



Using Student Participation Pools in Research

1.0 Introduction

1.1 The use of student participation pools is widely used in some disciplines (e.g., psychology, business administration, criminal justice, etc.). Student participation pools typically include undergraduate students enrolled in introductory courses. There are many advantages to the establishment of a student participation pool. From a research perspective, the student participation pool provides researchers with ready access to a large number of individuals to participate in research. From a pedagogical perspective, involving students as research participants provides understanding of the scientific method and evidence base in research, and may also help instill a participant perspective in future researchers.

1.2 The challenge of using student participation pools is that certain ethical issues may arise, most notably around whether or not participation is voluntary, and how confidentiality and potential conflicts of interest are managed.

1.3 This guidance document offers researchers some direction on the use and ethics of using student participation pools for research.

2.0 REB Review Requirements

2.1 Before proceeding with research involving student participation pools, researchers must complete an application that is reviewed by the UHREB or DEC (as appropriate). No recruitment or data collection can proceed without UHREB approval.

2.2 Researchers must provide detailed information on the study methods and design, and address any issues that specifically relate to the use of the student participation pools. In particular, researchers should provide information on:

- The study purpose and rationale;
- The study sample, with a particular focus on inclusion and exclusion criteria;
- Any screening tools that will be used in the identification of a sample;
- The methods to be used in the research (e.g., questionnaires, experiments); when the measures will be taken (will there be baseline measurements followed by later measurements?);
- How the researcher is handling the consent process;
- How the researcher is handling confidentiality of data;
- The plans for data management and storage;
- Compensation, if any, for participation (this includes whether students will earn course credit, assignment grades within courses or bonus marks);
- How the research is handling student and researcher no-shows and cancellations; and
- Plans for debriefing the students participating in the research.

2.3 Researchers planning to carry out data collection on the same research question or hypothesis over more than one academic year should provide detailed information in their application. Annual reporting and renewal of the protocol will be required for studies spanning more than one academic year.



3.0 Best Practices in the Use of Student Participation Pools

Those using a student participation pool should ensure that the terms of engagement are clearly understood by the students who are being invited to participate as research participants. Students should understand the benefits and risks of participating in research.

3.1 Providing Direction to Students on Participation in Research via a Student Participation Pool

Students should be informed at the beginning of any course whether an instructor intends to use the student participation pool. Instructors should explain (in the course syllabus and in information accessible to students on the course management system) what the pool is, how it is used in research, what the expectations are for students enrolled in the course, and alternatives provided should students not wish to participate in student participation pool-based research. Instructors should ensure that students know the implications of cancelling participation in an experiment, and being a “no-show” for experiments they have enrolled in.

3.2 Managing Pressure to Participate in Research

One criticism of student participation pools is that they can be coercive in that students may feel that they must participate in research to satisfy course requirements. This is at odds with the TCPS2 requirement that research participants should agree to participate voluntarily (Article 2.2). Instructors should ensure that students know whether participation is part of requirements of the course within the grading scheme, or offered for the opportunity of bonus points. Ideally, participation should be invited with non-punitive consequences. When research participation is tied to course grades as part of grading or bonus marks, instructors must provide alternatives to participation and ensure that students are aware of them. Alternatives to participation should be equivalent in terms of effort required, time to complete, etc., and be aligned with the identified pedagogical goals of the research participation option.

3.3 Managing the Dual Roles of Course Instructor and Researcher

TCPS2 Article 7.4 notes that researchers acting in dual roles, such as course instructor, may create conflicts or undue influences. When course instructors (or their honours/graduate students) are also recruiting participants from the student participation pool, there should be provisions for mitigating conflicts due to their dual roles. For example, participation or completion of research alternatives could be tracked by a third party or software which masks participants' identity, so that instructors do not know which students were research participants. When instructors receive individual identifying information so they can determine course grades (e.g., how many credits were completed by each student), this information should not state whether the student completed the research itself or a research alternative, only the ultimate result (i.e., whether the requirement was satisfied or number of points to award).

3.4 Deception in Studies Using the Student Participation Pool

Some studies may involve deception. In all such instances, researchers must justify the use of deception, and then ensure that students receive an adequate debriefing at the conclusion of the study that explains the deception and why it was necessary.

3.5 Securing Consent



Each experiment using the student participation pool should provide a clear description of the research. This description can be provided orally or in written form. This is essential in the consent process as it will explain to students what the study is about, the nature of their participation, what happens if the student opts to withdraw from the study while it is in progress, etc. As with any study, the consent process and consent form should be explicit.

3.6 Ensuring a Pedagogical Purpose

TCPS2 requires that researchers balance the risks and benefits to participants. Recruiting students can increase risk in some areas (e.g., participation pressure related to grades; dual roles of instructor-researchers) but also create direct benefits if the learning opportunity provided by research participation is tied to their program of study. Making research participation a learning experience is one straightforward way of increasing the direct benefit to student participants and potentially balancing the risk of pressure to participate that occurs when research recruitment is linked to course grades. Therefore, when research participation is tied to course grades, it is normally expected that the experience should have a pedagogical purpose. A straightforward way of accomplishing this is a thorough debriefing after the study. This might include discussing how key concepts that students are learning about are being examined in real-world research or explaining core methodological principles (e.g., hypothesis testing, methods of analysis). Other reasonable means of providing a pedagogical purpose are also possible (e.g., requiring short reflection) as proposed by the applicant or department.

3.7 Equitable Access

When research participation is tied to course grades, researchers and departments should monitor and ensure that inclusion and exclusion criteria for studies, across the participation pool as a whole, do not systematically disadvantage certain groups by eliminating their opportunities to participate in and learn from research. This does not mean that individual studies cannot selectively recruit certain groups when there is an identified research purpose for doing so, or exclude certain groups when the study procedure presents a heightened risk to them. Rather, researchers should provide a justification of inclusion and exclusion criteria and, when possible, err on the side of allowing more students to participate so they may gain the educational experience of doing so.

4.0 Classroom Recruitment That Does Not Involve the Student Participation Pools

4.1 Sometimes researchers intend to carry out studies by recruiting students in their own classes. As with studies involving the student participation pools, instructors should inform students about intentions to recruit study participants from a class, and this should be done at the beginning of any course (ideally in the course syllabus and in information accessible to students on the course management system).

4.2 In order to manage the instructor's conflict of interest and reduce the perception of coercion, recruitment should be done by someone other than the researcher (e.g., a research assistant or co-investigator). As with studies involving the student participation pool, the researcher should explain the nature of the students' participation, and if course grades are involved through course assignments or bonus marks then equivalent alternatives to participating should be offered. When students are recruited from a class and remuneration affects course grades, there should also be a pedagogical purpose to the participation (e.g., thorough debriefing, reflective assignment, etc.).