SoTL Research & Institutional Review Board (IRB) Considerations: Frequently Asked Questions
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What are common errors or weaknesses in SoTL IRB protocols as noted by IRB Chair/Staff?

- ***Lack of Clarity*:** Your SoTL IRB protocols should clearly describe all aspects of the research project being proposed. Procedures and methods must be described in sufficient detail to allow reviewers an accurate and full view of your SoTL research project. Specific attention should be paid to thorough explanations of participant recruitment, confidentiality of data, risks, and processes for obtaining informed consent.
- ***Inadequate Risk Identification and/or Benefit Explanation***: In human subjects research, including SoTL research, there is rarely a case where there are no potential risks to participants. All risks, including threats to confidentiality/anonymity, to emotional or social harm, etc. must be clearly identified and explained. Additionally, if you are researching current students, a thorough explanation of how you will mitigate the threat of coercion is necessary. You should consider current and future threats for participants. In addition, you should make clear all actual and probable benefits (clearly distinguishing the two) to the student participant and class or other groups of students. Discussion of risks and benefits must be included in response to relevant questions on the protocol AND in the actual informed consent statement and procedures.

What processes and procedures minimize the risk of coercion of students to participate in SoTL research?

- You, as SoTL researcher, should refrain from data review and analysis until after your instructor, employer, and/or advisor involvement with student participants comes to an end.
- You should recruit a colleague not involved in the research project to obtain informed consent you're your student participants.
- Any compensation you offer student participants, if necessary, should not be so great that it is coercive and should not harm students who choose not to participate. In SoTL work this often includes that students who choose not to be in your SoTL study must also have the opportunity for any extra credit or other incentive via another mechanism if there is an incentive to participate.

What processes and procedures minimize threats to confidentiality and/or anonymity?

- Whenever possible, you should gather anonymous data. If data cannot be anonymous, keep it confidential. If neither is possible, methodologically, explain/justify why in the protocol.
- You must consider whether data could be attributed to an individual student and, if so, indicate in the protocol whether participant responses could lead to issues with reputation/future employability, etc. (identify these as possible risks).
- If the data you are collecting will not be anonymous or confidential, and/or there are risks of harm from a breach of confidentiality or anonymity, these issues must be explicit in your informed consent statement.

Can students serve as participant-researchers in SoTL research projects?

Students can be participants and researchers within the same study when all risks to students and issues of confidentiality are clearly identified and delineated as part of the informed consent process, and when benefits outweigh the risks.

When should students be listed as co-PIs on an IRB Protocol?

Whether students are listed as co-PIs on an IRB protocol is dependent upon their "level of engagement" in the research project. Students who are 'engaged' in any of the following ways should be listed as co-PI on the SoTL

study: initiate the study, come into contact with participants, recruit participants, gain informed consent from participants, collect data, or have access to identifiable data or data sets. Students who are involved in data analysis with no threats to participant confidentiality do not need to be listed as co-PIs for a project. Students who are listed as co-PIs on your SoTL IRB protocol do not have to complete full CITI training but must complete at least the student CITI training.

Are there circumstances that would preclude the need for an IRB Protocol for a SoTL research project?
It is generally best for you to write an IRB protocol for all SoTL research and let your Department IRB representative decide what level of review (exempt, expedited, full) is appropriate. There may be a few situations where a protocol is not needed; you should consult with your Department representative about this. The decision flow charts at www.hhs.gov/ohrp/policy/checklists/decisioncharts.html are to help IRB members and researchers make such decisions.

What other resources exist to assist in the preparation of an IRB protocol for a SoTL project?

- Web pages on ISU RSP pages (research.illinoisstate.edu/ethics/human) including 'Tips on Informed Consent' (research.illinoisstate.edu/ethics/human/informed_consent)
- Resources and links on ISU SoTL Research and Human Subjects web page (sotl.illinoisstate.edu/resources/research)
- SoTL and IRB workshops on campus provided on an occasional basis
- Consulting/advice from the Cross Chair and/or SoTL Scholar-Mentors and/or your IRB department rep