

## **BCHEAN Recommendations for Research Involving Student Participants**

Guidelines set out in the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research require that a person's decision to participate in research is **voluntary** and **based on sufficient information and adequate understanding** of the proposed research and the implications of their participation (National Statement 2.2.1)

When proposing the use of students as participants it is important to consider the following:

- **Will the student's participation be voluntary?**
- **Are they choosing to participate rather than having to choose not to participate?**
- **How will the student be properly informed so that they may make the voluntary decision to participate?**

### Key Issues to Consider

1. A main issue that arises when using students as participants is the potential for dependant or unequal relationships. These relationships have the potential to compromise the voluntary character of participants' decision to be involved in the research (see National Statement 4.3)
2. Students are vulnerable to being over-researched as they are easily accessible to University researchers (see National Statement 4.3.4)
3. If participants are in a dependant relationship with Researchers care must be taken to design the project in a way that minimises the impact of the dependency (see National Statement 4.3.5)

### BCHEAN Recommendations

1. The overarching principle in conducting research with students is that they participate by 'opting in' rather than having to 'opt out'. That is, students make the decision to participate in the research rather than making a decision not to participate.
2. Where possible, investigators should not recruit students they are currently teaching. If this is unavoidable, a third party should contact participants (distribute questionnaires, interview participants etc) on behalf of the principal investigator.
3. Ensuring anonymity protects students. A non-identifiable, online, survey is the easiest way to ensure anonymity. Remember, focus groups and interviews are not anonymous and neither is the return of a questionnaire via email.

4. Research should be conducted outside of class hours and should not interfere with the normal conduct of the class.
5. The research activities should not affect student assessment or grades. Where possible, research should be conducted after students' final assessment. If assessment tasks will be used as data this needs to be expressed in the Plain Language Statement. Students must be given the opportunity to 'opt-in' or 'out' of any research associated activities.
6. Participants should not return surveys during class time. Surveys should be conducted online where possible. Hard copy surveys should be returned to a box outside the class, for example at School reception.
7. Where possible recruitment should be done through advertisement (poster, MyRMIT 'news' item etc) rather than by direct approach. Surveys should be distributed and collected outside of the classroom eg a box outside the classroom where students could pick one up if they choose to participate.
8. Permission must be sought from the Head of School before students are recruited as participants.
9. I Explore can not be used to contact participants for purposes of research. MyRMIT can be used to post 'news' items inviting students to participate in research projects. The relevant authorisation must be sought before using any RMIT Database to contact students for the purpose of research.
10. If you intend to use student Blogs/ Wikis or other interactive media as part of your data collection method you will need to include the RMIT "statement to be included on blogs" at the front end of your IT interactive conversation tool.