

Tyndale University College & Seminary
Research Ethics Policy
Student Research Information and Checklist

As a member of the academic and research community, student researchers share responsibility with other members of the Tyndale University College & Seminary to ensure that the highest ethical standards in the conduct of research involving human participants are maintained. In addition to the basic principle of respect for human dignity, the ethical principles that guide research include the obligations to:

- Obtain and preserve free and informed consent on the part of potential research participants¹;
- Protect the rights and interests of vulnerable people (including children, the elderly and institutionalized individuals);
- Protect the privacy and confidentiality of research participants;
- Ensure justice and inclusiveness in research;
- Minimize harm to research participants by avoiding, preventing or minimizing harm to others;
- Maximize benefits to research participants; and
- Balance potential harms and benefits to research participants (i.e., ensure that foreseeable harms do not outweigh anticipated benefits).

The purposes of carrying out an ethics review of research involving human participants are (a) the protection of research participants, (b) the protection of Tyndale faculty and students, and (c) the education of those involved in research. As a student researcher, it is your responsibility to review the pertinent parts of the Tyndale Research Ethics Policy, which can be found on the Research Ethics Board (REB) website (www.tyndale.ca/reb). What follows is a brief description of the parts of the policy student researchers must be mindful of when carrying out research involving human participants.

Free and Informed Consent

Free and informed consent lies at the heart of research involving human participants. It encompasses a process that begins with the initial contact and carries through to the end of the involvement of participants in a research project. In the Tyndale Research Ethics Policy, the process of free and informed consent refers to the dialogue, information sharing and general process through which individuals choose to volunteer as participants in research.

Student researchers shall provide, to potential research participants or authorized third parties, full and frank disclosure of all information relevant to free and informed consent. Throughout the free and informed consent process, student researchers must ensure that potential research participants are given adequate opportunities to discuss and contemplate their participation.

Consent from research participants is required for the collection, use and disclosure of any information collected from human participants for the purpose of class research assignments.

There are a number of ways of providing evidence of free and informed consent by potential research participants, but *the usual and preferred method is to obtain written consent*. The course instructor will provide the appropriate consent form or verbal script to be used in completing course assignments for research involving human participants.

¹ In the Tyndale Research Ethics Policy, the term “research participant” refers to a living human individual.

Two copies of the consent form must be signed by both the researcher and by each potential research participant. A student researcher shall attach one of the signed copies to his or her course assignment when it is handed in to the course instructor, and the other copy shall be given to the potential research participant along with any other relevant information.

Voluntariness

Free and informed consent must be voluntarily given, without manipulation, undue influence, or coercion and may be withdrawn at any time. Undue influence may take the form of inducement, deprivation, or the exercise of control or authority over potential research participants. Voluntariness is especially relevant in research involving vulnerable or dependent research participants and is absent if consent is secured as a result of coercion or manipulation. The influence of power relationships on voluntary choice should be judged according to the particular context of potential research participants. Students carrying out research must therefore pay particular attention to the elements of trust and dependency, and avoid seeking potential participants from among individuals they have authority over (for example, youth ministers who want to interview the youth in their church, or pastors who would interview church staff), as these can constitute undue influence on the individual to participate in research projects.

Will you be taking extra precaution in seeking participants from among those individuals over whom you have power or authority?

YES NO. If your answer is no, provide an explanation here.

Naturalistic Observation

Ethics approval is normally required for research involving naturalistic observation (i.e. the study of behaviour in a natural environment where there is not reasonable expectation of privacy). Naturalistic observation that does not allow for the identification of the research participants and is not staged for the purposes of the research is normally regarded as ideal for course assignments.

Does your research involve naturalistic observation?

YES NO. If your answer is no, proceed to the section on Competence.

Will you taking steps to “anonymize” the information collected from your observation(s) and described in your course assignment?

YES NO. If your answer is no, provide an explanation here.

Competence

Competence refers to the ability of potential research participants to give informed consent. It involves the ability to understand the information presented, to appreciate the potential consequences of a decision, and to provide free and informed consent. Competence to participate in research is not an all-or-nothing condition. It does not require potential research participants to have competence to make every kind of decision. It requires only that they be capable of making an informed decision about their participation in particular research. Competence is neither a global condition nor a static one; it may be temporary or permanent.

For course assignments, competence will normally be an issue only when minors (i.e., people under the age of majority in their province of residence, which in Ontario is 18 years of age) are the potential participants. If prospective participants resident in Ontario are at least 18 years of age but not capable of giving informed consent, a full REB review is likely to be required and is therefore not suitable for a course assignment.

Where free and informed consent has been obtained from the substitute decision-maker of the minor, and in those circumstances where the minor understands the nature and consequences of the research, the student researcher is additionally obligated to ascertain whether the minor wishes to participate.

If a minor is the participant in your research, have you obtained informed consent from his or her substitute decision-maker?

YES NO. If your answer is no, provide an explanation here.

Will you providing adequate, age-appropriate written or verbal information to the minor him or herself?

YES NO. If your answer is no, provide an explanation here.

Will you be ensuring that the minor wishes to participate?

YES NO. If your answer is no, provide an explanation here.

Privacy and Confidentiality

Dignity and autonomy of humans is the ethical basis of respect for the privacy of research participants. Privacy is a fundamental value, perceived by many as essential for the protection and promotion of human dignity. It is also the case that breaches of confidentiality may cause harm to (a) the trust relationship between the researcher and the research participant, (b) other individuals or groups; or (c) the reputation of the research community. For these reasons, information that is disclosed in the context of a research relationship must be held confidential. In other words, when a research participant confides personal information to a researcher, the researcher has a duty not to share the information with others without the research participant's free and informed consent. In the free and informed consent process, researchers should indicate to research participants the extent of the confidentiality that can be promised, and hence should be aware of the relevant law.

In the context of research carried out for course assignments, personal information means information about an identifiable living individual. It includes information about personal characteristics such as culture, age, religion and social status, as well as their life experience and educational, medical or employment histories.

As a general rule, the best protection of the confidentiality of personal information and records will be achieved through anonymity. If the data being stored is truly anonymous, research carried out as part of a course assignment will not require a full REB ethics review.

Student researchers have an obligation to ensure that information obtained from research participants are stored with all the precautions appropriate to the sensitivity of the data. Information reported in a written course assignment shall not contain names, initials or other identifying information. While it may be important to preserve certain types of identifiers, these should be masked as much as possible.

Research participants have the right to know who will have access to identifying information and its nature, and the student researcher must therefore inform participants that information is being gathered for the purpose of a course assignment and that it will be submitted to the course instructor.

Was the research participant(s) be informed of what type of information would be included with the course assignment, and that it will be known to the course instructor who grades the assignment?

YES NO. If your answer is no, provide an explanation here.

Will the data you collect be recorded and stored using appropriate measures to ensure confidentiality by not recording any names or other identifying information?

YES NO If your answer is no, provide an explanation here.

To the best of my ability, I have conducted research for my course assignment according to the ethics principles outlined above. I have also answered the questions truthfully and provided explanations where required.

Student Name (please print)

Signature

Course Code and Name

Course Instructor

Date
