Tips for Content Areas of SoTL IRB Protocols
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Some of the key issues you must address in your IRB protocol include:

- Possible risks to participants
- Possible benefits to participants
- Protection of confidentiality and/or anonymity
- Avoiding coercion or perceived coercion in participation
- Accurate and detailed informed consent statement/procedures

Below, we briefly elaborate on these issues as they relate to SoTL studies with students as research subjects. Every SoTL study is different and this is not an exhaustive list of issues or specific examples, but this may assist you in thinking through these aspects of your IRB protocol.

Possible risks to participants

- Embarrassment, lowered self esteem, or other social or psychological harm
- Violation of confidentiality of their responses (this can be a problem in various methods but especially focus groups)
- Harm to learning or success or grade in a course or other learning context (this may especially be an issue in experiments or quasi-experiments)
- Denial of access to an opportunity given to other students (this may especially be an issue in experiments or quasi-experiments)
- Future harm to progress in higher education or career, etc.
- Future harm to reputation

Possible benefits to participants and more generally

- Increasing metacognition and reflection about own learning
- Possible increases in learning or development of course/program content or skills
- Possible enhancement of other, general skills such as team work or communication
- Providing opportunities that could improve competitiveness for graduate school or jobs
- Improve the program or curriculum or other department or program level outcomes
- Contribute to the body of knowledge in this area
- Increase in knowledge of research and research processes
- Increase in engagement and/or interest in course content

Protection of confidentiality

- If data can be collected anonymously, do so..

- If not, protect confidentiality by avoiding methods such as focus groups that threaten confidentiality (if possible). If you use focus groups, clearly state risks to confidentiality in your IRB protocol and how you will minimize those.
- Use 'formula' (e.g., month born in numerical form, first letter mother's maiden name, first 2 numbers in home street address) for participant identity codes rather than keeping a list or participant code numbers.
- Keep data 'blind' from student researchers or research colleagues who know student participants or use others to code data.
- In your informed consent process and form, be explicit and accurate in describing to what extent and how confidentiality will be protected.
- If data will not be anonymous or confidential, that is, student responses can be identified, explain why this is necessary, discuss associated risk and how you will reduce these risks and/or how they are balanced by benefits.
- Be clear as to who has access to data, how and where it will be kept and destroyed.

<u>Avoiding coercion or perceived coercion in participation</u>

- Have a colleague who is not an instructor, adviser, or supervisor of student participants give informed consent and recruit participants.
- Do not access or analyze data until the course is over and grades turned in and/or after you, the researcher, have no power (adviser, teacher, employer, etc.) over the student participants.
- Any incentives to participate (money, food, extra credit, prizes) should not be so large as to be coercive.
- Any incentives such as extra credit that affect grade, learning, etc. must be offered in exchange for another task to those who do not wish to participate in the SoTL study.

<u>Accurate and detailed informed consent statement/procedures</u>

- See the other links on this web page about informed consent as well as those on the Research and Sponsored Programs Web page.
- Use Appendix A of the IRB Protocol as your check list.
- Be specific and accurate in describing risk, benefits, privacy, effort, time, tasks, voluntary nature, etc.