

### Should I consider bringing my project to the HSRB?

The Hendrix College Human Subjects Board is tasked with overseeing research about humans. Although research that needs to be overseen by the HSRB is more regularly completed by students in the biological, exercise, health, and social sciences, it is common for Human Subjects Review Boards to oversee some of the humanities research in religion, history, language studies, and the like. Note that projects within a variety of Odyssey categories could fall under the heading of research.

The key to whether you should consider bringing your project to this board is whether your project:

1. Involves research
2. Involves human subjects.

### What is Research?

The Federal guidelines offer this definition:

Research means a systematic investigation, including research development, testing and evaluation, designed to develop or contribute to generalizable knowledge. Activities which meet this definition constitute research for purposes of this policy, whether or not they are conducted or supported under a program which is considered research for other purposes. For example, some demonstration and service programs may include research activities.

*So, what does all of that mean?* There are two critical aspects to understanding what aspects of investigation require oversight:

1. The investigation must be **systematic**. This is generally met when investigation is repeated either with a few subjects, locations, or over time. It can involve a number of methods (interviews, observation, document analysis, survey, etc.). Even if the questions of an interview differ from person to person, this could still be seen as systematic if the topic of inquiry was the same. Also, when there are not set questions and a conversational-style of interview is used, this could still be defined as systematic.
2. The intent must be to develop **generalizable** knowledge. This means that projects are meant to examine something about the human condition or about people as a group. In other words, the project intends to develop knowledge that could be applied to people other than those directly involved in the research. If the study will involve multiple individuals' perspectives on the issue of interest, and these perspectives will be examined to explain something about an event, place, group of people, or experience, this is research that is generalizable.

### What is a human subject?

Research with human subjects involves the collection of information, which 1) is meant to explain something about people and 2) collecting it involves interaction with people. If the purpose of the research is only to find out factual details about historical events or corporate or government policies, it is not thought to involve human participants. However, if the purpose is to collect information from people about their experience (feelings or compliance) with such policies or events, then the information collected would be considered to have involved human

subjects. Research that involves the investigation of documents, websites, books, music, and other cultural artifacts available to the public is also not considered to be research involving human subjects. If the documents/cultural artifacts are not in public but would also not allow living individuals to be identified, then investigation using such objects would not be considered research with human subjects.

### **Examples: Is My Project Research with Human Subjects?**

#### *Research that does not need to come before the HSRB:*

A student sets out to examine the life and experiences of a local community organizer. She interviews them at length about their life and analyzes documents about their involvement in the organization. Although a systematic procedure might be used here, this is not generalizable.

Several textbooks are examined to determine how different countries describe World War II. This is not considered to be research involving human subjects because the focus is on documents that are considered to be public.

A student wishes to understand U.S. Department of Labor procedures for handling child labor in foreign countries and interviews multiple interviewers with workers about these policies. This is not considered to involve human subjects because the information that is collected is about policies and procedures not about how the subjects experienced, felt about, or followed these.

#### *Research that must come before the HSRB*

A student develops a few topics to discuss in conversational interviews with multiple people about a community meeting in order to determine how meetings are perceived by people in different social statuses. This is generalizable because it involves information meant to tell us something about how an event can be seen by different group, and it is systematic because it uses the same procedure (interviews) multiple times.

A faculty member wishes to study Christian web-based chatroom discussions of homosexuality; the chatrooms restrict viewing access to members via a sign-in procedure. This is considered research with human subjects because the information is not public.

A few people will be interviewed to understand how the Memphis flood impacted people's lives. Interviews involved people explaining their experiences and reactions to the situation. This is considered research because individuals are interviewed about personal experiences relating to an event.