

Q&A regarding the Human Experimentation Review Board (HERB)

What is HERB?

HERB is an Institutional Review Board (IRB) that was created by the Psychology Department in 2003 to review projects using human subjects. It is the duty of IRBs to protect research subjects from unethical treatment in research.

Why was it created in the Psychology Department?

The Psychology Department (students and faculty) conducts much of the research on campus involving human subjects. Thus, we decided that it was appropriate to create a panel that includes external reviewers to review these projects.

Is HERB registered/accredited?

HERB is registered with the Federal Office of Human Research Protections (OHRP registration *IRB00004718 Wagner College IRB #1 – HERB*) and meets their standards. HERB is not accredited. Accreditation is usually something sought by those IRBs that review medical studies and often involves the hiring of full time personnel to administer the IRB.

Does HERB review proposals from other disciplines/departments?

Yes. So far, relatively few outside psychology have a need for IRB review at Wagner College. Thus, in an agreement with the Provost, HERB will act as Wagner College's IRB and will review (and has reviewed) proposals from other departments. Currently, these proposals are only about 10% of the proposals we review. Should they become an unwieldy number, the college can consider creating additional IRBs (according to OHRP, institutions may have more than one IRB).

Does HERB review medical studies?

No. Faculty/staff conducting medical research would have to seek IRB approval from an affiliated institution in the area that has that expertise. For example, some faculty at Wagner have utilized the IRB at Staten Island University Hospital. Furthermore, since HERB does not meet NIH standards for IRB administration (again, we would have to hire full time staff to meet their standards), anyone applying for an NIH grant would have to seek approval from an IRB that meets NIH standards. For definitions of the research HERB will not review, see the attached decision tree that we have created to assist you.

Who serves on HERB?

HERB has 6 members: two from the psychology department (chair and vice chair), one from biology (scientist with little experience with human research), one faculty member with no expertise in science, one community member (unaffiliated with Wagner), and one student. There is an alternate member from psychology should a psychology member need to recuse him/herself. This array satisfies expertise and gender balance requirements of OHRP. The members are appointed by the chair of the psychology department.

How do I know whether I need IRB review?

See the attached decision tree for assistance.

Will HERB review my proposal for methodological/experimental design soundness?

No. HERB will only address methodological issues that pertain to the ethical collection of data from humans.

How can I avoid pitfalls in HERB review?

Here are some suggestions:

Provide subjects with informed consent form. A sample form can be obtained from the HERB website.

Use deception of subjects only when absolutely necessary.

If you are doing research with other institutions (e.g. schools, clinics), have letters of intent and/or agreement from those involved and include copies with your application.

Does HERB have an expedited review procure?

Yes, this is a universal feature of IRBs. Many projects (e.g. those using only questionnaires/surveys) do not require review by the full committee and are approved by “chair’s action.” All committee members are informed of decisions made by the chair. See HERB procedures available on website for more details.

Is this just another roadblock to conducting research?

No. HERB is here to help you use ethical methods in the use of human subjects in research. This will aid you in conducting your study and publishing your results.

Determining whether you need IRB review for your research involving human subjects

It is possible that the journal you would like to submit an article to or a granting agency requires review by a research ethics committee or IRB. It is also likely that the professional organization you are a member of requires it. These considerations aside...

