RESEARCH ETHICS – WORK INTEGRATED LEARNING

Introduction

Purpose

The purpose of this booklet is to provide a guide for instructors/project leads who are developing work integrated learning (WIL) experiences at the college to help determine whether research ethics approval is needed, as well as provide information about key ethics issues which may arise when research is conducted during a WIL experience.

Definition of Work Integrated Learning

"Work integrated learning (WIL) is experiential learning that occurs either in a workplace setting or with the involvement of a host organization. It is a full time, unpaid opportunity that provides students with intensive, hands-on, practical experience in a setting relevant to their subject of study" (Bow Valley College, 2024). Following the Co-operative Education and Work-Integrated Learning Canada (CEWIL) definition, WIL experiences:

- Include a partnership of at least an academic institution, a host organization, and a student
- Can occur at the course or program level
- Include development of student learning objectives related to employability, knowledge and skill mobility and life-long learning (CEWIL, 2021).

There are various types of WIL experiences (CEWIL, 2021). Experiences may require that participants engage in some form of research. When research involving human participants is conducted by members of the Bow Valley College community (i.e., employees, learners) or by an external researcher such as a host organization or community partner, research ethics approval must be obtained *before* the research begins.

Definition of Research

The research ethics board's (REB) determination of whether the WIL activity requires ethics approval rests partly on the definition of research as set out in the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans – TCPS 2*.

Research "is defined as an undertaking intended to extend knowledge through a disciplined inquiry and/or systematic investigation. The term "disciplined inquiry" refers to an inquiry that is conducted with the expectation that the method, results, and conclusions will be able to withstand the scrutiny of the relevant research community" (TCPS 2 2022, Chapter 2, Article 2.1, p.14).

Other factors the REB considers in determining whether ethics approval is needed include:

- *The nature of the population under study.* Populations that have diminished decision-making capacity, or limited access to rights, opportunities, and power are considered

vulnerable under the TCPS 2. This may include but is not limited to children, older persons, women, prisoners, those with mental health issues, those with diminished capacity for self-determination, and ethnocultural minorities (Chapter 1, Article 1.1). Vulnerable populations may need special attention to be treated justly in research.

- *The likelihood that the participant may be identified*. Where researchers collect, use, share and access various types of information or data about their participants, it must be determined whether the information may be reasonably expected to identify an individual. Researchers are obligated to protect participant identity and safeguard their information (TCPS 2, Chapter 2).
- *The risk level of the study.* Research, even if unintended, may involve harm to participants and others. Harm is "anything that has a negative effect on the welfare of participants, and the nature of the harm may be social, behavioural, psychological, physical or economic" (TCPS 2 2022, Chapter 2, p.24). Risk is a response to the seriousness of the harm and the probability that it will occur. More than minimal risk research must consider the available methods for mitigating the risk.

Research Ethics Screening Form

The REB has created an ethics screening form to be used by instructors/project leads in the design stage of the WIL activity. The screening form is adapted from the *ARECCI Ethics Screening Tool (2010)*. **Once the WIL activity has been screened, it will not have to been screened again (or by subsequent instructors) unless the activity is modified or changed.**

Instructors can access the *Course-based Research Ethics Screening Form* on the BVC Research Ethics website. Submit the completed form to the Research Ethics Board (researchethics@bowvalleycollege.ca) for review during the design stage *prior* to implementing the WIL activity. Allow enough time for the activity to be screened and to go through board review if needed (approximately one month). Build this process into your project timeline. Please email the Research Ethics Board with any questions. REB suggests reading this booklet before completing the screening form.

The form asks a series of questions about the WIL activity. Opening questions (the nature, purpose, and intent of the activity) are used to sort projects into either research or non-research activities. The next set of questions allow us to sort research activities based on whether the activity is one that meets the TCPS 2 exemption criteria, and the final set of questions focus on the potential risk of harm to participants (foreseeable harms, identifiability of participant information). See the Ethics Screening Flow Chart below for a visual depiction of the decision process.

Ethics Screening Flow Chart

Responsibility of the Instructor/Project Lead

If the REB deems the research to be exempt from further review, the instructor/project lead must still comply with the guidelines set out in the TCPS 2 and college research policies and procedures. REB can provide you with guidance with these upon request.

If the REB requires further ethics review, we will direct you to the appropriate application form. Once the application has been reviewed and formal research ethics approval is granted, you will

not have to apply again every term. Approval is granted for one year and can be renewed unless substantive changes are made to the activity.

Note: If there are several instructors teaching the same course and administering the same research activity, they will not have to apply for research ethics approval.

What Happens if I Do Not Go Through Ethics Screening?

Serious issues may arise if your WIL activity requires REB approval, but you did not get it. These include but are not limited to the following:

- If something happens during a study that affects participant welfare, the instructor/project lead will not have the protection of the college.
- Participants may file a complaint against the instructor/project lead with the college; and depending on the severity of the situation, with local authorities.
- Damage to the reputation of the college and of one's colleagues.

Key Ethics Issues for WIL

As WIL research often involves human participants including students, colleagues, and members of the community partner, ethical issues must be considered and ways to mitigate the associated risk integrated into the design of the research activity. Ethical issues include but are not limited to conflict of interest, informed consent, risk of harm, anonymity and confidentiality.

Conflict of Interest

A conflict of interest may arise when situations place an individual or institution in a real, potential, or perceived conflict between research responsibilities and personal, institutional, or other interests (TCPS 2, 2022, Chapter 7). Conflicts may come from interpersonal relationships (e.g., family or community relationships), financial partnerships or other economic interests, academic interests or incentives, the involvement in dual and multiple roles inside or outside the institution. For example, when an instructor is also the person responsible for the research activity, they may experience situations where these two roles conflict. The power imbalance (instructor/student) may unduly influence or pressure students to participate in the research, violating ethics consent guidelines. Conflicts must be disclosed, assessed, and mitigated as they could jeopardize the integrity of the research. Mitigating the conflict may include removal, disclosure, recusal, third party evaluations and/or codes of ethics. For more information about conflict of interest, see Chapter 7 of TCPS 2.

Informed Consent

In research, informed consent refers to the dialogue, information sharing and general process through which prospective subjects choose to participate in research. Consent needs to be voluntary, informed, and ongoing.

Consent should be given voluntarily and as such, participants should be able to withdraw their consent during the research process. If participants do withdraw their consent, they should also be able to request the withdrawal of their data (TCPS 2, 2022, Article 3.1).

In order to make sure that consent is given freely, no undue influence should exist on the participant to participate. For example, the power dynamic between an instructor and a learner may sway the learner to participate in research involving the instructor because they fear that it may affect the instructor's perception of them if they decline to participate.

Also, the consent process should be free of coercion. Coercion is a "more extreme form of undue influence, involving a threat of harm or punishment for failure to participate" (TCPS 2, 2022, p. 33). Incentives may be used as a form of remuneration for the participant's time and effort in participating in the study, but they should not be so attractive that they encourage disregard of the risks of participating in the study (TCPS 2, 2022, Article 3.1)

Researchers must provide potential participants with all information necessary for them to make an informed decision to participate in the research study.

The following should be addressed in the informed consent:

- Branded with Bow Valley College logo.
- Written at an appropriate language level for the intended participant group(s).
- Written in non-expert terms. Required technical terms are clearly explained.
- Written in the active voice.
- Sources of funding are disclosed.
- Basis for participant inclusion and/or exclusion in the research is provided.
- Goal of the research is clearly outlined.
- What is required of the participant, including time commitment and information to be collected.
- Level of confidentiality and how participant data will be stored and used.
- Risks and benefits of participation.
- Voluntary nature of participation.
- Conflicts of interest are disclosed.
- Withdrawal procedures and what will happen to the data upon withdrawal.
- Remuneration.
- Contact information for Principal Investigator and/or project coordinator.
- Statement that the study has received approval from the Bow Valley College Research Ethics Board and board contact information.
- Statement to the effect that, by consenting, participants have not waived any rights to legal recourse in the event of research-related harm.
- Participant is provided with a copy of the consent for future reference

Researchers have an ongoing responsibility to provide participants with relevant information for their ongoing consent to participate in the research. Consent is a process that begins with initial contact with the potential participants (e.g., recruitment) and carries through to the end of the participants' involvement in the project (TCPS 2, 2022, Article 3.3). This becomes relevant to any changes to the research project, especially changes to the potential risks or benefits of the research.

For more information on the consent process, please see *TCPS 2 - Chapter 3* and *Appendix A* for the Bow Valley College Informed Consent Form Template.

Risk of Harm

Risk is a "function of the magnitude or seriousness of the harm, and the probability that it will occur" (TCPS 2, 2022, p. 25). Risks may cause a degree of emotional, psychological, social and/or physical discomfort. Real and potential risks need to be considered and anticipated by researcher(s) relative to the probability and magnitude of potential harm deemed no greater than what the subject(s) may potentially encounter in everyday life.

Minimal Risk research is that "in which the probability and magnitude of possible harms implied by participation in the research is no greater than those aspects of their everyday life that relate to the research" (TCPS 2, 2022, p. 25)

Considerations for Assessing Risk:

- Will participating in this research cause participant(s) to be at risk physically?
- Will participant(s) be unduly vulnerable for any reason (s) (e.g., developmental disability; age; culture; social/economic status)?
- Will participant(s) feel any pressure/obligation to participate in this study, whereby they may not have volunteered under other circumstances (e.g., inmates; adult learners registered in programs; workplace employees; agencies receiving funding or other forms of support from BVC)?
- Do risks flow from confidentiality (e.g., might the information be of interest to a law enforcement agency)?
- Will participant(s) suffer undue psychological stress?
- Might individuals or groups be stigmatized by participating in the study?
- Might individuals' or groups' reputation be at risk by participating in this study?
- Might individuals or groups be at risk with regards to political and/or immigration status by participating in this study?

Categories

No risk: None of the above apply, although it is very likely that some components of this research will involve at least minimal risk if human participants are involved.

Minimal risk: Risk that would normally be experienced and sustained in everyday life.

More than Minimal Risk: Risk that would be experienced above and beyond that experienced and sustained in everyday life (e.g., Interviews with participants about past life events which may have been traumatic and could trigger psychological or emotional distress).

Note: Most applied research projects involving human participants will have some minimal risk associated with it.

Anonymity and Confidentiality

As private information becomes more difficult to associate with a particular person, ethics concerns lessen. Concerns also vary with the sensitivity of the information being collected and the potential for harm to the participant or community. Ideally researchers should strive for anonymity, but this is not always possible. When anonymity is not possible then it is appropriate to promise confidentiality.

Anonymity refers to information that is not identifiable by name to a specific participant, even to the researcher. The TCPS defines anonymous information as that which "never had identifiers associated with it" (TCPS 2, 2022, p.80).

Confidentiality is an ethical duty which is important in upholding the trust relationship between researcher and participant and the integrity of the research project. It refers to safeguarding entrusted information. Researchers have an obligation to protect information from unauthorized access, use, disclosure, modification, loss, or theft (TCPS 2, 2022, Chapter 5).

Researchers should consider the information presented below when making decisions about data access and storage.

1. Contact data of participants
2. Access to raw data (including audio or video files)
    a. How will data be stored? How long will it be stored? Will it be public? What security measures have been put into place to safeguard the information?
    b. How will the data be destroyed or archived?
    c. Note: There is a five-year minimum for data storage
3. How will the participant's privacy be respected (for data storage and report write-up)?
4. Write-up of the results:
    a. qualitative (e.g., with names, quotes) vs. quantitative (aggregated data)
    b. use of pseudonyms vs. real names
    c. participant review of data before publication
5. Size of sample – small samples may be more identifiable even with anonymized information
6. Possible identification of participants due to uniqueness or recognizability (are there precautions to alleviate this?)
7. Is the researcher under any obligation to report on specific findings (e.g., child abuse, risk of suicide, safety, etc.)?

8. For group settings, how will the researcher manage confidentiality for the participants? How will confidentiality guidelines be described to the participants?
9. If anonymity is optional, include a provision in the consent form to have the participant allow the use of his/her name

Note: REB advises instructors to have students sign a confidentiality agreement if they have access to participant information.

See *Appendix B* for a Risk Matrix tool to help assess the level of risk as it relates to participant information.

Disclaimer

This booklet is not intended to replace comprehensive guidelines set out in TCPS 2 or in college research policies and procedures.

References

ARECCI Ethics Screening Tool developed by the Alberta Research Ethics Community Consensus Initiative (ARECCI) Network (2005, revised 2010). ARECCI - The Alberta Innovates Ethics Screening Tool

Bow Valley College (2024, January 19). *Work integrated learning*. Get Working. https://bowvalleycollege.ca/get-working/career-services-for-albertans/career-services-for-students-and-alumni/work-integrated-learning

Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans*, December 2022.

Co-operative Education and Work-Integrated Learning Canada (CEWIL) (2021, January 19). *What is work-integrated learning (WIL)?* CEWIL Canada. https://cewilcanada.ca/CEWIL/CEWIL/About-Us/Work-Integrated-Learning.aspx

Appendix A

Informed Consent Form Template

This document is a template. The italicized text is instructional. Delete it, including these paragraphs, when writing your consent form.

Supply the information requested under the bolded headings. ***Use plain language, understandable by a layperson (grade 7 level). Consider reading the informed consent aloud with the participant to ensure understanding of risk.*** *Add details relevant to your study. Be sure the consent form is written in second person. Please check the correctness of your spelling and grammar.*

Name of Researcher, Department, Telephone & Email:

(*Insert your name and title, and those of your co-researchers)*

Supervisor:

(If the researcher is a student, the supervisor's name and department appears here, otherwise delete) **Title of Project:**

(*The title of the project goes here)*

***Sponsor*:**

(*If the project is funded, identify the funding source here)*

This consent form, a copy of which has been given to you, is only part of the process of informed consent. If you want more details about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

Researcher to Supply the Following (include the headings below in your consent form)

Purpose of the Study:

Describe the purpose of the study and tell the participant how s/he was chosen as a possible participant, if applicable, invite the individual to be a participant.

What Will I Be Asked To Do?

Describe exactly what the participant is expected to do. State (approximately) how much time it will take, include details such as the number of questionnaires or other requirements for their participation. Indicate if there is any follow-up and when.

Indicate that the individual's participation is voluntary, that the individual may refuse to participate altogether, may refuse to participate in parts of the study (if this is acceptable to the research), or may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which s/he is otherwise entitled (for example: assistance received through Agency "X" will not be affected).

What Type of Personal Information Will Be Collected?

If no personal identifying information is to be collected (e.g. names, social insurance numbers, student ID numbers, etc.), and the participant remains anonymous, use the following statement:

"No personal identifying information will be collected in this study, and all participants shall remain anonymous."

If information such as gender, age, ethnicity, educational level, etc., is collected, provide a description of the type of information you will be collecting. For example, "Should you agree to participate, you will be asked to provide your gender, age and academic major."
If applicable to the research, describe options available to the participant. To do so, it may be useful to create "check boxes" to help enumerate a participant's choices. For example, you might instruct the participant:

"There are several options for you to consider if you decide to take part in this research. You can choose all, some or none of them. Please put a check mark on the corresponding line(s) that grants me your permission to:"

I grant permission to be audio taped: *Yes: ___ No: ___*
I grant permission to be videotaped: *Yes: ___ No: ___*
I grant permission to have my company's name used: *Yes: ___ No: ___*
I wish to remain anonymous: *Yes: ___ No: ___*
I wish to remain anonymous, but you may refer to me by a pseudonym: *Yes: ___ No: ___*
The pseudonym I choose for myself is:
_____
You may quote me and use my name: *Yes: ___ No: ___*

Are there Risks or Benefits if I Participate?

List reasonably foreseeable risks, harms, or inconveniences to the participant. If the research necessitates the provision of rescue mechanisms, advise the participant what these are, how to access the support, and whether there is any cost to the individual.

If the research has the potential to reveal information that is required by law to be revealed to a law enforcement or other agency (e.g.: child abuse, suspected danger to self or others), inform your participant of your legal obligations.

If the person will be paid to take part, describe that payment. If they will incur any costs, describe these.

What Happens to the Information I Provide?

Explain who will have access to the information collected.
State how the participant's contribution will be treated. For example, will pseudonyms or some other means of ensuring anonymity be used? Explain any limitations to the anonymity / confidentiality that you can offer. Tell the participant what will happen to their information if s/he decides to withdraw.

Confidentiality vs. Anonymity

Confidentiality

Maintaining confidentiality of information collected from research participants means that only the investigator(s) or individuals of the research team can identify the responses of individual subjects; however, the researchers must make every effort to prevent anyone outside of the project from connecting individual subjects with their responses.

Anonymity

Providing anonymity of information collected from research participants means that either the project does not collect identifying information of individual subjects (e.g., name, address, Email address, etc.), or the project cannot link individual responses with participants' identities. A study should not collect identifying information of research participants unless it is essential to the study protocol.

For example

"Participation is completely voluntary, anonymous and confidential. You are free to discontinue participation at any time during the study. No one except the researcher and her supervisor will be allowed to see or hear any of the answers to the questionnaire or the interview tape. There are no names on the questionnaire. Only group information will be summarized for any presentation or publication of results. The questionnaires are kept in a locked cabinet only accessible by the researcher and her supervisor. The anonymous data will be stored for five years on a computer disk, at which time, it will be permanently erased."

Signatures (written consent)

Your signature on this form indicates that you 1) understand to your satisfaction the information provided to you about your participation in this research project, and 2) agree to participate as a research subject.

In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the investigators, sponsors, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from this research project at any time. You should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

Participant's Name: (please print) _____

Participant's Signature_____ Date: _____

Researcher's Name: (please print) _____

Researcher's Signature: _____ Date: _____

Questions/Concerns

If you have any further questions or want clarification regarding this research and/or your participation, please contact:

Dr./Ms./Mr. (Insert name of principal researcher(s),
Department of XXXXXXX
Telephone, email
And (supervisor's name, department telephone number, and email if applicable)

If you have any concerns about the way you have been treated as a participant, please contact the Bow Valley College Research Ethics Board email at researchethics@bowvalleycollege.ca.

A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference. The investigator has kept a copy of the consent form.

Appendix B

Matrix to Assess Risk Level of Data

	Low Risk	Medium Risk	High Risk	Extreme Risk
Risk level definitions	Publicly available data where there is no reasonable expectation of privacy, regardless of sensitivity or identifiability. Data collected with no information that could reasonably identify individuals or groups. Data contains no confidential, private, or sensitive information. Data subjects are not vulnerable in the context of the research and would not be harmed if a breach were to occur.	All identifiers collected have been stripped so that data to be deposited has no information that could reasonably identify individuals or groups. Data may contain information originally collected as confidential, private, or sensitive. Data subjects are not vulnerable in the context of the research and would not be harmed if a breach were to occur.	Identifiers remain and/or (re)-identification is possible or probable. Data contains confidential, private or sensitive information. Data subjects may be vulnerable in the context of the research and may be harmed if a breach were to occur.	Data acquired through an agreement (formal or informal) with a custodian, barring further use or retention. Identifiers remain and/or (re)-identification is possible or probable. Data contains confidential, private or sensitive information. Data subjects are vulnerable in the context of the research and would be harmed if a breach were to occur.

Source: Digital Research Alliance of Canada (October, 2020). Sensitive Data Toolkit for Researchers Part 2: Human Participant Research Data Risk Matrix. DOI 10.5281/zenodo.4060448 Sensitive Data Toolkit for Researchers Part 2: Human Participant Research Data Risk Matrix (zenodo.org)