

Class Projects vs. Research

Does My Project Require IRB Review?



If USF students or faculty are unsure if specific projects or classroom experiences would be considered research, please contact the USF IRB at 813-974-5638 or email RSCH-IRB@usf.edu.

Additional information on differentiating between research studies, class projects, and program evaluations can be found in the USF IRB's [Comparison Chart](#), located in the "Regulation and Guidance" section on the USF ARC website.

The USF IRB often receives questions from students and faculty about the distinction between class projects that do not require IRB review, and research projects that students perform which do require IRB review. This flyer has been created to provide the USF research community with guidance and specific examples regarding when it is appropriate for students to submit their projects to the USF IRB, and when IRB review and approval is not necessary.

Educational Records & Research - Faculty Responsibilities

Faculty members are permitted to review and use education records for research purposes as allowed by the federal regulations, USF Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) Policy, and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). Faculty members are not permitted to use class or student projects as research unless prospective IRB approval for the research study is obtained. More information on utilizing educational records for research purposes can be found in HRP-103 – INVESTIGATOR MANUAL, located in the [BullsIRB Library](#).

Class Projects Vs. Research - Does the Project Contribute to Generalizable Knowledge?

If the coursework in a class includes a research experience project that is not intended to contribute to generalizable knowledge, and is not intended to be presented or published beyond the classroom, IRB approval is not required and the project should not be referred to as research. If a student is collecting data from other individuals, they are not permitted to present the project to the individuals as research. If a student or faculty member finds that already collected student project data could potentially contribute to generalizable knowledge, they are permitted to use the data as background information in their protocol to conduct a prospective research study. **The USF IRB does not provide retroactive approval for class or student projects.**

Examples of Student Projects vs. Research

Use of Education Records: A faculty member would like to compare best educational practices in their course with similar courses around the country. To conduct this research study, the faculty member would like to use test scores and grades. This study can be conducted as allowed by the federal regulations, USF HRPP Policy, and FERPA with prospective IRB review and approval.

Student Project: During a research methods class, students are required to create a protocol, consent form, and survey tool to complete a project for course credit. The intent of the project is to provide an educational experience about research methods. There is no intent to present or publish the results beyond the classroom, campus, or educational program. The students will inform the individuals taking part in the project that they are conducting a project for course credit and will not refer to the project as a research study. IRB approval and oversight is not required for this project.

Upon presentation of the results, the faculty member deems that the results of the project could potentially contribute to generalizable knowledge. The student/faculty member cannot submit a retrospective application to the IRB to use the student project as research. The student/faculty member can recreate the project in the form of a prospective research protocol, ensuring that the protocol is submitted for prospective IRB review. Information about the student project can be included in the background section of the protocol.

Student Research Project: The graduate program in Biology requires that graduate students conduct a research study. The intent of the project is to provide an educational experience and to develop a protocol that could contribute to generalizable knowledge. The results will be presented and published as research. This study can be conducted as allowed by the federal regulations and USF HRPP Policy with prospective IRB review and approval.

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