

FAQ: Using Student Classroom Assignments for Research Purposes

1. Can I use my student's assignments, coursework, or other academic work in my research?

Not unless you have obtained informed consent from the student allowing you to use their assignment for research purposes.

- Student assignments, papers, projects, reflections, discussion posts, examinations, and other course-related work may not automatically be used for research purposes simply because they were collected as part of a class. **De-identification alone does not automatically eliminate the need for IRB review or the consideration of informed consent requirements.** Faculty members should consult the IRB before collecting, analyzing, presenting, or publishing student work for research purposes.
- Consent is about respecting a student's right to decide how their work is used, it is not simply about protecting their identity. A student may be comfortable submitting an assignment for a grade but not comfortable having that same work analyzed, quoted, or published as part of a research study. De-identifying data addresses privacy risk, but it does not address the separate ethical requirement that individuals control whether their work is used for research.

2. What is "undue influence," and why does it apply here?

- Undue influence refers to the risk that a student may feel pressured either explicitly or implicitly to participate in research because the person asking is also their instructor and grader.
- Even if no pressure is intended, the power differential between a faculty member and their student can make it difficult for a student to decline, or to trust that declining will have no effect on their grade or standing in the course.
- As the instructing faculty member, you must account for this dynamic and take active steps to minimize it when designing your consent process.

3. How can I reduce the risk of undue influence when recruiting my own students?

- The IRB encourages instructing faculty members who wish to use their own students' assignments for research to ask a faculty colleague to gather consent on their behalf, rather than requesting consent directly whereby:
 - A colleague — not the instructor — recruits potential participants and collects consent forms (electronically or hard copies).

- The instructing faculty member does not know which students agreed to participate until after final grades have been submitted
- This separation ensures that a student's decision to participate (or not) cannot influence, or appear to influence, their grade.
- Faculty as well as the individual(s) recruiting and/or gathering consent from students **MUST** have completed the following CITI training per the IRB [Human Subjects Research Training Policy](#):
 - [Basic Human Subjects Research](#)
 - [FERPA for Researchers](#)
 - [Conflicts of Interest](#)

4. What if I can't find a colleague to help gather consent?

- Contact the IRB office before proceeding. We can help you identify alternative safeguards, such as:
 - Timing consent requests after final grades are submitted
 - Using a third party (e.g., a research assistant not involved in grading) to manage recruitment and data collection
 - Structuring the study so participation status remains unknown to the instructor throughout the grading period

5. Does this apply to all classroom assignments, or only certain types?

- This guidance applies broadly to any student-generated coursework such as essays, projects, exams, presentations, discussion posts, or other assignments that a faculty member wishes to analyze, publish, or otherwise use for research purposes, regardless of format or subject matter.

6. What counts as "research" in this context?

- Generally, an activity is considered research if it involves a systematic investigation designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge (e.g., work intended for publication, conference presentation, or broader dissemination beyond the classroom). If you are unsure whether your intended use of student work qualifies as research requiring IRB review, contact the IRB office before proceeding.

7. What should I do next?

If you are considering using student assignments — de-identified or not — for research purposes:

- Submit an IRB application in IRBManager and/or contact the IRB if you want guidance on your proposed study design.
- Plan for a third-party consent process if you intend to recruit your own current students.
- **Do not proceed with data collection or analysis** until you have received a determination on your IRB application

Questions? Contact the Institutional Review Board at IRB@louisiana.edu