

Guidelines for Administrative Research *Distinguishing Research from Normal University Administrative Activity*

These guidelines are designed to help clarify the difference between information gathering techniques undertaken in the normal course of administering University operations and administrative research falling under the purview of University Policy 1406 and requiring Research Ethics Board approval.

Most administrative information gathering procedures and practices are not undertaken in the context of research nor embedded in a research framework. Rather, they are undertaken for purposes of evaluating choices, assessing client satisfaction, identifying product or service enhancements, or for similar quality assurance objectives. Nonetheless, individuals administering these information gathering procedures must ensure that the highest ethical standards are maintained and that the anonymity of respondents is protected. There is an Administrative Bulletin that may be referred to for guidance.

However, it is important to note that there will be cases where information gathering procedures such as interviews and surveys undertaken by University Administration have a clear research orientation, are on sensitive topics, collected from vulnerable populations, or where confidentiality of individual responses could not be maintained, and hence would be subject to Research Ethics Board review and approval. The following criteria should be useful in determining whether Research Ethics Board approval is required for information gathering procedures undertaken in the context of University administrative activities.

Criteria for Considering Applicability of Policy #1406

Information gathering activities *may constitute research requiring Research Ethics Board approval* when they meet one or more of the following characteristics:

- The primary aim of the data collection is to produce conceptual knowledge or expand existing published theory.
- There is an expectation to share the results or findings within a professional community through publication, articles, conference papers, etcetera. Participants may be manipulated or exposed to certain conditions without their awareness as a part of their research participation.
- It involves the active participation of "at-risk" participants such as children or other vulnerable populations, or involves the collection of personally sensitive information.
- If it is possible to identify individual respondents so that confidentiality

cannot be assured.

Information gathering procedures *may be classed as "in support of general administration of the University"* when they exhibit none of the above-noted characteristics, and,

- The primary aim of the activity is to diagnose problems, identify appropriate solutions, provide advice for operation management, or assess performance.
- The data collection is primarily designed to affect the operations of the University simply through affirming satisfaction with the status quo or leading to quality improvements.

Application for Research Ethics Board Approval

Administrators who are uncertain whether the information gathering procedures require Research Ethics Board Review should consult the Chair of the REB designated for review of administrative research under Policy 1406, i.e., REB 2 in the case of central administrative research, or the discipline-relevant REB in the case of unit-based administrative research.

If it is deemed that Research Ethics Board approval is required, University Policy #1406 must be followed with the required submissions completed from the perspective of the survey or research administrator serving as the "principal investigator", and the protocol submitted to the appropriate REB for review and approval.