Institutional Review Board Approval

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The role of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) is often forgotten when we gather data from surveys and focus groups. Approval is required when using the data gathered from these qualitative research methods to contribute to the profession's body of knowledge such as through publishing or presenting at a conference. In these instances approval must be sought before gathering the data.

Since 1974, when published research involves human subjects, IRB approval must be granted in advance. There are several historical cases involving abuse of human subjects in research, cases such as the Tuskeegee syphilis study in Alabama and Stanley Millgram's famous obedience study are just two. In those studies, informed consent was absent, and subjects were not informed of the potential negative effects of participation. Some sets of existing data, such as historical student records, make obtaining consent difficult or impossible. In instances where the research is only for internal or institutional use IRB review and approval would not be necessary. If there is a future possibility that any of the internal data collected is to be dispersed outside of the institution the project would need approval.

Research done through virtual reality, i.e. the Internet or email, or from the use of oral histories must also have approval. The critical point is whether there is participation of human subjects. Researching each institution's IRB Website will give researchers the information and resources needed to begin the application process. Also, do not hesitate to contact the IRB experts on your campus to assist you.

Failure to obtain approval for research involving human subjects can result in serious consequences. The research can be shut down and the University could lose federal funding. The best approach is to error on the side of caution and submit an application for any planned research. The IRB will determine whether it is needed or not.

References

Mississippi State University Office of Regulatory Compliance website http://www.orc.msstate.edu/irb/ and Training Manual http://www.orc.msstate.edu/irb/documents/irbinvmanual.pdf Retrieved March 12, 2009.

United States Department of Health and Humans Services, Office for Human Reasearch Protections. http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/ Retrieved March 14, 2009