



Research



FAQ for Academic Assessment Research

When do I need IRB approval?

Often times, academic assessment data (e.g., grades, course work, surveys, interviews, etc.) are only used to provide feedback to students, improve a course or program, or report findings to the Office of Academic Assessment for University-wide educational program improvement. For such cases, VT IRB approval is not required. However, at times, there are plans to disseminate results outside of the University (e.g., publish, present findings at a conference, report findings to a granting agency). For such cases, VT IRB approval is required. Please consult the [Activities Requiring Approval flowchart](#) for help deciding whether IRB approval is required.

Note: Releasing data to accrediting agencies in order to present evidence of improvement of student learning does not constitute dissemination of research results/data, and therefore does not require IRB approval.

Do I need IRB approval before or after I collect / analyze assessment data?

Before collecting assessment data from students (e.g., survey, focus group), classroom data (e.g., coursework, senior projects), or student academic data, ask yourself whether you intend to disseminate findings or would disseminate if the findings are interesting / valuable. If the answer to either of these questions is 'yes', IRB approval is required **PRIOR TO** the collection of data.

If, during the initial collection of assessment data, there is no intention to disseminate findings (even if the findings are interesting / valuable), however interest for disseminating results or analyzing data for research / dissemination purposes develops at a later date, IRB approval for the analysis / use of existing data is required as soon as there is intent to analyze the existing data for research / dissemination purposes.

To emphasize, if you have ANY intention of using future classroom data for presentations, publications, or any other dissemination purposes, **you are required to obtain IRB approval prior to the collection of such data, including the conduct of related classroom activities**. Note: students should be provided advanced notice of the classroom-related research project within the class syllabus. In addition, IRB approval is required **PRIOR TO** the analysis of previously collected (e.g., past semesters) data (e.g., coursework, grades, attendance rates, etc.) for research / dissemination purposes. Note: failure to obtain proper IRB approval at the appropriate time (i.e., at the time of intent to use, collect, or analyze data for dissemination purposes) will be documented under all involved research investigators in IRB records as an incident of noncompliance, which may

result in sanctions to include destruction of research records; termination of research activities; notification of noncompliance to appropriate department heads, deans, study sponsor, and/or DHHS; loss of the privilege to conduct research at Virginia Tech; and (for graduate students) postponement of graduation.

Do I need to obtain signed and/or informed consent from students?

The IRB makes decisions concerning the requirement for signed and/ or informed consent on a case-by-case basis; however, this section discusses the activities that TYPICALLY do or do not require signed and/or informed consent. Here are a few examples to get you started:

1) Paper-pencil surveys, online surveys, and telephone interviews:

The IRB typically waives the requirement for researchers to obtain signed consent from subjects; however, subjects should be provided with an information sheet, which covers the basics of a consent form (they just don't sign it). For example, if using an online survey, the information sheet is presented as page 1 of the online survey and subjects click to go to the second page after they've read the information sheet (i.e., consent details).

Another note about consenting for surveys: you may wish to provide a checkbox on the cover sheet / information sheet that student subjects check if they consent for the use of their assessment data to be used for research purposes. This will allow for the use of assessment data for non-research purposes for students who just do not want to have their data used for research.

2) In-person interviews and focus groups:

Signed consent is typically required - especially when audio and/or video recorded.

3) Analysis of coursework, grades, etc.:

Signed consent is required for current and future students. The IRB often waives the requirement for informed and signed consent (i.e., students are unaware that their data is being used for research purposes) if the data is already in existence (e.g., collected the year before there was any intention to use the data for research / dissemination purposes), unless it is feasible for researchers to obtain signed consent from past students. It is recommended that the data be de-identified (stripped of subject identifying information such as name, student ID number, etc.) prior to analysis to protect the confidentiality of student data.

4) Accessing student records (e.g., GRE scores, GPA) from the Registrar's Office:

Visit the following link and click on "Accessing Student Records": <http://www.irb.vt.edu/pages/college.htm>

What else should I know about involving college students in my research?

For more information about involving college students as research subjects, visit <http://www.irb.vt.edu/pages/college.htm>

Where do I go to start my VT IRB application?

To start a VT IRB online application, go to <https://secure.research.vt.edu/irb>

Whom may I contact at the IRB office if I have questions?

Carmen Papenfuss, IRB administrator, at ctgreen@vt.edu or (540) 231-4358.

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