

## RRA Tips

### What the Reviewer looks for:

This document is intended to give guidance to students and faculty about the content of the RRA form and supporting materials. This is not intended as an exhaustive document, but intended to give insight into the research review application process.

**The reviewer does not typically review the research proposal.** Therefore, it is the responsibility of the student and the capstone instructor to provide enough information about the project in the RRA form and, if applicable, supporting documents. The reviewer should be able to say, yes, I know what the project is about, who the subjects will be, how they are selected, what methodology will be used, that all consent documents contain the appropriate elements of consent, and that the survey/interview questions are reasonable in terms of balancing risks and benefits. It is the responsibility of the reviewer to ask for clarification if the research cannot be understood and/or if elements are missing or materials should be revised.

The ultimate goal is to insure human subject protection. The reviewer will determine that nothing in the proposed project constitutes an unacceptable level of risk. Please note that these are administrative projects and typically the risks that need to be addressed have to do with anonymity issues. Students often want to ask for demographic information that is not needed or fail to realize that demographic questions are not appropriate for a small subject pool. Occasionally, topics and survey questions/interview questions have content that could distress the participants, such as PTSD, toxic leadership, sexual harassment, or workplace violence. The reviewer considers how the impact on a potential participant and make a judgment whether the questions are distressing. In cases where this determination is made, the review works with the student and faculty monitor to restructure questions. In extreme cases, approval cannot be granted and this is communicated. In cases where risk is identified, the IRB office may be consulted either for guidance or to seek a second opinion.

Assuming minimal risk, the reviewer may give recommendations to improve a research design, comment on question wording, and so forth. Egregious spelling errors may be identified.

| Application requirement  | What does the reviewer look for?   |
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| The student researcher describes the purpose of the research project | <p>The reviewer makes a determination that the project is appropriate for a degree in administration. The student researcher will need to articulate that there is an administrative component in the research. Guidance is provided in the Student Guide and seven typologies are suggested as frameworks for the research:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Hypothesis Testing</li> <li>2. Cost Benefit/Effectiveness Analysis</li> <li>3. Feasibility Study</li> <li>4. Policy Analysis</li> <li>5. Program Design</li> <li>6. Operations Research</li> <li>7. Program Evaluation</li> </ol>   |
| Source of the subject pool or human subjects data                    | <p>Has the student provided a signed permission letter (on letterhead) from the appropriate administrator which authorizes access to the subject pool or to the human subjects data?</p> <p>If the subject pool is a public source, has this been described and is it verifiable? For example, if the URL for an online directory is provided, confirm that public access is allowable. Otherwise, require a permission letter.</p>  |
| Number of subjects   | <p>This can be a real challenge in some student projects. In small organizations, the potential subject pool may be very small. The reviewer must compare demographic questions to the size of the subject pool. The number of responses under each demographic question is also a matter of concern. For example, if the demographic questions include gender, ethnicity, years of employee, and position, the combined responses to these questions could serve to identify individual participants. The reviewer should point this out and suggest remedies, such as eliminating demographic questions, reducing the number of selections for each demographic question, broadening ranges, or making responses less specific (generic titles, rather than specific titles). It is appropriate to probe whether demographics are really necessary to the student's data analysis or whether this was just interesting information to ask.</p> |
| Selection criteria   | <p>In an ideal world, there are unlimited participants available and subjects can be selected using a random number table or some sort of systematic approach. Also, ideally, subject groups (male/female, ethnicities) are fairly represented in the selected subject pool. Student researchers will typically use the entire available population, a convenience population, or a systematically selected (for example, every 3<sup>rd</sup> name on a list) subject pool. If unclear, the reviewer should ask the student to clarify the selection process, if any.</p>   |
| Relationship to subjects   | <p>This question is asked to determine if there needs to be any language in the consent documents about the relationship and for the reviewer to assess whether there is any potential for coercion (or the perception of coercion) in the research design. If subjects are co-workers or superiors, there are typically no issues. However, if the student researcher supervises some or</p>  |

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|   | <p>all of the research subjects, this should be clearly pointed out in the consent documents and subjects clearly informed that they can make the decision to participate or not to participate. Surveys that can be returned anonymously (and with no or few demographics) pose the least amount of issues. Face to face interviews do carry the potential for a perception of coercion on the part of the participant. The reviewer can certainly ask the student researcher to articulate how this possible perception will be alleviated. Other relationship issues are the coach/athlete relationship or the teacher/student relationship. Care should be taken in the consent document language and that the research design allows for anonymous return.</p>   |
| Overall description of subject pool/human subjects data | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Based on the proposed topic and review of survey and/or interview questions, is the subject pool appropriate? In other words, can the proposed participants be expected to answer the questions?</li> <li>2. Has the subject pool been adequately described?</li> <li>3. Has the student researcher provided enough information about human subjects data? (source, data recording sheet, how data will be de-identified, and so forth)</li> </ol>  |
| Describe the research methodology                       | <p>Has the researcher adequately described the researcher methodology? If surveys are planned, how will the survey be distributed and collected? If interviews are planned, where will the interviews take place, and are the interviews in person or by phone? If human subjects data is used, what is the source of the data, what part of the data will be used in the project, what is the process for collecting the data, and how will subject information be de-identified for use in the project? If subjects are underage, what are the procedures for insuring that the parental/guardian consent and the child assent are in place prior to the administration of the survey/interview.</p>  |
| Consent document  | <p>Is there a consent document for every planned methodology? In other words, is there a survey cover letter for the survey, a consent form for planned interviews, and so forth? Does the consent document follow the template? Typical elements of consent (includes items specific to MSA):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Student researcher identifies himself or herself as a CMU graduate student</li> <li>2. Purpose of study</li> <li>3. Criteria for participating (how selected)</li> <li>4. That participation is voluntary</li> <li>5. What is expected of the subject (complete the survey/participate in the interview)</li> <li>6. Instructions on returning the survey anonymously</li> <li>7. Time commitment</li> <li>8. Age disclaimer, if there is any possibility that the survey could go to someone under the age of 18.</li> <li>9. Compensation, if any</li> <li>10. Benefits (Offer to share project summary) and other benefits (shared with HR department, shared with CEO, etc)</li> <li>11. Survey link (or text placeholder) if an online survey is planned</li> </ol> |

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|                            | <p>12. Contact information for MSA program office (for anonymous complaints/concerns)</p> <p>13. Contact information for student researcher and faculty monitor (capstone instructor)</p>  |
| Survey/interview questions | <p>Review the survey/interview questions for the following:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. If instructions are provided, do the instructions match the instructions in the consent document?</li> <li>2. Potential for subjects to be identified (are there excessive demographics, too many response categories, etc.)</li> <li>3. Potential risk either because of the subject matter (violence in the workplace, drug abuse, domestic abuse)</li> <li>4. Risk because the subject is asked to comment on a supervisor. The reviewer should ascertain whether there are multiple supervisors, can responses be tracked back to individual participants, can responses be reworded, for example, “management”, rather than “my supervisor.”</li> </ol> |
| <b>Other issues</b>        |  |
| Underage subjects          | <p>MSA student researchers do not typically use underage subjects as research subjects. In the few cases that come up, the reviewer should provide guidance. Following the IRB templates, the student should develop a parental/guardian consent form and a child assent form. This can be a combined form. The student researcher should also articulate how the signed forms will be in place prior to the administration of the survey or interview. Survey or interview questions should be reviewed for appropriateness.</p>  |
| Social media               | <p>Student researchers will increasingly use social media as a means to distribute surveys. The reviewer needs to apply a test of reasonableness when reviewing applications. Many social media sites have groups and members can post surveys on the group sites.</p>   |
| Online surveys             | <p>Student researchers may state that they are using SurveyMonkey to distribute their survey. It is allowable for student researchers to pay for survey panels. If so, include a statement on the RRA form that you are using a paid survey panel. The fact of using an online survey system doesn't necessarily imply permission to use a subject pool. Students should be reminded that it is not appropriate to collect IP addresses.</p>   |

In order to assist student researchers, the *Student Guide to the MSA Capstone Project*, part 2, contains a variety of samples RRA forms, permission letters, cover letters, and sample text for the RRA form under a variety of scenarios. Templates are also found on the Capstone Guides and Research Approvals webpages.

*Student Guide to the MSA Capstone Project* <https://www.cmich.edu/colleges/ehs/MSA/Pages/Capstone-Resources.aspx>