

Guidance for class projects, independent studies and honors projects

Bowdoin College charges its Institutional Review Board to review all research involving human subjects that is conducted under the auspices of the College.

Per the Department of Health and Human Services, *research* is defined as “a systematic investigation designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge.”¹ Such investigations are routinely undertaken by faculty and by students under direct faculty supervision; they may also be undertaken by College staff or by others who are formally affiliated with the College.

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 College. All honors projects contribute to generalizable knowledge because they are published and deposited in the Bowdoin College libraries.

Research is designated *human subjects research* if it involves living individuals with whom you interact or intervene or if it involves the recording of private behavior of people who could be individually identifiable. [\[see Chart 1 for what constitutes human subjects research\]](#)

Faculty research activities, whether conducted individually or collaboratively and including collaborations with students, usually are clearly identifiable as research. However, what should and should not be recognized as research can be difficult to discern in some contexts. These include course "research projects" and similar assignments in academic courses taught by Bowdoin faculty.

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 have as an additional goal, the intent of contributing to generalizable knowledge within a discipline. The College considers such projects as constituting research 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 College.

Course instructors are responsible for determining whether a project qualifies as research involving human subjects and, therefore, requires prior IRB review. Instructors and students must be aware that IRB approval cannot be granted retroactively.

Class projects/assignments that do not qualify as research, or that qualify as research but do not involve human subjects, do not require IRB approval and should not be submitted for review.

¹ Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Title 45 Public Welfare, Department of Health and Human Services, Part 46.102 (d) Protection of Human Services.

Instructors who assign a class project that involves studying human subjects but is not intended for publication are encouraged to engage their students in a discussion of the ethics of human subjects research as appropriate to their discipline and the methodology employed in the project. Students and instructors may find [human subjects research training](#) a helpful starting point for discussing research ethics.