



## **Guidance for class projects, independent studies, capstone projects and theses**

Whitworth University charges its Institutional Review Board to review all research projects involving human subjects that are conducted under the auspices of the University. What should and should not be recognized as research can be difficult to discern in some contexts. These include course “research projects discern in some contexts. These include course “research projects” and similar assignments in academic courses taught by Whitworth faculty. The IRB cannot give retrospective approval to a project that includes research with human subjects.

**Definition of Research:** The Federal government (DHHS) defines research as “a systematic investigation designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge,” Such investigations are routinely undertaken by faculty and students under direct supervision of faculty; they may also be undertaken by staff.

**Definition of generalizable knowledge:** An investigation *contributes to generalizable knowledge* if a report on its questions, procedures and/or findings is made public. Publication may involve an oral presentation such as a lecture or conference talk, a written presentation such as a published research article, scholarly book, conference poster, internet posting or any other display that is made available to persons beyond the University. All masters’ theses with human subjects contribute to generalizable knowledge because they are published and deposited in the University library.

**Definition of human subjects:** *Human subject* means a living individual about whom an investigator (whether professional or student) conducting research obtains (1) Data through intervention or interaction with the individual, or (2) Identifiable private information about an individual.

**Class projects:** The primary goal of class projects and independent studies is to provide students with experiential learning in research methods and the practice of inquiry; there is no intent to contribute to generalizable knowledge. However, some such projects, particularly capstone and research methods courses, have as an additional goal, the intent of contributing to generalizable knowledge, for example when students present a project from a class assignment or independent study at SIRC or a disciplinary conference. The University considers such projects as constituting research with human subjects and course instructors and/or students must submit a protocol to the IRB before any data are collected or experiments run. If a class project or independent study has not received IRB approval, the results of the assignment cannot be shared beyond members of the University.

**Responsibility of course instructors:** Course instructors are responsible for determining whether a project qualifies as research involving human subjects and therefore requires prior IRB review. The IRB cannot provide after-the-fact review. An additional benefit of having your students apply to the IRB is that it provides an educational element and prepares them for situations that may occur in graduate school.

