

HPRC Guidelines Ethics Review and Experiential Education (EE)

The purpose of this guideline is to assist those participating in Experiential Education (EE) to ascertain when there is a research component to the project and thus the activity is subject to research ethics review by the relevant ethics review committee.

As per the Tri-council Policy Statement and Senate Policy, based on the information received to date, Experiential Education that involves an element of research requires ethics review by the unit's (i.e. Faculty level or Department-level) Delegated Ethics Review Committee*.

*NOTE: the Delegated Ethics Review Committee reviews student research that is minimal risk, course related, and does **not** include involvement by Aboriginal/Indigenous peoples or clinical trials. All other research must be reviewed by the HPRC. Please contact the Office of Research Ethics (ore@yorku.ca or the [Office of Research Ethics website](#) for further information.

Overview of Research Ethics in the Context of Experiential Education

The definition of research as described under the TCPS is the "... an undertaking intended to extend knowledge through a disciplined inquiry or systematic investigation". The York University Senate Policy on the review of research involving human participants describes research as follows:

Research, for the purpose of this Policy, involves a systematic investigation to establish facts, principles or generalizable knowledge, and it includes pilot or preliminary research...an undertaking intended to extend knowledge through a disciplined inquiry or systematic investigation..."

Further, for the activity to be considered research, it must involve a disciplined inquiry that is conducted with the expectation that the method, results, and conclusions will be able to withstand the scrutiny of the relevant research community. In many situations, research is intended to produce results which are generalizable and/or which generate new knowledge within a discipline using discipline specific methods and approaches. In such cases, research would have **the potential** to be disseminated outside the organization via published articles, presentations at seminars and conferences, or uploaded to publicly accessible and searchable databases in the case of theses and dissertations. Note however that intent or ability to publish findings are not factors that determine whether or not an activity is research requiring ethics review¹

Thus, in the context of Experiential Education, research related activities that involve direct engagement with human participants through scientific and/or other research methods for the purposes of assessing and/or investigating a research question or hypothesis and generating an outcome such as a report, essay etc., would be subject to ethics review.

Course related research activities that primarily involve the investigation or assessment and/or analysis of documentation only and not identifiable people for the purposes of improving a program, process, instrument and may involve consulting with human participants, but only for the purposes of clarifying or adding to the documentation provided, is not considered research requiring review.

By way of example, activities in which the students are engaged in policy assessment, programme assessment, marketing tool analysis – all activities utilizing various forms of documentation that have been provided are generally not subject to review. While interactions with humans may form part of the activities, the individuals are not themselves the focus of the research but rather are contacted

¹ TCPS 2: Chapter 2, Article 2.1 Application

solely for the purposes of providing information or data in the ordinary course of their employment and/or² clarifying or augmenting the written information provided.

Other EE projects that involve direct engagement with human participants for the purposes of assessing outcomes, investigating facts and/or furthering generalizable knowledge such as those that involve community outreach, focus groups etc. will require ethics review if the final outcome is to generate a report, essay etc. or other research related outcome.

The following provides a brief discussion of what, when and how EE falls within the context of requiring research ethics review and approval.

What is Experiential Education?

EE is an approach to learning that bridges theory and practice by providing students with concrete applied practical experiences and then helping them to reflect on their experiences using the theoretical knowledge they have learned. (York's White Paper Companion, 2010:38).

Structured reflection is any planned activity or exercise that requires students to refer back and critically examine their own concrete experience in light of existing theory and/or what is being covered in the course. For example, following a concrete experience, students may have to: explain why they believe certain events occurred, or justify the necessity of certain procedures, or consider the experience from multiple theoretical perspectives or challenge their own assumptions or beliefs. The specific reflective learning exercise will depend upon the intended learning outcome(s) for the students. The reflections focus on the students themselves and do not include direct responses from or to other participants in the activity.

At York University EE strategies have been categorized into three distinct areas: classroom-focused, community-focused, and work-focused. Degree programs at York University incorporate EE across a range of courses at different levels. Early experiences in developing reflective thinking and collaborative learning through classroom-focused activities serve as building blocks for community and work-focused opportunities later in the student's degree program, preparing students to experience deeper learning and adapt to workplace teams. All EE activities should be fully integrated into the course with explicit links to student learning outcomes (and course assessment strategies).

Determining whether Ethics Review is required

As noted above, not all activities involving human participants require review. For an activity to be considered research it must meet the definition of research as defined by the TCPS and York's Senate policy. Many activities undertaken by students as a consequence or element of the learning experience, though they may involve other human beings, do not constitute research. The following are examples of activities students may engage in to satisfy Experiential Education requirements. With a few exceptions most of these are for learning purposes and thus may not generally be considered research subject to ethics review.

RELEVANT EXAMPLES

Professional Skill Development: If the primary objective is **purely professional skill development**, then data gathering is probably **not research** since the primary objective of a professional skill development activity is to demonstrate to the instructor that the student has

² TCPS2, Article 2.1, Application

acquired job or career related skills. This may include developing skills that will subsequently be used to perform research in the future (e.g., apply statistical research methods/models or conduct a literature review (for academics), conduct market research (for marketers or entrepreneurs), conduct patient interviews (clinicians). It is important to recognize at the outset of the work that there is NO potential for publication or presentation of this work, and that the nature of this activity is not for the purpose of generalizing knowledge; it is not “*an undertaking intended to extend knowledge through a disciplined inquiry or systematic investigation*”; it is not a research activity. Such projects allow for the student to demonstrate, and an instructor to assess, specific career skills or professional abilities directly related to future employment. The project is never to be presented outside the course and any data collected will be destroyed as soon as the instructor’s assessment is complete. (For example, 1) A journalism student is required to set up a series of interviews with small business owners, ask them questions and then write an article so their instructor can assess their interview skills and writing ability; 2) A graduate student, following professional practices in social work gathers clinical information from patients in a hospital to prepare admittance reports that will be evaluated by their instructor to see if they meet professional standards.) *

*Note: Even though the research ethics approval may not be required, other ethics standards (e.g., professional practice, institutional practices, privacy legislation) still apply. Thus, if the project is deemed to be exempt from research ethics review appropriate procedures are still required for the collection, use, securing and disposal of all data. The confidentiality of data must be maintained at all times. For guidance on data security, please see the following guideline:

<http://research.info.yorku.ca/data-security-guideline-research-involving-human-participants/>

Capstone Courses: Many pedagogical exercises afford students the opportunity to be exposed to research methods in their field of study with the purpose of the development of research-oriented skills. If these activities are used for the purposes of research they should be reviewed by the relevant institutional research ethics committee. For example, capstone courses that require the student to complete an independent thesis project generating new knowledge that could be purposed for generalizing knowledge (whether or not an actual publication or presentation or some other transmittal occurs) would be subject to review by the relevant Faculty/Departmental level delegated ethics review committee.

However, a capstone course designed to include knowledge development and/or skill demonstration is probably **not research** since the primary objective of a capstone course report or activity is not to generate new knowledge but rather to demonstrate existing knowledge derived from classroom learning. The learning objectives of capstone courses might be skill acquisition, to facilitate transfer of training, or to deepen knowledge acquisition in different contexts (e.g., applying specific processes or models in a consulting engagement with a client, applying clinical techniques in a real world or simulated environment, participating in an internship)³. In the case of a capstone course, the only audience is the instructor in order to satisfy academic requirements. In these cases, participant data is collected solely for in class training or demonstration purposes and will be immediately disposed of once the training or demonstration has been completed. (For example, a professor teaching first year statistics has everyone in the class fill in a survey regarding their fast food buying habits in order to create a data set that will be used to run various statistical tests on; however, in such a case the instructor might be encouraged to manufacture a “fake” dataset that can be used for purposes of training or demonstration.)

Co-op/work placement reports: As the primary outcome of a co-op/work placement may be to generate a report summarizing the student experience to the co-op office or instructor, co-op/work

³ NOTE: that while ethics review and approval may not be required, researchers are advised to be cognizant of other ethical considerations that may arise during the course of knowledge development activities and or co-op placement work

terms are typically not research. However, although the co-op report itself may not be research, the work undertaken during the course of the co-op or work placement could be research. In many situations this could be a form of applied research. Therefore if the work undertaken during the work term is deemed research and has **the potential** to be presented or published in any context beyond the instructor's review, then it would fall under York Senate Policy as well as the TCPS and in this case would have to undergo ethics review.

Quality assurance studies: Performance reviews or testing related to assessing performance of employees or students within normal educational or employment requirements (and when used exclusively for assessment, management or improvement purposes) are typically **not research and thus not typically subject to review**. The specific results of quality assurance studies, or performance or program review are generally administered in the ordinary course of the operation of the organization where participation is required by employees or students (e.g., performance appraisals, student course evaluations). It should be noted that the results of quality assurance or performance evaluation can not to be used for research purposes unless ethics review and approval for use of said data (research involving secondary data analysis) has been obtained.

Research Ethics Review – Delegated Ethics Review Committee

If the project involves an element of research, then ethics review will be required by the relevant Research Ethics Review Committee. For students conducting course-related, minimal risk research that does not involve Indigenous/Aboriginal people and/or clinical trials, the relevant Research Ethics Review committee is the unit level Delegated Ethics Review Committee within each Faculty/School/College.⁴ Once it has been established that the projects do require ethics review, there are two levels of course-related ethics review that must be undertaken depending on the nature of the research activities. The criteria for course versus individualized review can be summarized as follows:

- 1) If the students in a graduate or undergraduate course are conducting research involving human participants as part of a course assignment, and all students in the class are conducting the same or similar research, then the Course Director would submit a [Generic Protocol](#) to the relevant delegated ethics review committee for ethics review and approval.
- 2) If the students in a graduate or undergraduate course are conducting individual research involving human participants as part of a course assignment, (i.e. they have created the project or research question themselves) then each student would submit an "[Individualized Protocol](#)" to the relevant delegated ethics review committee for ethics review and approval..

For further information on the ethics review process for course-related research involving human participants (including requirements and protocol forms) please go to the [Office of Research Ethics website](#)

⁴ **NOTE:** If the research is deemed to be more than minimal risk, involves Indigenous/Aboriginal peoples or elements of a clinical trial, then the research must be reviewed by the Human Participants Review Committee, the university wide Research Ethics Board. Please contact the Office of Research Ethics at ore@yorku.ca or ext. 55201 for further information and assistance.