

Policy on the Use of Subject Pools in Human Subjects Research

WHAT IS A SUBJECT POOL?

A research subject pool is a registry of individuals who are interested in participating in research and agree to be contacted for potential participation in a study. Subject pools are often used as a research resource by departments and schools in academic settings to facilitate the recruitment of participants into human subjects research studies. Departments are responsible for the management of their subject pools including determining eligibility of volunteers and which researchers access the pool. The UCR Institutional Review Board (IRB) provides guidance and oversight of departmental subject pools, and reviews all research requesting subject pool access. Researchers wanting to use subject pools must submit a General IRB application form which details how the subject pool will be used and what the volunteers will be doing in the study. The IRB will review the application to ensure that the rights and welfare of the volunteers are protected.

Some departments may require students to be enrolled in a subject pool (e.g., Intro to Psychology) as part of the educational experience providing the students with familiarity in experimental techniques and/or instruments. However, student participation in any research study recruiting from the pool must be completely voluntary. Students should be provided with clear information on the organization of the subject pool by their instructors as well as conditions for fulfilling course requirements.

Additionally, some departments may utilize individuals from the community for their subject pools. These individuals may vary depending on the research topic for which the individuals are being recruited. The volunteers should be informed that enrollment in the pool is completely voluntary as well as enrollment in any research study. Volunteers should be provided with information on the types of studies associated with the pool, how to enroll in the pool, how their contact information will be shared, how to sign up for studies, and how to stop enrollment in the subject pool.

IRB REQUIREMENTS FOR RESEARCHERS USING SUBJECT POOLS

Researchers proposing human subjects research projects that utilize subject pools must undergo prospective UCR IRB review by submitting an application to the IRB. As part of the IRB application process, researchers must ensure that the following information and/or documents are included in their application submission:

Recruitment

- Identify which subject pool will be used and how participants will be recruited.
- Researchers should take into consideration the potential for undue influence when recruiting participants from subject pools. If recruiting their own students, researchers should ensure that students are aware that the decision to participate in the subject pool and/or a specific study will not influence their grades.
- Copies of recruitment material (e.g., flyers, scripts, text, etc.) must be included.

Compensation

- Studies may include compensation or incentives (e.g., extra credit or credit hours) for student subject pools. Detailed information on when and how payment will be provided should be included in the application as well as the informed consent.
- Information should include what will happen to compensation/incentives if participation is withdrawn at any time during the study (e.g., before, during or after study completion).

Alternative Assignment

- For student subject pools providing incentives (e.g., extra credit or credit hours), an alternative assignment must be provided for students who do not wish to participate in the research studies. This alternative assignment should require approximately equivalent time and effort commitment as the research participation to ensure that undue influence is not exerted onto the students to participate in the research rather than the alternative assignment.

Data Sharing

- For studies that include the potential for data sharing, information must be provided on how data will be stored, shared and used.
- Information should include what will happen to data if participation is withdrawn at any time during the study (e.g., before, during or after study completion).

Debriefing

- Debriefing process and forms may be required for specific subject pools (e.g., Intro to Psychology); researchers are encouraged to discuss with the department on specific language or text that may be required.
- The debriefing process is used to provide participants with pertinent information following completing a study. For studies that involve a concern for contamination of future participants, researchers may utilize a process where participants are debriefed after the entire study is completed.

ADDITIONAL REVIEW BY SUBJECT POOL DEPARTMENTS

An additional application process and review may be required from the department or school that manages the subject pool which may include proof of IRB approval. Researchers are encouraged to contact the department or school to ensure that all departmental/school requirements are included in the IRB application and relevant documents.

REQUIREMENTS FOR RESEARCHERS DEVELOPING SUBJECT POOLS

Researchers should consult with the IRB on any development plans for subject pools. Depending on the department, the use of the pool and the participants, requirements may vary.