

# Ethics in Social Research

# Ethical Issues in Social Science Research

## (1) Scientific Misconduct

- Fraud

- Plagiarism

- Manipulating or Suppressing Findings

## (2) Treatment of Participants

- Physical or Psychological Abuse

- Power Issues

- Deception

- Privacy, Anonymity & Confidentiality

## (3) Sponsors

- Failing to Identify Sponsors

# Ethical Principles for Social Science Researchers

- (1) Do no harm to subjects
- (2) Ensure that subjects provide informed and voluntary consent
- (3) Be sensitive to issues of power and cultural differences
- (4) Fully disclose all pertinent information to subjects and audiences
- (5) Be aware of your role as a researcher

# Structures and Processes to Ensure Ethical Human Subjects Research

- (1) Institutional Review Boards and Human Subjects Committees
- (2) Professional Organizations Guidelines
  - Disciplinary Organizations
  - Interest Groups
- (3) Legal Provisions

[DSU IRB](#) [ASA](#) [AAAS](#) [DHHS ORI](#)

# DSU IRB Requirements

## Institutional Review Board

### Criteria for Informed Consent and Assent

The following information must be communicated in writing to all research subjects or respondents before they agree to participate in a project that qualifies for exempt certification. The information must be incorporated into a cover letter or information sheet to be distributed with a questionnaire or other survey instrument. Researchers are required to develop a consent form to be signed by each research subject. Additional elements of informed consent may be required for some projects.

Following are the minimum required elements of informed consent. Additional information may be included at your discretion:

- a statement identifying yourself and your affiliation

- an *invitation* to participate in the study as part of a research project

- an explanation of the purposes of the research, the expected length of time of the subject's involvement, a description of the procedures to be followed, and identification of any procedures which are experimental in nature

- a description of any benefits to the subject or others which may reasonably be expected from the research

- a description of compensation for participation (money, extra course credit, etc.)

- a statement describing the subject's anonymity or the extent to which confidentiality of records identifying the subject will be maintained

- the names, addresses, and phone numbers of the people to contact for answers to questions about the research, and the office to contact for questions about the rights of research subjects

- an assurance that participation is voluntary and that the subject may withdraw from participation at any time

- for subjects under 18 years of age (or custodial adult) (unless enrolled at Delta State) parental *consent* is required for any research in the expedited or full review categories. The IRB may waive that requirement under special circumstances. Written *consent* of a school administrator is required for all research, whether exempt or not

- for subjects under 18 years of age (unless enrolled at Delta State), a statement of Informed "Assent" is required. "Assent" refers to the willingness of the research subject to participate. Thus, if the research subject is a minor (under 18 years of age) both parental (custodial) consent and "Assent" are required.

# Voluntary Participation and Informed Consent

## American Sociological Association (ASA) Guidelines on Voluntary Participation and Informed Consent

*“Informed consent is a basic ethical tenet of scientific research on human populations. Sociologists do not involve a human being as a subject in research without the informed consent of the subject or the subject's legally authorized representative, except as otherwise specified in this Code. Sociologists recognize the possibility of undue influence or subtle pressures on subjects that may derive from researchers' expertise or authority, and they take this into account in designing informed consent procedures.”*

– Section 12, ASA Code of Ethics (1997)

Achieving informed consent means that, ideally, people are able to maintain their autonomy and can decide whether or not to participate in the research process. One approach used to help provide for informed consent is the “statement of informed consent.”

Depending on the context and rules set forth by the research review body, consent may be given by the research participant in written or oral form.

### **Example Section of an Informed Consent Statement**

*“I understand that my participation in this interview is completely voluntary, that I have the option of not answering any question for any reason, and that I have the right to withdraw from participation at any time. Portions of the interview may be recorded, but I understand that my name will not be used on any written transcripts or in any presentations. The audio tapes will be kept by the researcher and will not be distributed to any other person or group.”*

# Confidentiality

## American Sociological Association (ASA) Guidelines on Confidentiality

*“Sociologists have an obligation to ensure that confidential information is protected. They do so to ensure the integrity of research and the open communication with research participants and to protect sensitive information obtained in research, teaching, practice, and service. When gathering confidential information, sociologists should take into account the long-term uses of the information, including its potential placement in public archives or the examination of the information by other researchers or practitioners.”*

– Section 11, ASA Code of Ethics (1997)

This means that the researcher will not make known the identity of the respondent or link them directly with the data they provide.

Note that there is a difference between confidentiality and anonymity.

Confidentiality has been under attack in high-stakes cases. For example, instances of “court ordered” or “compelled” disclosure.