MEMORANDUM

From: The Human Subjects Review Coordinators
To: Doctoral Students Doing Survey or Questionnaire Studies
Subject: Appropriate Informed Consent

When do you need to get individual written consent of your participants when you are collecting data by means of a questionnaire or a survey?

If you are doing research in which a survey instrument or questionnaire is a means of your obtaining data and the questionnaire depends on your participants’ written response in their own words, then individual written consent from the participant is most likely necessary. The guidelines for your written consent form are described in our preceding memorandum.

If your survey instrument or questionnaire solicits information that is controversial or sensitive and could in any way make your participant vulnerable, you should secure individual written consent.

If your questionnaire or survey asks for identifying information about your participants, such as name, address, telephone number, place of work or study, or other information that could lead to the identification of your participants, then you should solicit individual written consent.

If your sample is small and because of that small size your participants are potentially identifiable, you should secure individual written consent.

If any one of the above conditions apply to your research approach, you must secure the individual written consent of your potential participants.

When do you not need to get individual written consent of your participants when you are collecting data by means of a questionnaire or a survey?

If you are doing research in which a survey instrument or questionnaire is a means of obtaining data, you may not have to solicit individual written consent from your participants if all the following characteristics describe your questionnaire or survey:

- The survey is a true/false, multiple choice, or fill in the blank type of survey. It does not rely on the language of the participants.
• The participant’s responses to the survey would not make him or her vulnerable in any way. No risk is involved in the participants’ completing and submitting the survey or questionnaire.

• The results of the survey are to be reported in the aggregate and not by individual. Individual participants in the study would not be identifiable.

If all the above conditions describe your research, you do not have to secure individual written consent. If any one of these conditions does not apply, then you most likely have to secure individual written consent from each participant.

If you are surveying students or teachers in a school or a system or other members of an organization or institution, you may have to secure the consent of the appropriate officer or administrator of that organization in order to conduct the survey.

Even if you do not need to get individual written consent of your participants, you will still have an ethical obligation to inform your participants about the following:

• Who you are and how you can be contacted; Who your supervisor (chairperson) is and how they can be contacted
• The nature of your research;
• What rights your participants have, for example, to withdraw from part or all of the study at any time, or to review the results;
• That you will not use their names in the study;
• That participation in the study is voluntary and their decision to participate or not to participate will in no way be prejudicial to them; and, finally,
• Children below the age of 18 must have the consent of their legal guardians to participate.

The way to inform your participants about these conditions is to address them in an introductory paragraph to your questionnaire or survey instrument or in a cover letter. The final sentence of the introductory paragraph or cover letter should be something like: “Your informed consent to participate in the study under the conditions described is assumed by your completing the questionnaire and submitting it to the researcher. Do not complete the questionnaire or hand it in if you do not understand or agree to these conditions.”

*When you submit Form D-3A, include a copy of your introductory paragraph or cover letter.*

If you have questions about whether your survey or questionnaire requires anything beyond the introductory paragraph we are suggesting above, please contact your comprehensive chairperson or a member of the Human Subjects Review Committee.