

FORUM ON EDUCATION ABROAD
Guidelines for Undergraduate Research Abroad

Introduction

In offering opportunities for undergraduate research abroad, institutions and organizations embrace the formative and transformative power of undergraduate research abroad to develop discipline-specific knowledge, language skills, a deeper engagement with the local culture, and a first-hand understanding of the fundamentals of research. Undergraduate research abroad, whether or not academic credit is sought, occurs in a variety of configurations, from projects sparked by in-class assignments on site, to projects that are designed on the home campus, carried out abroad, and continued after return to the home campus. Undergraduate students conduct research abroad in all academic disciplines throughout the social sciences, engineering, natural sciences, arts, and humanities.

Undergraduate research abroad shares the same best practices as research in the home campus setting. However, by its nature the research setting abroad presents an additional set of concerns and considerations, beyond those of the typical education abroad learning experience, and different from the on-campus research setting. As an example, students who conduct research while abroad, and the programs and faculty sponsoring them, must observe the laws and practices of their host cultures, and conform to the ethical norms of the relevant disciplines, and of the host communities.

For this reason, institutions and independent education abroad organizations should:

- Articulate specific objectives for undergraduate research abroad;
- Delineate clear policy and procedural guidelines for undergraduate research abroad for students, faculty and on-site faculty and experts;
- Maintain resources adequate to support this research; and
- Provide clear, consistent direction on research ethics in the areas of data collection, human subject research, informed consent, confidentiality in preparation of and during the proposed research,
- Clarify intellectual property issues, such as ownership, electronic distribution, and possible future use or publication of the research results.

The guidelines below have been developed to support undergraduate research abroad and to ensure that the research experience follows best practices of education abroad and of disciplinary research. These guidelines should not take the place of guidelines set by home institutions and organizations. In all cases, research should defer to guidelines established by specific disciplines. The word 'faculty' is used here in its broadest meaning, and encompasses all types of teachers and instructors, whether or not they are specifically called a faculty member in their position.

1. Objectives of Undergraduate Research

Education abroad organizations should have stated objectives that frame the role of research abroad in the context of their academic programming and as appropriate to the organization's overall mission and goals. Considerations for establishing objectives include:

- a. Does the undergraduate research abroad support and increase disciplinary knowledge, language skills (where applicable), engagement with the local community, and a hands-on understanding of the fundamentals of research design, methodology and analysis?
- b. Does the undergraduate research abroad observe, recognize, and respect local culture, ethical norms, and value systems?
- c. Is the research undertaken abroad integrated into the student's overall academic career, including prior and intended subsequent coursework and/or graduate study?
- d. Do the organization's research objectives engage the intellectual resources of its faculty and local experts such that the research creates significant collaborative opportunities for students, faculty and local experts?
- e. Are there mechanisms to help students link the research experience to the intellectual life of their home institution? (E.g. conferring academic credit for the research abroad; fostering collaboration

between the student and home institution faculty, and between home faculty and on-site/ program faculty and experts?)

- f. What impact might the students conducting research have on their host community-before, during and following the research?

2. Research Guidelines for Students

Organizations should have a clear set of policies and procedures to guide students as they develop research proposals, design research, and conduct the research. These guidelines should consider:

- a. Guidelines for students should define essential requirements for students' academic and personal eligibility, academic responsibilities, pre-program preparation, and approval processes.
- b. In the research design and proposal stage, organizations should ensure that students consider: expected outcomes in terms of the timeframe of the research experience abroad; human, financial and material resources/expenditures required; the cultural and linguistic challenges associated with navigating the host setting; the assessment requirements, such as the appropriate follow-up evaluation of research outcomes.
- c. Review and approval processes for research proposals, including an Institutional Review Board (IRB) timeline for approval, should be clearly articulated, and reviewers should have the appropriate knowledge to address discipline-specific issues.
- d. Assessment and grading procedures should be clearly articulated for credit-bearing research projects prior to the commencement of the research.
- e. Academic policies specify whether research proposals are expected to apply directly to the student's declared major or concentration or to other areas of study or categories in the student's degree plan.
- f. On site research guides or mentors who are knowledgeable about the host community, and who have been vetted by the credit-conferring entity, are assigned to assist the student with identifying resources, adhering to local norms, and respecting local value systems.
- g. The organization encourages both on-campus and on-site faculty mentorship of given research projects in order to maximize the level of academic support provided throughout the research experience.

3. Guidelines for Faculty, Advisors and Program Administrators Working with Undergraduate Research Abroad

Institutions/organizations should have clear guidelines for faculty, advisors, program administrators, research mentors and experts working with students in research abroad. These guidelines should consider:

- a. Qualifications and eligibility for all staff, faculty and experts supervising and leading undergraduate research abroad;
- b. Required training and orientation for all staff and experts supervising and leading undergraduate research abroad, relating both to the research and to administration of a program abroad, including training in IRB policies and research ethics;
- c. Clearly delineated responsibilities related to the administration of the program abroad;
- d. Policies on use of facilities, intellectual property, and the fair use of research results;
- e. Requirements for assessment of research and for program evaluation, and processes that reflect on the impact of research abroad on undergraduate students;
- f. Mechanisms to facilitate communication between the program staff and faculty, student researchers, faculty mentors at the student's home institution, and supervisors/counterparts on-site throughout the research;
- g. Institutional capacity, including human, financial and material resources, must be adequate to ensure student support throughout the process of undergraduate research abroad: from initial enquiry, to research design, implementation on site, and re-entry to the campus community;
- h. A means to address the possibility of mismatched student-supervisor assignments;
- i. Legal compliance matters appropriate to the local setting will be addressed prior to the commencement of any research project.

4. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) Structure and Undergraduate Research Abroad

Research involving human subjects is regulated in the U.S. by federal regulation, adopted by seventeen federal agencies, and known as the Common Rule, (Title 45 Code of Federal Regulations Part 46 [43CFR46]). These regulations provide for basic protections of human subjects of research. Many institutions and organizations have an Institutional Review Board (IRB) in place, and a process by which this Board reviews projects and determines whether Common Rule requirements are satisfied.

The student researcher has the primary responsibility for determining whether the subjects will be exposed to a risk of harm and IRB approval is fundamentally the researcher's responsibility to obtain. However, undergraduates, particularly those new to research, may not be aware of these regulations. As teachers and mentors, responsibility is shared by all involved in the research, including faculty, home campus and program provider organizations, to ensure that the rights of human subjects are protected.

References to IRB policies occur throughout these guidelines. Specifically restated here:

- a. Any institution or organization offering research options including human subject research has an obligation to be aware of the regulations of the Common Rule, whether or not the institution is based in the U.S.
- b. Faculty and staff working with undergraduate research abroad should be trained in Common Rule and other IRB principles.
- c. Home institutions should have a clear policy on whether the home institution's IRB or that of the program providing organization will review research proposals, and which review process decision it will accept. Further, the home institution should be clear whether or not it will accept credit for human subject research conducted without appropriate IRB approval.
- d. When approving or affiliating with external programs, institutions should ensure that any course work involving human subject research meets their institutional standards.
- e. Where organizational structures or in-country regulations do not require IRB approval, a parallel process, in keeping with the Common Rule, should be instituted.
- f. When working with exchange partner universities, institutions should review in-country standards for human subject research, how they relate to the institution's own policies and the Common Rule, and have clear guidelines for students, faculty and staff about whose research policies take precedence.
- g. Schools of Record, which grant credit for education abroad programs, should ensure that where applicable, Common Rule and IRB principles are met in courses they accredit.
- h. The home institution or program ensures that appropriate IRB procedures are followed where applicable, and that all students have obtained clearance from their relevant IRB.

5. Health, Safety, and Risk Management

The same procedures and policies for health, safety and risk management established generally for education abroad apply to research in education abroad. In addition, the research context presents further considerations, including:

- a. Procedures and reviews to assess risk, and then to approve or deny student research projects, depending on the risk that student researchers will experience. Consideration of risk should include individual students' previous research abroad;
- b. A process to assess and/or affirm the safety of location, research facilities, equipment against standards approved by the institution/organization. These may be standards established by the institution/organization in the U.S., local governmental, technical or disciplinary standards, but they should be accepted by all partners in the research.;
- c. A process to assess and/or affirm the qualifications of on-site research guides, mentors, technicians, and other staff associated with the research; and
- d. Established reporting requirements for students' international and in-country travel plans and on-the-ground emergency response and or, if warranted, evacuation plans, associated with the sponsored or approved research.

6. Special Ethical Consideration for Undergraduate Research Abroad

The intention of the points below is to draw attention to specific considerations in the context of undergraduate research abroad. Particularly in the area of research ethics, precedence should be given to the ethical best practices and standards set by institutions and specific disciplines.

- A. Policies:** Organizations should adopt clear and consistent policies and procedures to ensure that students conduct their research responsibly within an ethical framework, most notably,

cultural context, data collection, human subject research, vulnerable populations, informed consent, and confidentiality. Not all of the points listed below are applicable to all types of research, but where applicable the program or organization should:

- a. Identify an applicable ethical framework for undergraduate research;
- b. Instruct students in the fundamentals of research ethics appropriate for their field of research; and
- c. Establish a review process to ensure students' compliance with the adopted ethical standards, either through the student's home institution, an off-campus review board, or a third party.

B. Cross-cultural Context: The organization recognizes the role and influence of cultural norms in the local communities in which they operate. These cultural norms include those surrounding gender, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, class, religion, citizenship, and language. This recognition should also be made clear to the student researcher through appropriate training for students.

- a. Research tools and methods are appropriate for local context/setting.
- b. Where relevant, on site faculty/experts guide students in interview and survey techniques appropriate to the cultural setting.
- c. Where relevant, the organization makes full disclosure to the community about who the student is and what s/he is researching.
- d. Situations that present a conflict of interest for the organization, the student, and/or the community involved in the research are avoided.
- e. Power relationships between or among community members are taken into consideration in the design and implementation of the project.
- f. There is a developed process for assessment of the validity of responses from informants and/or on surveys.
- g. Careful consideration is taken in the treatment of information received from informants, as local norms may differ considerably from accepted practice in a U.S. university.
- h. The research is planned with appropriate community participation, including their receipt of the research results, where relevant.

C. Confidentiality: The organization develops guidelines and holds its staff and students responsible regarding the protection of privacy rights and the confidentiality of the people with whom they work.

- a. There is a full commitment by the organization and the student to maintain the anonymity of informants, if necessary and appropriate.
- b. Translators are appropriately selected and trained for linguistic skills in addition to their demonstrated commitment to principles of confidentiality.
- c. There are adequate provisions to protect the privacy of subjects/informants and to maintain confidentiality of data and images including photography, video, and voice recording.
- d. The research plan has adequate provisions for monitoring the data collection to ensure the safety of subjects/informants.
- e. Where appropriate, research design ensures confidentiality of data, both in the field and afterwards.

D. Data Collection and Informed Consent: The organization ensures that the student researcher is trained in data collection, including the process of obtaining the informed consent of all human subjects who participate in research. Wherever possible (or required) the student researcher will submit the research proposal to the appropriate IRB which will review the proposal and ensure adherence to basic standards of data collection.

- a. The student researcher is trained in the appropriate methodology of data collection. This may include, for example: ethnography, participant observation; in-depth or semi-structured interviewing; design and use of surveys and/or focus groups. Faculty mentors should be involved in the design of student research projects to ensure appropriate methodology for these projects.
- b. The student researcher is trained in preparing written materials that explain the project to research subjects prior to their participation, the objectives of the research, the procedures to be followed, and potential risks and benefits.
- c. When the human subject of research is likely to be vulnerable to coercion or undue influence, additional safeguards are included in the study to protect the rights and welfare of these subjects.
- d. The accuracy of data collected is the responsibility of the student, rather than the translator or a research assistant.
- e. The organization ensures that research that exposes human subjects to unnecessary risk in any way is not allowed.
- f. The organization establishes a clear policy about research involving children and ensures that informed consent is obtained from children in addition to permission from the child's parent or school

Resources

Common Rule (Title 45 Code of Federal Regulations Part 46 [43CFR46])

<http://www.hhs.gov/ohrp/humansubjects/commonrule/index.html>

American Anthropological Association

<http://www.aaanet.org/issues/policy-advocacy/upload/AAA-Ethics-Code-2009.pdf>

Dickinson College <http://www.dickinson.edu/academics/resources/institutional-review-board/content/Frequently-Asked-Questions/>

Oral History Association

<http://www.oralhistory.org/about/do-oral-history/oral-history-and-irb-review/>

School for International Training

IRB policies

http://www.sit.edu/SSA_Other_documents/human_subjects_policy.pdf

Protection of Human Subjects - Vulnerable Populations, Institutional Review Boards, Informed Consent - Research, Participants, Irb, and Federal - StateUniversity.com

<http://education.stateuniversity.com/pages/2073/Human-Subjects-Protection.html#ixzz2H7i7DLQG>