

Departmental Human Subjects Review Guide for Sociology and Anthropology Majors

Dear Sociology/Anthropology Majors:

As you know, most of your projects for senior research are reviewed by the Departmental Review Committee (DRC). If you are a Special Major in Educational Studies and Sociology/Anthropology, your research project will be reviewed by the departmental review committee in Educational Studies.

Procedure

Prepare a draft of the application using this guide.

MAKE SURE TO PREPARE A DRAFT OF YOUR APPLICATION WELL IN ADVANCE OF THE DEPARTMENT'S DEADLINE TO ALLOW SUFFICIENT TIME FOR FEEDBACK AND REVISION. Your advisor must approve your application before you submit it to the DRC. It is common for there to be more than one round of revisions from your advisor before your application will be ready to submit to the DRC, so be sure to plan accordingly and allow time to receive multiple rounds of feedback prior to the deadline.

This guide contains each of the questions on the application, followed by explanations and guidance to help you compose your responses. In many cases, we have also included sample responses which you can use as templates to adapt and modify to fit the particularities of your proposed research. Please thoroughly read and follow this guide carefully so that the first draft you send to your advisor will be as strong as possible.

Once you have completed a draft, share it (send the application and all appendices such as recruitment and interview scripts **in a single document in Word format**) with your advisor to get feedback. Incorporate your advisor's feedback in a revised version and resubmit **to your advisor**. Once your advisor approves, submit your application file via email to Stacey Hogge, socanth@swarthmore.edu, with the naming convention, Last,First_DRC application, prior to the specified cutoff date for initial submissions.

Please note that your appendix must include recruitment scripts, informed consent form, survey questionnaires, and interview scripts if you intend to use them in your research. (You may also need several different sets of recruitment scripts/interview guides if you are working with several distinct populations. Similarly, if you will be conducting the consent process in a language other than English you must also include *both* the consent form in English and the language of presentation). We understand that interview questions and scripts may evolve over the course of your research, but the DRC nonetheless needs a substantial guide to review. Once you have received approval, you should consult with your advisor about whether changes in your script and the direction of your research are so substantive that they may require additional review by the DRC. (If you have not yet taken a methods course, please be sure to consult with your advisor about interviewing best practices and how to write effective interview scripts.)

Once your application has undergone initial review, you will receive the Word document with comments

and editing from the DRC in tracked changes. The email from the committee will contain directions on how to proceed. **It is important that you consult with your advisor on the revisions and how to best complete them. Be sure to consult your advisor and complete any suggested revisions and re-submit prior to the cut-off date for revised applications.** You may not start your research until you receive the final approval from the committee.

When you complete your senior research project, please include the following statement at the bottom of your title page (in the case of a written thesis) or in another similar location when presenting research in a different format: “An undergraduate research project produced in partial fulfillment of the educational requirements for a bachelor of arts degree in sociology and anthropology at Swarthmore College. Not intended for scholarly publication.”

I. Project Description

A: Describe the proposed research and its specific scientific or scholarly aims of the research project.

Be brief. Describe your project in 3-5 sentences. You should include a concise summary of your research topic, its main question(s), and its conceptual framing, as well as a brief discussion of methodology.

B: Summarize existing research and previous work that support the expectation of obtaining useful results without undue risk to the human participants.

This question asks whether anyone else has done a study like yours, and whether such research was carried out without undue risk to participants.

Please provide full citations to 2-3 studies relevant to your research that reveal that conducting the kind of research you propose (in a similar context) does not cause harm to human subjects. Be sure to pick sources that describe research that employed the same methodology(ies) you plan to use and be able to state that their research did not involve undue risk to their participants. If multiple studies are similar in focus and methods, you can group them together to describe the methods and state clearly that the research did not involve undue risk to participants. If the studies you choose employ different methods, you can offer a brief summary and description of the methods below each citation.

Example response:

“With regard to this methodology, several researchers have used interviews and/or digital ethnographic/participant observation research on YouTube without undue risk to the human participants.

1. Waldron, Janice. “YouTube, Fanvids, Forums, Vlogs, and Blogs: Informal Music Learning in a Convergent On- and Offline Music Community.” *International Journal of Music Education*, vol. 31, no. 1, 2013, pp. 91-105.

For this paper, Waldron conducted cyber ethnographic research, “blending the online ethnographic technique of participant interview with hidden participant observer.” In this case, that meant observing forum postings, chat room conversations, and YouTube videos without participating in them. Waldron also conducted interviews over Skype, forums, chats, vlogs, blogs, and email.

2. Lange, Patricia. *Thanks for Watching: An Anthropological Study of Video Sharing on YouTube*. Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2019.

For this book, part of Lange’s methodology included interviewing over 150 people who “engaged at various levels with video making and/or YouTube” and analyzing hundreds of YouTube videos.

3. Miller, Jordan F. "YouTube as a site of counternarratives to transnormativity." *Journal of homosexuality* vol. 66, no. 6, 2019, pp. 815-837.

For this paper, Miller conducted "over 60 hours of trans YouTube observation," which included watching hundreds of videos and noting information about their content and the channel to which they were posted (e.g. subscriber count). Miller also conducted interviews with six trans YouTubers over Skype."

C: Research Methods and Activities: Describe and identify all interactions and interventions with human subjects that are to be performed. Include where the research will take place and time required from each subject/participant.

Clearly discuss the methods you intend to use and be as **specific** as possible about all interactions with human subjects

- How would you recruit subjects? (If you plan to "reach out" to your subjects, tell the DRC how: through Facebook posts, phone calls, emails to listservs?)
- Do you plan to conduct interviews? A survey? Participant-observation? Other?
- How many subjects do you intend to interview?
- Where would the interviews take place? We recommend conducting interviews in public places like coffee shops (or the workplace, when appropriate).
- How long would the interview last?
- Etc.

Please also give us a sense of when you plan to begin and conclude your research with human subjects.

Sample response:

"Interviews with people who self-identify as Asians, Americans, or Asian Americans will be the only research that requires human interaction for my research project. Interviewees will be given the opportunity to choose a location for their interview to take place (coffee shop, library, their house, etc.). Interviews will be conducted for approximately 1 to 1.5 hours at places agreed upon by both myself and my interlocuter, or over a video chat service such as Zoom."

D: Describe the process for selecting participants in the study. Attach all recruitment materials to this application.

Clearly explain your criteria for selecting who to recruit to participate in the research and why. Note that, unless your research is focused on the study of classroom or other educational settings, one primary criteria for recruitment should be that participants must be 18 years of age or older.

Next, explain what process(es) you will engage in to recruit participants. Do not forget to attach a recruitment script(s) in an appendix. If you plan to use more than one recruitment method (for instance sending emails and posting a recruitment message to a Facebook group) be sure to include all recruitment scripts/materials/messages in the appendix. Note that if you need to go through any gatekeepers to get access to potential subjects (such as the moderators of a Facebook group), you need to submit the text of that email/message to the DRC for review as well.

Example response:

"I will be reaching out to artists who post "studio vlogs" or "small artist vlogs" on YouTube. The subscriber count of these YouTubers will range from a few thousand to nearly 300,000. I will be recruiting participants for this project through email. I will send one email asking for their voluntary participation and broadly outlining the goals of my research project. If they do not respond within one week, I will send a follow-up email. If they do not respond to these emails, I will stop contacting them. If I cannot find an email address for a potential interviewee, I will send them the same information in a direct message on Instagram. Recruitment materials in the appendix."

II. Description of Data

A: What type of data (interviews, surveys, audio recordings, etc.) will be collected?

Note: If you plan to collect visual data, please consider, in consultation with your advisor, the contexts in which and purposes for which you will be collecting it. This will determine whether you need to obtain informed consent, what procedures can help minimize risk to research subjects, and whether your work should become publicly available online.

Sample response:

“My research will involve conducting 5-8 interviews with [X type of participant]. In cases where participants consent to be recorded, I will audio record the interviews. I also plan to conduct participant observation [in X location/context/during X event]. I will record notes from observations in Word Documents.”

B: Will any identifiable data or coded data (e.g., data with participant ID numbers) where a master list (linking ID numbers to participants names/identities) to the codes exists, be stored for future use or entered into an existing database as a result of the research?

(Other than unusual situations) please state: “No identifiable data will be stored for future use or entered into existing databases.”

C: Will you collect data electronically?

Answer yes or no to this question. If your response is yes, explain a bit about the modes in which you will collect data electronically. For instance, collecting audio or video recordings (over Zoom or in person using a recording device), would count as electronic data collection, as would conducting an online survey, etc. Whatever mode you use when collecting data electronically, we suggest that you do not collect IP addresses. (If you are conducting survey research, tools like Qualtrics can allow you to collect data without IP addresses.)

D: In what format (paper, electronic, audio tape, etc.) will research data be maintained?

Please explain any format in which research data will be maintained (whether in short or long term). Common formats include audio files of interviews [in X app on your phone] (that you then transfer to your laptop and delete promptly from the phone); survey data in a program like Qualtrics, notes on paper in a notebook, notes in Word document files, interview transcripts stored in word documents, interview transcripts stored in a transcription application (such as Otter.ai), etc.

Sample response:

“Notes from my participant observation sessions will be taken on paper initially, then scanned, transcribed, and stored in a digital file. Interview recordings will be created via Apple Voice Memos and deleted from my phone once the files are transferred to my laptop. Interview transcripts and other notes will be stored as Microsoft Word documents. I will use Zotero, Atlas.ti, and Microsoft Word during data processing and analysis.”

E: Where will the data be stored (notebook, filing cabinet, computer, etc.)? Specify the level of security of the storage place (locked, password protected, etc.).

We suggest that you state that you keep your research data in an encrypted folder on your password protected computer. It is also important to maintain a backup of your research files in another location (e.g. external thumb drive, or your Swarthmore Google Drive account) that is also password protected. (For instructions on how to create an encrypted folder on Mac, see <https://www.hongkiat.com/blog/encrypt-mac-folder/>). Make sure also to state here how you will secure your computer. Most students keep their computer in a locked drawer or room when it is not in their possession. When you are uploading data or sending email related to your research, we recommend that you use the secure encrypted VPN connection provided by the College. (Visit the ITS website for more information.) We suggest that you scan or transcribe and then upload paper notes regularly and destroy (e.g. by shredding) and dispose of them in a safe location.

Here is a typical response to this question:

“All data will be stored on my personal laptop which is password protected in an encrypted folder. Additionally, I will create a backup of my research files on a password protected external storage drive. Recordings will be transferred directly from my phone to my laptop following each interview and subsequently deleted from my phone. Each application that will be used to store data will also be password protected (Otter). My personal laptop will be stored in a locked cabinet in my locked room when it is not with me.”

F: Will anyone other than you have access to the data? If so, who, and how will the data be shared?

State that you will not share your data with anyone. (Except for rare cases, your advisor does not need access to your raw data).

Typical response:

“No one but me will have access to the data I collect.”

G: What will happen to any identifiable data at the end of the study? (Identifiable data MUST be destroyed or de-identified prior to graduation or otherwise leaving Swarthmore.)

Please be explicit about your plans for your data once your thesis is complete. Identifiable data MUST be destroyed or de-identified prior to graduation or otherwise leaving Swarthmore. (Note that both audio and video recordings are considered identifiable).

Here is a typical response to this question:

“All identifiable data will be destroyed prior to my Swarthmore graduation in May of 2023.”

III. Informed Consent

A: What kind of informed consent (written, oral, etc.) will you obtain from the subjects? You MUST attach copies of all consent documents or scripts.

State whether you will use written or oral consent. The expectation is to ask for written consent unless there are reasons for using oral consent. In such cases, be specific and explain in detail why you believe

oral consent to be more appropriate in certain cases. A sample informed consent form is provided at the end of this document. Please use it and modify it to your project and attach it in an appendix at the end of this application. When requesting oral consent, you must modify the signature lines to be statements of consent (for instance: “If you consent to participate in this research, please state, ‘I consent.’ And, “If you consent for this interview to be audio recorded, please state, ‘I consent.’”).

Here is a typical response:

“I will be obtaining written consent from all interviewees. The consent form I will use is in the appendix.”

Here is a response arguing for oral consent:

“I plan to follow an oral consent procedure. Oral consent is needed in the context of my research because many potential research participants are not literate. Thus, presenting people with a formal written document to sign, even if I were to explain the contents, could likely cause participants unnecessary stress. Further, given the legacy of living under colonial rule, potential research participants are likely to feel distrust or a sense of intimidation at being presented with official documents that require signing.”

Here is another example of a response arguing for oral consent:

“I plan to follow an oral consent procedure. Oral consent is needed in the context of my research because I will be conducting all my interviews over Zoom. I will provide all participants a copy of the consent form via email, but many may not have the equipment or the software to be able to return a signed electronic version of the form to me. Thus, it is more reasonable to go through the consent form together over Zoom and then request participants to assent verbally.”

B: Explain the process that you will use for obtaining informed consent.

Please explain how you will establish informed consent with each participant. Participant observation in public spaces (virtual or in person) and at public events does not require informed consent, but you should inform participants in closed groups or smaller meetings of your research and offer options for people to opt out of participating. For direct interventions, such as focus groups, interviews, or surveys, you should obtain explicit informed consent. In general, an explicit informed consent process involves sharing the consent form with a potential participant (on paper or over email, or in the case of an online survey, at the initial screen prior to starting the survey). Prior to the start of an interactive research intervention such as an interview, you should talk through the primary contents of the consent form (explaining the purpose of your research, what participation will involve, any potential risks, how you will minimize risks, etc.) using plain language. This process should be conversational where you make it clear that you welcome any questions and explain anything about your research whether it is in the consent form or not.

Here is a model for a response to this question:

“I will email the consent form to interviewees after they have responded to my email or direct message on Instagram and shown interest in being interviewed and after we have scheduled a day and time for the interview. I will ask them to review it prior to the interview and let me know if they have any questions. Before beginning the interview, I will summarize key points of the form, including the purpose of the research, voluntary participation, skipping questions, ending the interview early, and withdrawing participation. I will then ask if they have any questions. If the interviewee did not sign the form prior to the interview, I will ask for their verbal consent at this point. I will not be obtaining informed consent of participants in comments sections and chat boxes during public digital ethnographic observations because I will not be interacting with them. However, I will include information about my project on my profile pages.”

C: Explain how coercion or undue influence will be minimized when obtaining consent.

Make sure that you agree to this and actually DO it:

“I will make sure that respondents understand that they can stop the interview at any time, that they know their participation is voluntary, that they need not answer questions that they do not want to, and that they can cancel their participation in the research entirely at any time.”

IV. Risks and Benefits

A: List the potential benefits associated with this study.

While your advisor and others will likely understand that there are many diffuse benefits related to the research you plan to carry out, this question is about *direct* benefits to participants and others that result from the research. In most cases, research participants do not benefit directly from the study. Thus, you should state that plainly in response to this question. (Fear not, this does not mean your research is not worthwhile or beneficial in general)!

Typical response:

“There are no anticipated benefits for participants in this study other than the completion of the thesis exercise.”

B: Describe all reasonably expected risks, harms, and/or discomforts that may apply to the research. Discuss severity and likelihood of occurrence including but not limited to data collection, data storage, maintaining confidentiality and privacy, informed consent process, recruitment processes, study processes, etc.

It is expected that risk to human subjects should not be different from the kind of discomfort/harm one would encounter in discussion with family or friends. Address any harm that could be related to data storage.

Typical response. Please adapt to your research context:

“There may be a small risk to interviewees of disclosing personal information in the interview that they do not want [insert context here... e.g. supervisors/parents/peers to learn about]. This information could include [insert details]. It is also possible that because interviewees will be asked personal questions about [X], conversations about [insert details, e.g. distressing topics/mental health/other] could arise during interviews. The severity and likelihood of these risks occurring are low because most of the interview questions are focused on positive aspects of [X]. Further, the kinds of subject interview questions will raise are not different from the kinds of topics one might reasonably expect to be shared in ordinary conversations with family or friends in the course of daily life.”

C: Describe how potential risk, harms, and/or discomforts will be minimized.

We suggest that you do everything in your power to protect your data and your subjects. Explain that here. We expect that in most cases, student researchers will offer anonymity and protect the identity of their subjects. Make sure to address each point you mentioned in IV.B.

Example response:

“I will make sure that respondents understand that they can stop the interview at any time, know their participation is voluntary, need not answer questions that they do not want to, and can withdraw their participation in the research entirely at any time. I will also minimize risk by anonymizing interviewee responses and changing any identifying information in such a

way that they are not affiliated with their profiles or channels, but only broadly YouTube, Instagram, and Twitch. Only I will have access to the complete interview recordings and transcripts. I will do everything I can to protect the identities of participants in this study and the data.”

D: Discuss how risks to participants are reasonable when compared to the anticipated benefits to the participants and the importance of the knowledge that may reasonably be expected to result.

The SOAN DRC reviews only projects that do not pose risks to human subjects. So please explain that there are neither anticipated benefits nor risks beyond the kind of things one would encounter in discussion with family or friends. If there are, we will recommend a full IRB review.

Typical response:

“There are neither anticipated benefits nor risks beyond those one would encounter in a discussion with family or friends.”

[TITLE OF RESEARCH PROJECT, should be neutral- not revealing of a position]

Informed Consent

[Researchers: This example of informed consent can also be used in situations when research participants will not be providing a signature to denote their consent. In this case, researchers provide the participants with a copy of written study information.]

You are invited to participate in a research study about... The goal of this research study is to... *[please provide a quick and clear summary, and avoid scholarly jargon or too much leading information]*

This study is being conducted by *[name of investigator]*, an undergraduate student in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at Swarthmore College in the United States. It will serve as the core of my senior thesis, which is a requirement for my major.

There are ____ qualifications to participate in this study: (1) You must be at least 18 years of age; (2) ____ (and continue as needed.)

Participation in this study is voluntary. If you agree to participate in this study, you would be interviewed for about *[length of time]*. You may choose not to answer any questions, and you may discontinue participation at any time.

I do not anticipate any undue risks or significant benefits as a result of this study, but it is helping me to complete my work in college.

[Here, students should clearly explain any and all expected risks to participants of participation in the research in ways that help participants understand the risks. Consider both the risks of the interview process (is there a chance that subjects might find questions upsetting?) and the risks pertaining to data storage. Students should then clarify ways they will minimize risks, if applicable. Please fill in the details based upon your responses to the questions in section IV. An example of language pertaining to data storage is below. Ensure that whatever you include below matches what you describe in answer to questions in sections I, II, and IV of the application:]

[The information you will share with me if you participate in this study will be kept anonymous.

Your information will be assigned a code number that is unique to this study. The list connecting your name to this number will be stored in *[explain data protection measures, such as a locked file on Google Drive or a password-protected and encrypted file on your computer]* and only I will be able to see the list or your interview. No one else will be able to see your interview or even know whether you participated in this study. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, the list linking participant's names to study numbers will be destroyed. Your name will not be used in any writing that results from this project.]

If you participate in the study, you will receive ___ for your time *[if applicable. Note that if you choose to reimburse subjects for their participation you need to include this information in the questions about recruitment in I.D. and explain how undue influence/coercion would be minimized in III.C.].*

The information you will share with me will be kept anonymous. Your information will be assigned a code number that is unique to this study. The list connecting your name to this number will be kept in a locked file [*specify where*] and only I will be able to see the list or your interview. When the study is completed and the data have been analyzed, the list linking participant's names to study numbers will be destroyed. Your name will not be used in any writing that results from this project.

If you have any questions about this study or your rights as a research participant, please contact [*name of PI (usually your advisor), phone number and email address*] or the Chair of my department:

Professor [*Insert name*]
Department of Sociology and Anthropology
500 College Avenue
Swarthmore College
Swarthmore PA, 19081 USA

By signing below, you are certifying that you are at least 18 years old and agree to be interviewed.

Signature _____ Date _____

Agreement to be Audio-Recorded:

I would like to record this interview. I will store the recording in a password-protected file on my computer (or phone) and will destroy the file when my research is complete. If you do not agree to be recorded, I will simply write notes.

By signing below, you are agreeing to have the interview audio-recorded.

Signature _____ Date _____