

In the words of OHRP, “Publishing something does not make it research and not publishing something does not make it non-research activity”. Instead, researchers should ask themselves why they are conducting the activities. What is their motivation? Is it to obtain knowledge that can be used to understand people or contexts beyond those directly studied? If so, it is likely designed to contribute to generalizable knowledge.

There are, however, projects that can resemble research in a lot of ways, but that are not designed to contribute to generalizable knowledge. Some examples follow:

- **A quality assurance/quality improvement/organizational effectiveness study** where the **intent** is to assess, improve, or develop programs or services for a specific organization rather than draw conclusions about programs or services of a particular type would not be considered as contributing to generalizable knowledge.
- **An oral history or journalistic piece** that is limited to documenting or reporting on specific people, events, situations, policies, institutions, or systems without the intent to form hypotheses, draw conclusions, or generalize their observations to new people or contexts would not be considered as contributing to generalizable knowledge. In contrast, an oral history or journalistic piece that intends to draw broad conclusions about people, events, situations, policies, institutions, or systems would be subject to IRB review.
- **Classes, independent studies, and honors projects** may involve activities that resemble research (e.g., hypothesis generation, data collection, analysis). If these activities are being conducted for training purposes only, they would not be subject to IRB review and oversight. However, even in these situations we strongly recommend that faculty provide their students with training in the ethical conduct of human subjects research (e.g., CITI), carefully review and oversee student activities, and ensure that any data collected is deleted at the completion of the project. In some situations, activities carried out for a class, independent study, or honors project have a dual purpose: 1) to train students and 2) to obtain knowledge that can be used to understand people or contexts beyond those directly studied. When this is true, these projects would be subject to IRB review and oversight.

If you are unsure if your planned activity is designed to contribute to generalizable knowledge, please reach out to us at irb@bowdoin.edu. We would be happy to discuss it with you.