

**The Conduct of Research and Organizational Surveys at  
Waubensee Community College**

**PURPOSE**

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance to individuals in the conduct of research and demonstrations at Waubensee Community College. It is designed to clearly delineate between research and demonstration so that:

- Research is strictly controlled and researchers adhere to professional and ethical guidelines.
- Research subjects are aware of and protected from any adverse impacts of the research.
- Faculty members are not unduly restricted in their conduct of educational demonstrations by an overly-broad definition of research.

**APPLICABILITY**

This document is applicable to both employees and non-employees who wish to conduct research at Waubensee Community College.

**RESPONSIBLE OFFICE**

The Office of Institutional Research and vice president of Quality, Planning, and Organizational Development are responsible for approval, monitoring, and control of all research conducted at Waubensee Community College.

**DEFINITIONS**

**Research** - is any systematic investigation, including research development, testing and evaluation, designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge. This includes activities which attempt to discover new facts, information, or new applications of existing knowledge. Demonstrations are not considered to be research because new knowledge or information is not generated. Although publication in professional journals is often an outcome of research, such publication or potential publication is not germane to the definition of research.

**Human Subjects** - refers to living individuals about whom an investigator (whether professional or student) conducting research obtains:

1. Data through **intervention** or **interaction** with the individual, OR
2. **Identifiable private information.**

**Intervention** - includes both physical procedures by which data are gathered and manipulations of the subject or the subject's environment that are performed for research purposes.

**Interaction** - includes communication or interpersonal contact between investigator and subject.

**Private information** - includes information about behavior that occurs in a context in which an individual can reasonably expect that no observation or recording is taking place and information which has been provided for specific purposes by an individual which the individual can reasonably expect will not be made public (e.g., a medical record).

**Demonstration** - The presentation or revelation of known information, principles, or findings through lecture or activity in support of educational objectives to people voluntarily participating in a class, activity or event. A demonstration is not considered research and, as long as only people voluntarily enrolled in a class, activity or event are involved, is not subject to research approval.

**Informed Consent** - The agreement of a person (or his or her legally authorized representative) to serve as a research subject, in full knowledge of all anticipated risks and benefits of the research project. Informed consent is required of all research subjects at WCC. Any demonstration involving people not voluntarily participating or aware of their inclusion in a class, activity or event, is not permitted without their informed consent. Minors may not give informed consent at Waubensee Community College. Acceptable informed consent forms and verbal consents are available through the WCC Institutional Research Office. Forms should include:

- Identity and contact information for the researcher.
- Description of the research project.
- Risks and benefits.
- Time involvement.
- Payments (or a statement of non-payment)
- Subjects rights.
- Confidentiality and security of data.
- How to withdraw from the research.
- Statement of consent.

**Researcher** – The person primarily responsible for conducting and controlling the research and ensuring that all WCC protocols and requirements are adhered to.

**Research Practica** - These are course-related research projects and/or directed studies designed to provide students an opportunity to practice various research methods such as interview, observation and survey techniques, measurement of behavior (e.g., reaction time, speech, problem solving) as well as data analysis. Generally, research practica do not constitute research and do not require institutional review, except when external publication or presentation of findings is anticipated or planned.

**Organizational Survey** – An instrument designed to gather information that describes the nature and extent of a specified set of data ranging from physical counts and frequencies to attitudes and opinions. This information, in turn, can be used to answer questions that have been raised, to solve problems, to assess needs and goals, to determine whether or not specific objectives have been met, to establish baselines against which future comparisons can be made, or to analyze trends across time. (Source: *Handbook in Research and Evaluation, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.*, Stephen Isaac and William Bell, 1990, EdITS Publishers San Diego, CA.)

**Uninformed Human Subject** - A person who is participating in research or a demonstration without their informed consent. It is not allowed to involve uninformed human subjects to be subjects of or involved in research or demonstrations without their consent.

### **CONDUCT OF DEMONSTRATIONS**

In delivering educational offerings, instructors often use different forms of demonstration to illustrate principles, findings, theories, or concepts associated with the instructional material. In that these activities are meant to demonstrate already established information, they do not constitute research and are not subject to institutional review. The only caveat is if a demonstration involves uninformed human subjects. The instructor must be aware of and account for the involvement of uninformed human subjects when designing and planning for any demonstration. Any such demonstration is a learning opportunity for students involved so that they can come to understand the concept of informed consent. Many times simple verbal consent can be obtained in demonstration situations. The Institutional Research office can provide information on obtaining verbal consent in these cases.

### **CONDUCT OF RESEARCH PRACTICA**

Research practica are, generally, quite limited in scope, do not lead to generalizable knowledge and are not undertaken with that goal in mind. For example, a student may interview a peer when the interview does not involve any sensitive, personal information.

Such projects should not put the subjects at more than minimal risk, and the data must be recorded anonymously by the students (i.e., with no names, social security numbers, or any other codes that can be linked to a list of names). These projects are considered "classroom exercises" and are not subject to institutional review. They do not require review unless the student researcher anticipates publishing the results or presenting at a professional meeting.

### **CONDUCT OF RESEARCH**

The Office of Institutional Research will serve as the focal point for all research conducted at the college. The vice president of Planning, Quality, and Organizational

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Development will be the approving authority for any research conducted at the college. The review and approval process exists to ensure that:

- Only a reasonable number of research projects are being carried out at any point in time.
- Individuals or populations are not “over-selected” as research subjects.
- Research projects support the mission of the college and do not cast the college in an adverse light.
- The time, experiences, and privacy rights of selected populations are respected.
- Researchers adhere to professional and ethical standards.
- Human subjects understand that all participation in research is voluntary and that they must be provided with informed consent information, and that they must provide their informed consent prior to participating in research as a subject.
- That researchers adequately design their research to achieve its objectives and that the research adheres to principles of good research design, execution, and analysis.

### Review Procedures

All research projects will be coordinated through the Office of Institutional Research. The Manager of the Office of Institutional Research will review the technical merit of the research and of the research instruments. By maintaining a record of all approved research conducted on campus, the Manager will ensure that any selected population is utilized only once per semester. Institutional-level surveys used to generate accreditation data and inform college-wide decision making will take precedence over other internal or external survey research.

Following the above review, the research request is sent to the vice president of Planning, Quality, and Organizational Development. The vice president will assess if the research is in the best interest of the institution, is in alignment with the mission of the college, and is correlated to the goals of the related program. Approval of research proposals will be determined on a case-by-case basis with special attention to minimizing the intrusion on learning and on protecting the rights and welfare of the WCC community.

If research involving WCC administrators, faculty, staff, or students violates college research procedures, conflicts with college policies, or engenders participant complaints, the vice president of Planning, Quality, and Organizational Development may suspend the research activities without prior consent of the researcher.

The application process requires a minimum of three weeks. It is recommended that applicants begin the process well in advance of deadline dates. Institutional approval does not guarantee participation by the target population. Participation by the target population is voluntary. Institutional demands and other priorities may influence participation decisions.

## **Research Related to an Individual's Teaching Assignments**

Faculty members will not engage in research that involves students in their current course sections or their programs. Doing so creates a possible ethical dilemma. Even though an instructor may guarantee that participation in the research will not affect a student's grade, the student may still feel pressure to sign an informed consent and participate in the research.

## **INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW PROCESS**

The process for seeking approval for research involving WCC administration, faculty, staff, or students is identified as:

1. Complete the Application for Research and Research Protocol documents. Present these documents to the Office of Institutional Research. This office will route your request through step 2, 3, and 4 of this procedure.
2. Office of Institutional Research will provide a technical review and signature sign-off.
3. The VP of Planning, Quality, and Organizational Development will assess the appropriateness of the research request.
4. A decision letter (or email) will be sent to the researcher. If approved, the original Application for Research, Research Protocol, and appropriate attachments will be filed with the Office of Institutional Research. This research approval is valid for one year. Research projects may not begin until the Informed Consent Forms have been obtained from the participants and copies of those forms are placed on file in the Office of Institutional Research.
5. Implement research.
6. Advise the Office of Institutional Research when data gathering activities are complete.
7. File research results and final research instruments with the Office of Institutional Research.
8. As appropriate and upon request, research results will be presented at a college-wide professional development session.

## **ORGANIZATIONAL SURVEYS**

Organizational surveys have become very popular for addressing the smallest to the greatest concerns of faculty, staff and administrators. As surveys proliferate, people

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often feel as if they are being inundated by requests for information and opinions from various functional areas. They may also feel they are being asked for the same information over and over again, they are being asked frivolous questions, or that the surveys are not really addressing their concerns. As a consequence, when we really need survey information about something, we may get low response rates because people are just tired of filling out surveys.

People also tend to think that anyone can write a good survey because they have seen and filled out so many. This is simply not the case. There is both science and art involved in the design of surveys and professional review is required to assure that the right questions are asked in the right way so that the intended information is attained.

The Office of Institutional Research has approval authority, with some exceptions, for organizational surveys conducted at the college. The office is available to help you with design and planning for the conduct of your survey prior to their approval. They will also provide you with a booklet that will help you with your initial survey development. The Institutional Research office is responsible for:

- Providing assistance and expertise in the development of your survey and survey plan, as requested.
- Reviewing all surveys to ensure that they are well-designed and capable of producing the results desired by the office conducting the survey.
- Assigning a survey control number to each survey so that participants will know that the survey has been approved.
- Coordinating the timing for conduct of surveys to ensure that potential respondents are not “over-surveyed” or that too many surveys are not being done at one time.
- Providing assistance and expertise with analysis of surveys, as requested at the beginning of the project.
- Creating the web-form for appropriate surveys to be conducted with college personnel or other populations for which a valid e-mail address is provided. By the researcher.

### Exceptions

In the following cases, approval and review are **not** required but consulting services are available, as requested:

- Surveys conducted by Faculty Council Local # 604 of their members in line with their responsibilities to their members under the current agreement.
- Surveys conducted pursuant to approved research.
- Surveys conducted by student clubs and organizations.
- Informal surveys conducted within separate functional areas to gain information about ideas or concerns such as parties, social events, etc.

**QUESTIONS, IDEAS, OR CONCERNS**

Any questions, ideas, or concerns about these procedures should be directed to the manager of Institutional Research or the vice president of Planning, Quality, and Organizational Development.