

The University of Melbourne School of Behavioural Science

Research Experience Program (REP) Policy For Students of First Year Psychology Subjects

1. Introduction

The Research Experience Program (REP) in the School of Behavioural Science has a number of aims related to the good ethical conduct of research in a discipline where empirical investigations are the primary means of advancing the understanding of human behaviour and its development.

- For students in their first year of psychological studies the program aims to extend their understanding of the place of empirical research in psychological knowledge through experience as a participant in research projects being undertaken by academic staff, honours students, and postgraduate students ;
- For postgraduate students, honours students, and academic researchers, the program provides an avenue to recruit samples of research participants. For postgraduate research and Honours students this provides supervised training in research recruitment and administrative procedures.
- For the School of Behavioural Science itself, the program ensures that high standards are maintained in the conduct of research. Access to the Research Experience Program provides an opportunity for advanced students to receive a solid grounding in appropriate methodological and ethical procedures. Supervisors are able to closely monitor the research and the School has monitoring procedures firmly in place.

The Research Experience Program has been designed to provide benefits for both undergraduate student participants and researchers. The organization and procedures of the Research Experience Program have been examined and revised by the School and by the University of Melbourne's Behavioural and Social Sciences Human Ethics Sub-committee (BSS-HESC) process from time to time, and the current set of guidelines and rules are designed to ensure maximum benefit and protection for all participants.

The Research Experience Program is overseen and monitored by Chair of the Human Ethics Advisory Group (HEAG) in the School, who is independent of both the administration and the convening of 1st year psychology subjects. The Chair of the HEAG also acts as Convenor of the Research Experience Program and is the person whom 1st year students should contact if they choose to not participate in the program and instead wish to undertake an alternative assignment (see section 3 below for further details about this alternative arrangement).

Within the School of Behavioural Science there is a diverse set of research interests that are currently being pursued by staff and postgraduate students. Many of the research programs within the School are recognized internationally and are contributing to contemporary psychological knowledge and understanding.

No proper training in psychology and its ethical underpinnings is complete without an understanding of the perspective of the research participant. Providing beginning students with the opportunity to participate in 'real' research projects gives them access to aspects of the research process that might not be obvious from their learning in lectures and laboratory classes. For example, the program gives students access to information about theory testing, and to different ways of asking people questions and of analysing data. It also reinforces in first year students the importance of freely consenting to participate in research and the option of withdrawing that consent, together with the importance of being debriefed about the aims and rationale of the research they participated in and any possible adverse consequences that may arise after their participation.

The program provides first year students with a "participant's eye view" of how research should be conducted under carefully controlled and monitored conditions. Students experience the way contemporary psychological research respects the privacy and integrity of participants. They are given (i) a choice of projects from a large set, (ii) appropriate information for choosing, relevant information to give their informed consent, and (iii) appropriate follow-up information and feedback. In short, the program models the university's ethical guidelines and standards in a practical way for first year students to experience and learn from.

There are well-advertised guidelines to allow students to decline to participate in the program or to withdraw from individual studies without prejudice of their academic progress. Attached is a copy of the relevant entries in the subject manual. (Attachment No. 1).

Principles of informed consent, confidentiality, and privacy are observed in the operation of the program. Specifically, in addition to the information contained in Plain Language Statements and Debriefing documents, researchers are expected to make their findings available to students in a way that gives them insight into the research questions, methodology, results and conclusions. Researchers contract to provide summary feedback to all participants in the Learning Management System (LMS) for first year subjects.

2. How the Research Experience Program Works

2.1 Level of Participation:

Each student enrolled in the two first year psychology subjects is asked to undertake 3 hours of research participation. There are two semester long subjects: *Mind, Brain and Behaviour 1* (800 001) is offered in Semester I, and *Mind, Brain and Behaviour 2* (800 002) in Semester II. Thus, over a full year, each student has 6 research participation hours to engage in as a hurdle requirement.

Because the REP emphasises the importance of a range of research experiences, participating students are required to divide their participation time between projects involving standardized questionnaires (e.g., self-report personality inventories) and projects involving non-questionnaire activities (e.g., reaction time studies using computers). Within the three hours, students need to choose one hour of questionnaire (Q) and one hour of non-questionnaire (NQ) projects. The remaining hour can be either Q or NQ, according to the student's choice.

No individual project is compulsory for any 1st year student. Students are provided with a short description of the project, through an advertisement approved by the School of Behavioural Science Human Ethics Advisory Group (HEAG) and by the BSS-HESC, on which to base their choice.

2.2 Student Choice of Projects:

Approved projects are advertised on a special noticeboard located on the 10th floor of the Redmond Barry Building and on the first year psychology site within the University of Melbourne's Learning Management System (LMS) for the 1st year subject. No other advertisements or enticements are permitted in lecture or laboratory classes. Only the HESC-approved advertisement may be used for recruitment purposes.

The restriction of research advertisements to a specific place (physical and computerised) means that all projects are carefully vetted against HESC approvals, and that the advertisements are checked for their suitability.

Projects are advertised from the first day of the semester, so that it is possible for students to have this part of their course commitment completed before pressure of other assignments builds up later in the semester. Each semester numbers of students avail themselves of this opportunity. Where students have difficulty attending during the daytime they are able to contact researchers and arrange participation times to suit their situations.

Students sign-up for a specific data collection session in the projects they have chosen. Each student keeps a Research Experience Program Record Sheet that is signed by the researcher on completion of the data collection session. After completing 3 hours participation students submit the record sheet and are credited with meeting this subject requirement.

3. Procedures for Students Declining to Participate:

At the beginning of each semester students who have concerns about participating in the Research Experience Program are encouraged to meet with the Convenor of the Research Participation Program¹ and to discuss these concerns. This provision is drawn to students' attention in the first lecture in Orientation Week, in the printed Manual distributed to all first year students, in an email sent out to students in the first week of the semester, and in the first laboratory class where tutors go through some of the course requirements in detail. If a 1st year student does not wish to participate in the Research Experience Program, then an alternative assignment is provided by the Convenor, which deals with some aspect of research participation and ethical issues in psychological research.

4. Procedure for Researchers using the Research Experience Program

First year students doing the REP engage in research being undertaken by all researchers who are staff members of the School of Behavioural Science. Honours and postgraduate research students may also access the REP if an academic member of staff specifically accepts responsibility for the project as Principal Investigator.

Information about the Research Experience Program is available for potential users on the School web site (in the 1st year webpage and on the Ethics webpage) and is also provided in the 1st Year Manual that is given to each student at the start of each semester.

¹ See the end of this document for contact details of this person.

Application to conduct a study is made to the Convenor of the Research Experience Program after the project has been approved by the HESC. Each researcher is required to provide a copy of their proposed advertisement (see an example of REP advertisements in Attachment No. 2) and their debriefing statement.

A member of the School's professional staff checks the details of the application and the ethics approval before forwarding the application to the Convenor. The Convenor also checks that the project has received ethics committee approval (HESC, or HEAG for Minimal Risk applications). The advertisement and the debriefing statement are checked, and if satisfactory the project is approved to be posted on the noticeboards.

A limit of 100 participation hours *for each advertised project* in each semester is imposed (80 hours for an Honours project), to ensure equity of access, and to ensure a range of projects from which first year students may choose their three hours participation. Each academic or postgraduate student has access to 100 participation hours per semester (or 80 hours for a Honours student).

These two quota restrictions imply that:

:

- Each REP Advertisement can advertise for the equivalent of 100 hours at a maximum of REP allocation (or 80 if for an Honours project).
- This 100 hours can be made up solely of one researcher's allocation only, or it can comprise less than 100 hours for each of two or more researcher that come to 100 hours in total (e.g., Researcher A uses 60 hours of her allocation of 100 hours in one semester, and her PhD student uses 40 hours of his allocation in the same semester).
- This form of sharing enables the same researcher to access the REP for more than one research project, while ensuring that each project only uses 100 hours at a maximum.
- However, these restrictions can mean that a particular research project may be restricted to advertising for less than 100 hours, if all researchers between them do not have 100 REP hours left in total from their individual allocations.
- Any researchers' REP allocation hours cannot be traded or given to other researchers for their own project, if that researcher is not a member of the project (according to the Ethics form).

Researchers who wish to access more than 100 hours for a particular research project (or who do not have 100 hours left in total between them) may be offered further access to additional participants only after all initial requests by researchers have been met and exhausted.

In recent years there have been large numbers of projects offered and this provision has not been used.

5. *Special Issues*

- *Amount of time on individual projects.* To achieve variety across the 3 hours of participation, REP projects should involve no more than 2 hours participation time. Where projects require more than one hour of participation time a combination of methods is preferable (e.g., a questionnaire and a computer-based task or a physical manipulation task).
- *Risks to students.* Any risk to participants must be declared in the appropriate HESC Ethics Application form, and such risk will be carefully assessed by School's HEAG and by the

University BSS-HESC before approval is given for research project. In order for approval to be given, HEAG and BSS-HESC need to be assured that all risks have been minimised wherever possible, and that appropriate strategies are in place to deal with any adverse circumstances arising from such risks. High risk projects are not suitable for the REP and will not be approved by HEAG and BSS-HESC.

- *Confidentiality.* Projects of choice are a personal matter for each 1st year student. Confidentiality of procedures and data management are checked by the School HEAG and then the HESC committee.
- *Dependency issues.* Where the principal investigator in a research project is teaching in the 1st year course, the researchers are expected to provide the HESC and the student participant with a clear indication of how the researcher is dealing with dependency issues. This criterion applies to lecturers, and to tutors (tutors may not advertise or recruit in their own lab classes).

Any dependency issue needs to be explicitly stated in the Plain Language Statement provided to participants, with an explicit indication that students will not be penalised in any way either if they do not consent to participate or if they withdraw the participation after giving initial consent.

- *Withdrawal from a project.* The Plain Language Statement makes clear that participants have the right to withdraw without penalty, both before and after having signed up for a project. If any student withdraws his or her participation once a project has started, that student will still obtain the participation credit indicated in the Plain Language Statement.
- *Incentives.* Researchers are not permitted to offer further incentives to students (e.g., payment) unless there is a specific reason approved by the BSS-HESC.
- *Support.* In the occurrence of an adverse event during or after participation, the provision of support and/or counselling to student participants is the responsibility of the principal researcher in the project. If it is a honours or postgraduate student project, the responsible researcher is the supervisor of the student researcher.

Student researchers do not provide support or counselling to REP participants. If the REP participant wishes to complain about the project, s/he is directed to the HESC in the Plain Language Statement. Any other concern with the conduct and running of any research project by any 1st year student should be directed to the supervisor or to the REP Convenor if they involve administrative matters.

- *Referral.* The Plain Language Statement and/or Debriefing Statement must include contact information for referral in case a student may have concerns raised as a result of their participation. In the first instance, the supervisor (or staff member who is the principal investigator) will see the student and arrange a referral. If the project has clinical implications and the supervisor is not a clinician, the researchers are expected to give the name of a clinician who has agreed to see the student for referral purposes.

No research project will be approved for the REP without prior ethical approval being given by the Human Ethics Advisory Group and by the Behavioural and Social Sciences Human Ethics Subcommittee (or an alternative Subcommittee, if it is deemed more appropriate for the particular research being undertaken)

6. *Research Training for Potential Honours Student Researchers*

The fourth year of study in psychology includes a compulsory subject: 512-423 "Theories and Ethics in Psychology". In that subject, students are introduced to the theory and practice of ethical research and receive detailed instruction in these two areas (as well as practical instructions in completing Ethics Application forms). Students are given tutorials in HESC procedures and adequate opportunity to discuss the ethical issues involved in their own research and in research more generally.

7. *Monitoring the Operation of the Research Experience Program*

Students are encouraged to give feedback concerning the operation of the Research Experience Program through:

- *Staff-student liaison meetings.* Each semester a formal staff-student liaison meeting is held seeking student comment on how the course is progressing. Each of the laboratory classes (approx. 30 classes per semester) is invited to send a representative to the meeting. The Research Experience Program is discussed at these meetings.
- *Access to the 1st Year Convenor.* From the beginning of the semester it is stressed, both verbally and in the printed 1st Year Subject Manual, that any students who may have any concerns about the Research Experience Program to meet the 1st Year subject convenor and/or the Convenor of the Research Experience Program. .
The substance of the concerns raised with either convenor tend to be timing of projects and broken appointments. To address issues of timing students are encouraged to contact the researchers conducting the project (s) chosen and arrange a special session at a time convenient to them. This has worked well as researchers are generally keen to accommodate all potential participants.

If it happens that a researcher has not keep a scheduled appointment and a 1st year student has been left waiting, then the REP credit advertised for that study is given to the student for the time they have been inconvenienced. In practice, this occurs infrequently. However, if it does occur, then REP student should contact the Convenor of REP to inform her or him that it happened and to get the REP credit (after the incident has been investigated)

- *Laboratory classes.* Tutors who are taking the laboratory classes in 800-001 and 800-002 are encouraged to include discussion of the ethics of research participation when it is pertinent to the research methods issues being dealt with in their classes. This provides tutors with an opportunity to receive informal feedback on the current operation of the Research Experience Program and any problems being encountered by participants. Tutors have a briefing meeting with the 1st year subject convenor each week and any issues raised in their classes can be brought up in this forum, and then subsequently brought to the attention of the Convenor of the REP.

Dr Paul Dudgeon
Convenor of the Research Experience Program
Room 1213, Redmond Barry Building
University of Melbourne

dudgeon@unimelb.edu.au (03) 8344-4456