



Rutgers School of Nursing Policy

**Research Studies and Projects Involving Rutgers School of Nursing
Students or Employees as Participants**

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Policy Owner: The Dean	
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1. Policy Statement

All research studies and DNP projects involving recruitment and/or enrollment of Rutgers School of Nursing students or employees as participants must be reviewed by the School of Nursing’s IRB manager to ensure that IRB documentation is prepared accurately and that research/project team members have completed all human subjects research training. If the study is already IRB-approved, clearance is needed for access to communication with students and employees, timing, and follow-up.

2. Reasons for Policy

To provide guidelines on the inclusion of Rutgers School of Nursing students and employees as research subjects. The ethical principles of professional societies insist that research subjects voluntarily consent to participate in research and that all potential subjects must be treated as autonomous agents with the right to choose whether to take part in experiments. Federal regulations (e.g., 45 CFR 46.116) are explicit: "An investigator shall seek such consent only under circumstances that provide the prospective subject or the representative sufficient opportunity to consider whether or not to participate and that minimize the possibility of coercion or undue influence." The Rutgers Board of Governors has decided that all human subjects research at this university must conform to federal regulations and be reviewed by the IRB.

The Rutgers Institutional Review Board (IRB) has developed procedures to reduce the potential for coercion or influence when faculty or instructional staff use Rutgers students or employees as research subjects.

These procedures DO NOT apply to students studying research techniques in courses that require them to perform didactic experiments, but DO apply to any human subjects research that involves students or employees, not as investigators, but as subjects.

3. Who Should Review This Policy

This policy applies to all members of the Rutgers School of Nursing involved in research, including but not limited to faculty members, researchers, principal investigators, research staff, trainees, residents, students (including postdoctoral fellows), volunteers, collaborators, visiting scholars, and staff members.

4. Resources and Related Documents:

- [Research Sponsored Program Procedure, Who Can Apply as Principal Investigator \(PI\)](#), Rutgers Policy
- Human Subject Research Guidance Topics [website](#)
- Research Misconduct [website](#). Rutgers faculty, administration, staff, students, and volunteers have an important responsibility to maintain high ethical standards in research, research training programs, and activities related to such research or training. These standards include validity, accuracy, and honesty in proposing and performing research, collecting, analyzing, and reporting research results, and reviewing the research of others.
- Rutgers Research Misconduct [Policy](#)

5. Definitions

- 1) **Principal Investigator (PI)**—The individual who bears responsibility for technical compliance, completion of programmatic work, fiscal stewardship of sponsor funds, and compliance with administrative requirements of the project. The PI may be a faculty member, staff member, or student.
- 2) **Researcher**—Anyone who leads a research project, whether as principal investigator or in another role. Typically, all researchers are listed in the IRB application.
- 3) **Coercion**—This means that the person involved should have the legal capacity to give consent and should be so situated as to be able to exercise free power of choice without the intervention of any element of force, fraud, deceit, duress, overreaching, or other ulterior form of constraint or coercion. The person should also have sufficient knowledge and comprehension of the elements of their participation as a research participant to enable him/her/them to make an informed decision.
- 4) **Conflict of Interest**—Conflicts of interest represent circumstances in which professional judgments or actions regarding a primary interest may be at risk of being unduly influenced by a secondary interest, such as financial gain or career advancement. The secondary interest may be financial or non-financial, and the resultant bias may be conscious or unconscious. The presence of conflicts of interest, both financial and non-financial, poses a problem for professional, patient,

and public trust in research and the research enterprise. Effectively identifying and managing conflicts is a crucial aspect of achieving research goals successfully. Traditional strategies typically focus on the investigator and emphasize disclosure despite its significant limitations. Complementary approaches include process-oriented steps and outcomes-oriented strategies.

- 5) **Confidentiality**—In research, confidentiality is the ethical obligation of the researcher to protect the privacy of the participants by ensuring their data is not disclosed to anyone outside the research team. Individual participants' identities cannot be linked to their specific data when the results are reported publicly. Essentially, the researcher knows who provided the data but will not reveal that information to others.
- 6) **Anonymous**—In research, anonymous means that the identity of a research participant is completely unknown to the researcher. That is, no identifying information, such as name, address, or contact details, is collected. Therefore, the researcher cannot link the data back to a specific individual.
- 7) **Vulnerability** - A potential problem with student participation in research or projects (e.g., quality improvement) conducted at the university is the possibility that their agreement to participate (consent) might not be freely given. While researchers may be careful to avoid potentially coercive behavior, the very nature of the relationship with the subject can create the perception of coercion. Students or employees may volunteer to participate out of a belief that doing so will place them in good favor with faculty or supervisors (e.g., that participating will result in receiving better grades, recommendations, employment, or the like), or that failure to participate will negatively affect their relationship with the researcher or supervisor (i.e., by seeming "uncooperative," not part of the scientific community). For this reason, all researchers should be aware of the potential for coercion that exists when a research subject is also a student, employee, colleague, or subordinate of the researcher.

6. Principles

Principles For Using Students as Subjects

Involving current students in a research study, often conducted by their teacher or professor, can be a convenient way to access a readily available population but requires careful consideration of ethical concerns regarding potential coercion and undue influence, necessitating clear informed consent and measures to minimize any impact on their academic standing if they choose not to participate.

Researchers who use students or employees as experimental subjects or who maintain "subject pools" of students from which investigators may draw research or project participants are asked to adopt procedures that meet the following conditions:

1. Whenever possible, researchers should avoid using their students if another population of potential participants is equally suited, e.g., another class section not

taught by the researcher, recruitment by another instructor, or blinded/coded data collected by an associate so that subjects are not identified to the instructor.

2. For research studies or projects that gather individual-level data, students must be given the option to decline participation without penalty. If a course requires students to serve as research or project participants, then faculty must provide students with alternative ways to meet this requirement. Students should receive a written description of the various ways of meeting the requirement during the first week of class.
3. Unless the research or project is directly related to class material or the study process is being used as a teaching opportunity, such as in a research methods class, the IRB discourages the use of class time to recruit subjects or to complete study instruments, etc.

Principles Applicable to the Use of Students, Faculty, and Staff as Subjects

1. Researchers who recruit RSON faculty, staff or students as research or project participants must be able to provide a rationale for their participation other than convenience.
2. Researchers must show that the recruitment method does not lead RSON faculty, staff, or students to think they will face retaliation, poor performance appraisals, or other-risks by choosing not to participate. Participants must be given the option to decline participation at any point without penalty.
3. Data privacy and confidentiality. Always protect participant identity and maintain confidentiality of any information shared by participants.

Scenarios when using students as participants might be appropriate

- Research on teaching or learning methods: Studying the effectiveness of different teaching approaches within a specific classroom setting (beyond aggregate level quality improvement or course evaluation).
- Curriculum development: Assessing the impact of curricular changes and/or new course materials on learning outcomes (beyond aggregate level curriculum assessment or evaluation).
- Educational psychology research: Investigating cognitive processes or learning behaviors in students.

7. Procedures

Information about how students and employees will be recruited and how coercion will be avoided should be included in the application and/or protocol information submitted to the School of Nursing's IRB manager and then to the IRB for review, as appropriate. A way to protect against coercion is for faculty investigators to advertise for subjects broadly (e.g., by posting notices in the school or department) rather than recruiting individual students directly. Requiring participation in research or DNP projects for course credit (or extra credit) is also controversial, though common in the social and behavioral sciences. As with any research or project involving a potentially vulnerable

subject population, IRBs pay special attention to the potential for coercion or undue influence and consider ways in which the possibility of exploitation can be reduced or eliminated.

1. Make an appointment by contacting the IRB Manager by phone or email, ideally as soon as your research idea involving students or employees is developed, to discuss the population, logistics, and time frame, as there may be competing studies or interests involved.
 - a. IRB Manager: Mylka Benitez
 - b. Email: biascomy@sn.rutgers.edu
 - c. Phone: 973-353-0687
2. The PI is responsible for obtaining approvals from the respective program administrators, division chairs, unit directors, or faculty of record on the timing and use of resources.
3. Once the research/project is approved, let the IRB Manager know the intended timeline for starting and ending the study/project.
4. Clearance from the IRB Manager must be obtained via email before recruitment to ensure that there are no competing studies and the timeline will not be disruptive to academic activities (e.g., sending student surveys during finals).