IRB Policy  

Recruitment and Incentives for Students Participating in Research  

I. Purpose  

This policy is designed to discuss the precautions and requirements for recruiting students as research participants. Students are vulnerable in that they may be unduly influenced by the expectation that participation or nonparticipation in a research protocol may affect their academic or employment status.  

Special precautions must be taken to avoid coercion or the appearance of coercion when including students in research. Similarly, it is important to avoid the appearance of any special treatment or any penalty of individuals in these categories based on their decision to participate or not to participate in a research protocol. Finally, confidentiality of data may be of special concern to these classes of research participants.  

II. Definitions:  

Student/Trainee – Any individual who is enrolled in a graduate or undergraduate program, to include residents, at Georgia Regents University (GRU) and those individuals who are in training programs.  

III. Recruiting Students  

An underlying ethical principle in research involving human participants is the belief that a person’s participation must be voluntary and based upon full and accurate information. When a student is asked to volunteer in a study being conducted by his/her teacher, the concept of “voluntariness” may be questionable. Students may volunteer to participate under the belief that doing so will place them in a favorable light with the principal investigator/faculty member (e.g., better grade, good recommendation, employment possibilities), or that failure to participate will negatively affect their relationship with the investigator or faculty (e.g., lower grade, less favorable recommendation, being perceived as “uncooperative” and not part of the scientific community). The IRB application must clearly discuss efforts to minimize coercion when recruiting students.  

Students have the same rights as any other potential participants to participate in an IRB approved research project, irrespective of the degree of risk, provided all of the following conditions are met:  

1. As autonomous individuals, students have the right to volunteer to participate in any research without receiving compensation/inducement (e.g. money, extra credit).  

2. Principal investigators/faculty members should take extra precautions when enrolling individuals whom they supervise. As a general principle, principal investigators/faculty members should avoid directly enrolling these individuals in their own educational research. Often, there may be educational value associated with being a research participant and the need to enroll one’s own students in educational research. In these instances, the principal investigator/faculty member should clearly state the educational benefit provided for students enrolled in the research (e.g. the students are enrolled in a research methods...
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course; the nature of research is directly tied to the course content). For educational research, the principal investigator/faculty member should specify how the educational methods studied are appropriate for the course.

3. Students must not be systematically treated differently from non-institutional participants as a result of their participation in a research study. Extra precautions must be taken to ensure the confidentiality of data files for students. If data to be collected are of an identifiable, sensitive nature, and the investigator does not already have access to the information, someone other than the investigator(s) must manage participant recruitment and data collection (interviews et. al.). The protocol application must specify how the confidentiality of the data will be ensured.

4. A student may participate in a research project if his/her participation is in response to a general announcement or a study advertisement outside of the class or if there is potentially direct benefit in terms of the student’s educational goals and desired outcomes of the researcher’s class.

5. The mechanism for equal access to all potential protocols must be provided. Individuals who accept monetary compensation for participation in research projects should be aware of the loss of confidentiality to supervisors and GRU personnel, resulting from IRS and other reporting requirements.

IV. Compensation for Students

It is not required that a research participant be compensated for his/her time during a study. However, compensation can be provided and may be provided in any of the following forms including gift cards, toys, a pizza party, extra credit, cash, etc.

All students must be offered equitable inducement as other participants in the research project. The research must not offer students any competitive academic or occupational advantage over others who do not volunteer, nor impose any academic or occupational penalty on those who do not volunteer.

Scenario 1: If the investigator is the Instructor of a course and offers extra credit to their students for participation in the research, alternative methods of gaining credit that require an equivalent educational benefit must be offered to non-participating students in the same course. The alternative method(s) of obtaining credit must be disclosed to the IRB.

Scenario 2: If the investigator recruits students that are not enrolled in their course, and the student’s Instructor granting extra credit for the student’s participation in research has no involvement in the research, extra credit is granted at the discretion of the student’s Instructor.
V. Participant Pools

Protocols that involve the use of participant pool policies should include:

1) procedures for the assignment of course credit

2) standard phrasing to be used in the syllabi for offering course credit

3) alternative methods of gaining credit.