

# CONDUCTING RESEARCH ABROAD

## Key Guidelines

### What is a research project?

A research project involves a systematic investigation of a specific topic, question, hypothesis, or theory. The purpose of research is to establish new knowledge or confirm what is already known. The research process involves discovery, documentation, and interpretation using a variety of reliable, scholarly resources. Under the guidance of a project supervisor, students consult relevant primary and secondary sources, analyze findings, and draw conclusions culminating in a final paper or project that demonstrates the knowledge gained through the investigation. Research typically does not involve applied work, internship, or volunteer activities.

### What is IRB?

IRBs (Institutional Review Boards) are formally designated committees to review, approve, and monitor research that focuses on gathering and analyzing private identifiable data about individuals. There are special additional protections for certain vulnerable populations.

Given the short duration of a study abroad program, you should select research topics that do not include require IRB review. The University's IRB process (even an exempt review) is intensive, takes time, requires finalized project and protocol, and must be completed prior to initiating any research abroad. Since IRB only reviews projects if the overseas project supervisor, full research project, methodology clarification, and required methodological training are confirmed, human subjects research during study abroad programs is highly discouraged. In addition, undergraduate students rarely have completed the level of methodological training to be approved by IRB.

### What should I know about conducting research abroad?

Research projects that focus on policies, procedures, methods, products, and organizations do not require IRB review and are great options for students interested in social science research abroad. With these kinds of projects, students can engage with and interview experts in the field without needing IRB review as long as the project does not focus on an individual's personal history/beliefs/background. Keep in mind that projects that focus on observation and documentation may not be considered research and, therefore, do not require IRB approval.

It is *essential* to consult with the overseas staff regarding your project and the approach you plan to take *before* initiating your research. Particularly if you plan to conduct a survey or interviews, you must discuss your questions with the overseas staff and receive approval for all questions in advance. The overseas staff will consult with the LAC, as needed.

Students who fail to modify their project to meet overseas staff and LAC expectations regarding IRB considerations risk receiving a failing grade for that course. It is not appropriate to engage in research that requires IRB clearance without having obtained the clearance in advance.

For more details, visit the IRB research web page: [www.research.umn.edu/irb/](http://www.research.umn.edu/irb/)

### What restrictions should I keep in mind regarding my primary sources?

Any data that you use for your research must be publicly available or previously published. Private medical files, for example, require IRB approval and should not be consulted. Interviewing individuals with expertise in the relevant field is allowed, as long as the focus is on policies, practices, and procedures and/or their expert views on these policies, practices and procedures. Avoid collecting private identifiable data.

IRB has significant restrictions on "sensitive populations," vulnerable populations, and minors. These populations cannot be consulted or interviewed without IRB clearance and should not be part of a research abroad project.

### What if I have IRB clearance from my home university?

IRB approval from your home school does not provide clearance to engage in human subjects research during your study abroad program. Contact the LAC for further guidance, as human subjects research on an LAC program must go through the U of M IRB process.