

## Guidelines for Scholarship of Teaching and Learning as Research vs. Program Evaluation and Quality Improvement

### Overview

This document is intended to provide guidance to researchers and educators to determine whether their Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) activities constitute research (thus requiring REB review) or can be considered program evaluation and/or quality improvement which does not require REB review. This document also contains REB recommendations based on best practices. If these practices cannot be accommodated, researchers need to provide a full justification of the process they are suggesting.

Research, program evaluation and quality improvement all use systematic investigations that include gathering and analysing data. Examples of research can include, but are not limited to, projects funded for research purposes and graduate and undergraduate theses. Examples of program evaluation and quality improvement projects include curriculum review, and program and course innovation. Depending on the intentions, scope, data collected, and plans for dissemination, some projects may fall into one or more of these categories. This guide is intended to help distinguish between these types of activities in order to determine if a SoTL activity needs REB review.

Article 2.5 of the TCPS2 states that 'quality improvement studies, program evaluation activities, and performance reviews, or testing within normal educational requirements when used exclusively for assessment, management or improvement purposes, do not constitute research for the purposes of this Policy, and do not fall within the scope of REB review.' If the data collected is **later** considered for research purposes, it may be considered secondary use of information and may require REB review at that time. If the purpose from the outset is both program evaluation/quality improvement and research, then REB review and approval is required **before** any related activities can commence.

The REB has the final authority as to whether a project requires ethics review and approval. If you are working on these kinds of activities, please email [humanethics@umanitoba.ca](mailto:humanethics@umanitoba.ca) for a determination of REB requirements before commencing your project.

### Questions to Consider

1. Is the intent to add to an existing body of knowledge and/or be able to generalize results beyond one's own context?
  - If yes, REB review is required.
  - If no, and the intent is solely to improve teaching and learning practices within one's own context, then REB review may not be required.
2. Is the activity primarily designed to test a hypothesis, answer a specific question, or gain and share particular insights?
  - If yes, then this would be considered research under the TCPS2, and REB review is required.

3. Will the data be gathered as part of organizational operations at UM and have multiple purposes?
  - If yes, then REB review must be sought, and approval must occur before activities take place.
  - If no, and the only purpose is for organizational operations at UM with no additional purposes, then REB review and approval may not be required.
4. Is the primary or secondary purpose of the project to produce results that could be published in a research journal, thesis, or dissertation?
  - If yes, then this would be considered research under the TCPS2, and REB review and approval is required.
5. Who is the primary audience for dissemination purposes?
  - If the answer is other researchers, scholars, and those external to UM, then this would be considered research under the TCPS2, and REB review and approval is required.
  - If the answer is that results will only be shared within UM, then REB review may not be required.

## Ethical Considerations

### Dual Roles

Often times, SoTL occurs when instructors undertake research in the context of a course or program they are teaching. Article 7.4 of the TCPS2 discusses dual roles and conflicts of interest that researchers should be aware of. The dual role of instructor and researcher may create conflicts, undue influence, power imbalances, or coercion (both real and perceived) that could affect their relationship with the students as research participants. Balancing these dual roles is essential. To do this, the REB recommends the following best practices:

- a. It should be made clear to students which components of the course are research components and which components are required for course completion.
- b. It should be clear that students can participate in the classroom activities without having to consent to their data being used for research.
- c. It should be clear to students that consent is voluntary and that their decision regarding consent about a specific study will not affect their learning opportunities within the course, or their grades.
- d. The instructor/researcher can only obtain access to identifiable data once the course is over and the appeal period is complete. Anonymized/de-identified data may be accessible during the course as long as there is no way to identify participants.
- e. Research that occurs during course time must still contribute to student learning and align with course goals.
- f. Researchers should supply a letter of support from the academic head of the program of study demonstrating the value of the research activity (for the risk/benefit assessment), as well as their awareness of the potential research burden on students.
- g. The description of the research project should be included in the syllabus and submitted for review by the REB.

## Recruiting Participants

Recruiting students as research participants is complex and poses ethical concerns as the instructor is in a position of power over the students. Students may feel pressure to participate in the study and/or feel that there will be negative repercussions if they decide not to participate. Article 3.1 of the TCPS notes that REBs and researchers should be cognizant of situations where participants' voluntary consent may be undermined by perceptions of undue influence, coercion, or incentives. Balancing the dual roles is essential. To do this, the REB recommends the following best practices:

- a. An individual with no role in the class should be responsible for recruiting and data collection.
- b. The research team should not have access to students' email addresses or course work (e.g. assignments, test scores) including within UM Learn.
- c. Recruiting can occur through in-class presentations, general posts in the course website (i.e. UM Learn), distributing flyers in or after class, displaying posters in places students are likely to see etc. but it must be undertaken by someone other than the course instructor. Use of student's UM email addresses for recruiting is not appropriate as instructors are provided with these email addresses solely for the purpose of teaching the course.
- d. As the identity of research participants is confidential, information on which students are participating must be kept from the instructor/researcher and other class members so that no one feels pressured to participate.
- e. Recruiting information should explicitly state that participation in a specific study will not affect their learning opportunities within the course or their grades and that participants can withdraw at any time without consequence.

## Secondary Use of Data

Sometimes data are collected for more than one purpose as described in #3 above. In this case, REB review and approval is required from the outset. However, there may be times when a researcher wants to use data that was originally collected for a non-research purpose for research purposes. This is considered secondary use of information since that information was not originally intended for research and it does require REB review and approval. Depending on the type of data collected, consent from students from whom the data was originally gathered may also be required. This is because the data that was obtained was gathered solely for the purposes of course completion.