Update: Research Protection

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SCSU requires integrity, moral and ethical conduct in all research performed by its faculty, students and staff. The Research Protection Program (RPP) is responsible for assuring conformity with both university and federal mandates for research design and investigator behavior. Divisions of the RPP include: The Office of Research Integrity (ORI); The Institutional Review Board (IRB); The Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC); and, Educational Resources. Visit us online at: http://southernct.edu/scsuresearch/

Internet Surveying

As a tool, the Internet promises much to a human-subjects researcher. It can allow for the rapid and quick collection of data from participants. It can allow a researcher to recruit participants who are distant and may not have been able to otherwise have participated. It can provide records of human behavior, such as blogs or chat rooms, which can be studied. The advent of commercial software and websites for conducting surveys has led to a surge in this type of research, and it has become common at SCSU as a result.

It has been argued that the use of the Internet poses some interesting ethical and scientific questions for those who use it for research. No separate set of federal regulations has been created for Internet research. It is the view of regulators that "research is research" and that new research modalities do not change the underlying ethical principles of beneficence, justice, and respect for persons that can be found in the Belmont Report. At a recent research ethics conference, the challenges posed by using the Internet for research was a topic of several sessions. In short, it seems that the regulations, as they currently exist, give researchers and IRB's sufficient leeway in creating procedures and policies that allow research to be conducted in ways that meet our ethical obligations.

For example, informed consent is a hallmark of ensuring that research participants are treated with respect, and the basic elements of informed consent are spelled out in the regulations. These basic elements can be easily applied to most Internet research, but the regulations also require that the informed consent process be documented with the participant's signature, which poses a problem. This would seem impossible for research conducted over the Internet. However, the regulations also give IRBs leeway in reviewing informed consent. For example, if an informed consent document would be the only record linking a participant with the research, this requirement may be waived or altered by the IRB. This is commonly done with surveys through the use of cover letters. Cover letters convey all the necessary elements of informed consent but do not require a signature. A statement that the completion of the survey will be taken as an indicator of the participant's consent should be included. Thus, for Internet surveys, like paper surveys, a well-constructed cover letter can meet the ethical obligation of informed consent.

Privacy and anonymity are always concerns for participants and researchers, and often an issue with using the Internet for surveys. If surveys are sent and returned via email, anonymity may not be able to be guaranteed as the email address may provide means of identifying the respondent. Anonymity may also not be possible with surveys using online services such as Survey Monkey. Researchers who use such online surveying must take care to thoroughly examine the "terms of use" of commercial or free surveying services to determine the extent that the data is protected. Questions the IRB will have, and researchers must address, are: Will IP addresses be collected? At conferences about research ethics, it is often noted that online surveys may not be anonymous due to the collection of IP addresses. How will the privacy of data be protected? In some cases of low risk research, a password-protected file may be sufficient, but in others, encryption may be necessary. Researchers should also determine if and how the survey service will maintain the data and for how long. This information should be documented in the IRB application.

IRB and IACUC News

IRB Update: New IRB Member

This year, Dr. Cynthia McDaniels has moved from serving as an alternate IRB member to a full voting member. Being an alternate on an IRB means being fully versed in the regulations and the applications to be reviewed, as alternates are needed to guarantee that the IRB meets the regulatory definition of quorum when members are absent or have to recuse themselves due to a conflict of interest. As an alternate, Dr. McDaniels has been an active and thoughtful member or the IRB. Dr. McDaniels' current areas of research are peace education and the professional development of teachers and administrators. She and her students founded the Peace Education Initiative ten years ago to prepare teachers to create and maintain "peaceable classrooms" through the use of conflict resolution, peer mediation, and violence reduction. Over the last decade she has received numerous grants as well as district, state, and national recognition for her work on peace education. She continues to incorporate principles of peace studies and global education in the educational foundation courses required by the State Department of Education for certification. She also is currently involved in a long term project on improving teaching effectiveness. She is in the process of completing a longitudinal study on the essential traits of quality teaching based on two decades of collecting data from students in teacher education programs at SCSU. She is under current contract to publish her work on her personal reflections on apartheid in South Africa and the cultural challenges that it presented for African Americans.

IRB APPLICATION SUBMISSION TIPS

First, all materials for the IRB should be taken to the School of Graduate Studies Office, EN B110, where they will be recorded and logged into our system.

Second, please check to make sure that all supplemental materials (education certificates, letters of agreement, and informed consent documents) are attached to the application.

Third, a detailed description of your research is critical to fully understanding the research.

Fourth, please contact us if you have any questions. EN A110 (203 392-5243).

IACUC Update: Does the PHS Policy apply to animal research that is conducted in the field?

If the activities are PHS-supported and involve vertebrate animals the IACUC is responsible for oversight in accord with PHS Policy.
IACUCs must:

(1) Know where field studies will be located,
(2) Know what procedures will be involved, and
(3) Be sufficiently familiar with the nature of the habitat to assess the potential impact on the animal subjects.

Studies with the potential to impact the health or safety of personnel or the animal's environment may need IACUC oversight, even if described as purely observational or behavioral. When capture, handling, confinement, transportation, anesthesia, euthanasia, or invasive procedures are involved, the IACUC must ensure that proposed studies are in accord with the *Guide* (see below). The IACUC must also ensure compliance with the requirements of pertinent state, national and international wildlife regulations. A study on free-living wild USDA covered species that involves invasive procedures, harms or materially alters the behavior of an animal under study is covered by USDA animal welfare regulations and requires IACUC review and approval.

An excerpt from the "Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals" (Authors: Institute of Laboratory Animal Research, Commission on Life Sciences, National Research Council):

"FIELD INVESTIGATIONS

Biomedical and behavioral investigations occasionally involve observation or use of vertebrate animals under field conditions. Although some of the recommendations listed in this volume are not applicable to field conditions, the basic principles of humane care and use apply to the use of animals living in natural conditions.

Investigators conducting field studies with animals should assure their IACUC that collection of specimens or invasive procedures will comply with state and federal regulations and this Guide. Zoonoses and occupational health and safety issues should be reviewed by the IACUC to ensure that field studies do not compromise the health and safety of other animals or persons working in the field. Guidelines for using animals in field studies prepared by professional societies are useful when they adhere to the humane principles of the U.S. Government Principles for the Utilization and Care of Vertebrate Animals Used in Testing, Research, and Training (Appendix D) and this Guide (see Appendix A, "Exotic; Wild, and Zoo Animals" and "Other Animals")."

Reporting Research Misconduct

Allegations of research misconduct and the basis for them should be communicated confidentially and preferably (but not necessarily) in writing to the Research Integrity Officer (RIO). Jerry Hauselt, Ph.D. is currently serving as SCSU RIO (Office: EN A 110 A-B; Voice: (203) 392-5243; FAX: (203) 392-5221; Email: hauseltw1@Southernct.edu)

The complainant may not remain anonymous but will be protected under *The HHS ORI Whistleblower's Bill of Rights.* Further, the professional reputation of investigators named in allegations will be rigorously protected unless found guilty, at which time case activity may be made public.

The HHS ORI Whistleblower's Bill of Rights may be found at: http://ori.hhs.gov/misconduct/Whistleblower_Rights.shtml