunysuffolk.edu](mailto:wittmah@sunysuffolk.edu).

### **Student Class Assignment Definition**

For the purposes of this policy guidance, *student class assignments* include activities that are:

- Conducted during, or outside of class, with students enrolled in an official course (including credit and non-credit courses)
- Conducted in fulfillment of class assignments involving interactions with individuals other than the members of the class (for example, interviewing family members or friends)
- Typically initiated and completed within a single term
- Designed to teach research methods through student interaction with individuals or data about individuals, or designed to help students understand concepts covered by the course
- Generally, not intended to create new knowledge or to lead to scholarly publication

**Important note:** if an activity involving data collection or analysis extends beyond a faculty member's section and other sections or courses are invited to participate in the classroom activity, it will require IRB authorization.

As per HHS, an activity is considered research if it is a systematic investigation, including research development, testing, and evaluation, designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge. (45 CFR 46.102 (l)) If the activity meets this standard, it is defined as research. Dissertation research is research, and does require IRB authorization. IRB authorization from the sponsoring institution will also be required.

If an activity uses human subject data that are regularly and routinely gathered at the institution, does not require new, additional, or significantly altered data gathering procedures, or if the activity is not sponsored by an external agency or does not test a hypothesis, it likely does not constitute research (e.g. assessment of student learning). Please see the information on Assessment vs Research.

Most student class assignments pose little or no risk to students or others. However, instructors should take special care to ensure that students realize any potential for harm and take all possible steps to eliminate the risks to students or individuals outside the class involved in the assignment. These risks may include: physical harm, or potential psychological, social, economic, or legal harm, especially when data is collected about sexual activity, use of alcohol or illegal drugs, or involvement in illegal activities. Such risks can be exacerbated when the

individuals outside the classroom are minors, pregnant women, prisoners, or people who are otherwise vulnerable, such as cognitively impaired persons.

When data previously collected as part of a class project is being used to contribute to generalizable knowledge or being shared with individuals, groups, or organizations outside of the college, it is considered research and does require IRB authorization

### **Instructor Obligation**

Even when a class assignment is “non-research” and, thus, not under the jurisdiction of the IRB, faculty have an obligation to ensure that students understand their ethical obligations in carrying out their assignments.

Instructors should provide guidance to students collecting information so as to minimize any unwitting or unintentional harms to other students or to individuals, especially if students will interact with or collect private information about vulnerable individuals.

Faculty members may use a number of ways to educate students and encourage responsible interactions with others, including:

- Reviewing students’ plans for classroom or group projects
- Suggesting improvements in design and protections for confidentiality
- Requiring students to take the NIH or CITI on-line training, or another federally or institutionally endorsed online training before collecting information from others
- Explaining ways in which students should be attentive to the welfare of individuals in cases in which:
  - Vulnerable populations, such as young children, prisoners, or the cognitively impaired are involved
  - Any possibility of physical harm to the student or other individual students will pose sensitive questions including topics related to sexual activity, victimization, use of alcohol or illegal drugs, or involvement in illegal activity
- Requiring students to provide printed instructions/information on questionnaires that explain the use of the data for coursework and include the name and contact number of the instructor
- Requiring, whenever possible, anonymous data collection so that the data are not linked to individuals
- Requiring that information identifying individuals be kept separately from the information collected from those individuals
- Requiring destruction of non-research data at the end of the course or within a short time afterward
- Instructing students about the privacy and security vulnerabilities associated with networked computers