How to Apply for Ethics Approval from the Sociology Department Sociology or from Acadia Research Ethics Board

NOTE: All honours and graduate students doing research with human subjects must receive approval from Acadia Research Ethics Board (http://reb.acadiau.ca/apply.html). The information below will help you prepare your application. For Acadia REB application and in-class research projects, the following information is required.

ETHICS GUIDELINES FOR STUDENT RESEARCH USING QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

Preparing your application

All applications must be prepared electronically. The application form is a downloadable Microsoft Word document containing cells into which you can easily enter the required information. For each project, the researcher must prepare an application containing the following:

- The application form
- The research summary
- The consent forms that will be used
- Any surveys, questionnaires, or interview questions (or guides) that will be used
- Any advertisements that will be used to alert or attract research subjects
- Consent form check list

Research Summary

The research summary should contain the following information (use the headings provided):

1. Title: your study requires a title. Plain language is best
2. Purpose: the objectives of the study; its hypotheses (if any); why the study is needed
3. Methodology: how the subjects will be chosen, how they will be contacted, and by whom; who will conduct the research and where; what the subjects will be asked to do; what data will be collected.
4. Consent: how informed consent will be obtained (Note: The REB requires parent/guardian consent for research subjects under 18 years of age.)
5. Debriefing: how the subjects will be debriefed following their participation if at all
6. Risks and benefits: any expected risks to the subjects and how such risks will be minimized and any potential benefits due to participation
7. Safety: if applicable, how the safety of subjects will be monitored
8. Confidentiality: how the confidentiality of the subjects and data will be assured
9. Data security: how will the data be kept secure
10. Deception: if deception will be used, you need to apply to Acadia's REB

Date

The form should be dated at the top of each page. This should be the date of department ethics committee approval of the project or the date of approval by Acadia's REB (required for honours and Masters projects). The objective is to ensure that any subsequent amended version of the Research Consent Form can be easily identified.

Title and Indication that this is a Research Project

An appropriate title can help to convey that the proposed project is for research rather than for educational, treatment, or other purposes. In addition, the beginning of the text must indicate that the individual is being invited to participate in a research project.

Researchers

The identity of the researchers should appear immediately below the title of the research project. You need to explicitly state that you are a student and the consent form should include the name and telephone number of your supervisor along with your name and contact

information.

Purpose of the Research

A brief description of the purpose of the research should explain the topic that is being explored or the hypothesis that is being tested and what the research is supposed to find out. The description should be in language that is comprehensible to individuals in the population from which the participants are being drawn. If there are specific inclusion and exclusion criteria for research participation, these can be noted here.

Description of the Research

A step-by-step description of the research as it will be experienced by the research participant must be provided (e.g., completion of a questionnaire, answering questions of a personal nature in a private interview, or being asked to solve problems), and it must clearly explain the expected length of her of his participation in the research.

Potential Harms

To further the goal of voluntariness and respect for research subjects, potential harms should be listed prior to potential benefits. To get departmental ethics approval the research you are doing must be minimal harm. Any research that may have foreseeable harms, including physical, emotional, and psychological harms and inconveniences (e.g., regret over the revelation of personal information to an interviewer, disruption of family routine, long waits, revelation of personal information never shared before) will need approval from the University Research Ethics Board.

Suggested wording:
"There are no known harms associated with your participation in this research. However, there may be harms that we don't yet know about."

Potential Benefits

If there are no potential benefits to the prospective research participant, this must be stated explicitly. If there are potential benefits to the participant, these should be described as accurately as possible. This description should include relevant information about the nature of the potential benefits and the probability of occurrence.

Suggested wording:
"There are no known benefits to you associated with your participation in this research."
"You will not benefit directly from participation in this research."

Confidentiality

Under Section 3 of the Tri-Council Policy, researchers are expected to indicate to research subjects the extent of the confidentiality that can be promised. It is not always possible to keep confidentiality and this must be stated clearly. Participants also have the right to waive confidentiality. However, this could be tricky as the researcher needs to also protect the identity of individuals that may be named in an interview. For this reason, we urge that confidentiality be *not* waived. It is important for the prospective research participant to know who will have access to the research data, and how such data will be safeguarded.

Suggested wording:
"Confidentiality will be respected. No information that discloses your identity will be released or published without your specific consent to the disclosure.

Data Security
Describe the measures that you propose for ensuring the security of any identifiable personal data.

Suggested wording:
All research data will be stored on a password protected computer or in a locked file cabinet. All data will be destroyed at the end of the research project."

Publication
The Research Consent Form should include a description of the ways in which the research results will be published. For example, will the results of your research be shared in a class assignment, a thesis, and/or a peer reviewed journal or at a conference? It should also state whether the participant's identity will be revealed in any such publication. In every case, participants must at least be told whether or not their identity will be protected in reporting the results.

Suggested wording
"The information I gather from my interviews will form the basis of my thesis, which will be printed and available at the Department of Sociology and the Acadia University Library. The research may also be presented at a conference or submitted as a journal article for publication. A copy of my thesis will be made available to the participants upon their request. Your identity will not be disclosed in any reporting of the results."

Participation
The prospective research participant must be told very explicitly that she or he has the right to refuse to participate in the proposed research and, moreover, that a decision to participate in the research is not binding. It is important to make it clear that participant withdrawal may be made at any time without negative consequences. At the same time, it is also okay to frame the withdrawal period. It is equally important to advise participants that withdrawal of their participation does not necessarily include withdrawal of any data compiled up to that point.

Suggested wording:
"Participation in research must be voluntary. If you choose to participate and later decide to change your mind, you can say no and stop the research at any time. However, withdrawal of your participation does not necessarily include withdrawal of any data compiled up to that point." Or,

"Participation in research must be voluntary. If you choose to participate and later decide to change your mind, you can say no and stop the research at any time up until two weeks after the interview."

The Letter of Consent

Your application to the REB must also include a sample letter of consent you will be giving to

your interviewees. The letter summarizes the information you provided above: potential harms, benefits, confidentiality, publication, etc. It is important to remember that the letter of consent is written directly to potential research participants. **The letter must end with the following paragraph:**

"By giving consent, you do not waive your right to legal recourse in the event of research-related harm. Should you have any further questions about this research project, you may contact myself, [researcher's name and email], or my supervisor, [supervisor's name and email]. If you have questions or concerns regarding the ethics of this study please contact (either the Ethics committee in the Department of Sociology or if your research is receiving university ethics approval then you say, the chair of Acadia University's Research Ethics Board, Dr. Stephen Maitzen (smaitzen@acadiau.ca or 902-585-1407)."

Then, on a separate page you need to have a signed consent form. See page 8 for sample wording. There should be a statement to the effect that the prospective research participant: (1) has read and understands the relevant information; (2) understands that she or he may ask questions in the future; and (3) indicates free consent to **participate by signing the consent form.**

Sample Consent Form

My signature below indicates that:

- I have read and understand all information presented in the letter of consent attached to this form..
- I agree to participate in [your name's] research project.
- I agree to have my interview audio-recorded and transcribed.
- I understand I am able to ask the researcher questions I might have and be answered honestly.
- I understand the researcher may contact me again for follow-up questions.
- I have received a copy of the consent form.

_____

Name of research participant (Please print)

_____ _____

Signature of research participant Date

_____ _____

Signature of researcher Date

If more information regarding this study is required, please do not hesitate to contact:

[Provide names of researcher and supervisor]

Consent Form Checklist

This checklist is designed to assist researchers in drafting, and faculty in reviewing, Research Consent Forms. The checklist enumerates elements that should be included in the Research Consent Form. Carefully review the draft consent form and check each element that is present.

The form clearly identifies:

____ the researchers, and if any researcher is a student, the student's supervisors (the person who is available to answer pertinent questions should be clearly identified).

The consent form clearly explains:

____ that the proposed intervention is for research;
____ the purpose of the proposed research;
____ the nature of the proposed research;
____ the likely duration of participation;
____ the potential harms and inconveniences associated with the research;
____ the potential benefits associated with the research;
____ whether confidentiality will be protected and the measures taken to ensure it;
____ that participation in research is voluntary (the right to refuse and the right to withdraw without prejudice).

The consent form is written:

____ in the prospective participant's (or her or his substitute decision-maker's) preferred language;
____ in lay terms (ordinary language);
____ at an appropriate level, taking into consideration the nature of the participant (e.g., child or adult).

ETHICS GUIDELINES FOR STUDENT RESEARCH USING ANONYMOUS SURVEYS

Anonymous surveys require ethics approval but do not require a SIGNED informed consent document. However, a statement of consent is needed, and should be part of the preamble to the survey. The consent statement also needs to be either handed out if you are doing a paper survey or if you are doing an electronic survey, there needs to be a link so that the participant is able to download the consent information.

In order to ensure anonymity:

1. Subjects cannot have their names on their surveys or on informed consent documents.
2. No open-ended questions on paper surveys can be included that would provide the ability of the researcher to trace the handwriting of a subject.
3. Researchers should take care in the collection of surveys so as not to see subjects' responses to items that would allow the researcher to know of the subjects' answers (e.g. place all surveys in an envelope and enter data after collecting all the surveys).
4. Care should be taken in asking questions in a survey that could possibly lead to the matching of survey answers to subjects (e.g. If you are surveying all international students and know that there is one who is 84 years old and age is not a relevant variable in your study, you may elect not to include age as a variable in order to protect the 84 year old subject's anonymity).

For student researchers carrying out anonymous surveys ethics approval requires the following:

1. The application form
2. Research summary
3. For Anonymous Surveys: A copy of the survey with informed consent statement

Other information regarding informed consent documents:

1. The Informed Consent Statement must include a phrase to the effect of "Once a survey is handed in, data cannot be traced back to individual respondents. By completing this survey, you are consenting to have your survey responses included in this research."
2. The informed consent statement can be a paragraph at the top of the survey or it can be a longer document following the guidelines of a more traditional informed consent document which would be handed to the subject.
3. It is recommended that the subject be given contact information of the researcher or their supervising professor, should the subject later have questions regarding the study.

Suggested wording:

Thank you for participating in this survey. As part of my honours thesis (master thesis, course work) in Sociology I am conducting research into [your research topic]. Please answer the questions honestly. Your responses and identity will be kept anonymous. The researchers are not able to link any answer to any individual. There are no risks associated with participating in this survey. Because of the anonymous nature of this survey, you will not be able to withdraw the answers you have provided once the survey is submitted but you may decline to finish the survey before it is completed. The results of this survey will be published [fill in accordingly]. By filling out the survey, you acknowledge that you are 18 years of age or older, and you are giving your consent for participating in our research project. By giving consent, you do not waive your right to legal recourse in the event of research-related harm. There is a very small likelihood that Acadia University may have access to your responses if you complete the survey using an Acadia computer. This survey shall take no longer than 10 minutes to complete. Should you have any further questions about this research project, you may contact myself, [give your name and email], or my supervisor, [give supervisor's name and email]. If you have questions or concerns regarding the ethics of this study please contact the chair of the Acadia University Research Ethics Board, Dr. Stephen Maitzen (smaitzen@acadiau.ca or 902-585-1407).

[For online surveys include] A copy of this consent is also available for downloading. Click the following link.

Research Ethics Board

Acadia University Box 181
Wolfville, Nova Scotia
Canada B4P 2R6
http://reb.acadiau.ca

Application for Ethical Review of Research Involving Humans

Complete this form electronically and submit it, along with your **Application Package**, by **e-mail attachment** to smaitzen@acadiau.ca. Please attach it as a single **Microsoft Word** or **PDF** file. No digital signature is required on your documents.

The Research Ethics Board strongly encourages you to consult the Tri-Council Policy Statement, Second Edition (TCPS2), when preparing your application. TCPS2 can be found at this link. **Note: Incomplete forms will be rejected**.

Name of principal investigator:

- ☐ Faculty
- ☐ Staff
- ☐ Graduate student*
- ☐ Undergraduate student*

*For students indicate:
Degree program:
Supervisor:

Your Department, School, or Program:
Your phone number:
Your e-mail address:

Title of your project:

Type of project (e.g., Honours or Master's thesis; externally funded project; part of a research program):

Other investigators on this project:	Their e-mail addresses:

Have you applied for funding for this project? ☐ Yes ☐ No
If "Yes," indicate source(s) of funding:

Has this research undergone external scholarly review (e.g., by a granting agency)? ☐ Yes ☐ No
If "Yes," specify results of review:

Proposed start date of your research: **(4-6 weeks are required for review.)**

Check the box below to certify that you agree to abide by all policies, procedures, regulations and laws governing the ethical conduct of research involving human participants.

☐ Date of certification:

For student researchers: Check the box below to certify that your supervisor assisted you in preparing this application. You must also "cc" your supervisor on your e-mail submission of this application.

☐ Date of certification: