

The Education University of Hong Kong (EdUHK)
Department of Psychology (PS)
FAQ for Undergraduate (UG) Student Research Ethics

[For Taught Postgraduate (e.g. MAPPE, MSocScP(SCS), MEd) students with PS staff as supervisors, please visit https://www.eduhk.hk/fehd/en/research.php?s=doctoral_resources for details.]

Below are answers to the following common questions:

- Q1:** How long will it take to get my Ethics approval?
- Q2:** How do I re-submit my Ethics application that needed amendments?
- Q3:** What kinds of consent forms do I need to submit with my Ethics application? Do I need to prepare the consent form and information sheet in both English and Chinese versions?
- Q4:** When can I collect my data / do my research?
- Q5:** Do I really have to ask my school principal if I can send consent forms to parents?
- Q6:** What if my principal says that he / she doesn't want me to send consent forms to parents?
- Q7:** If I get my principal's consent, do I need to ask students as well?
- Q8:** The Ethics application requires me to submit the "questionnaire and / or interview script," but I am still finalizing the exact questions that I will ask and might want to change them slightly later. What should I do?
- Q9:** Any special instructions if I want to make videotapes or recordings of the classroom or interviews?

Q1: How long will it take to get my Ethics approval?

A: The Departmental Ethics Committee (DEC) is responsible to review ethics applications of student research projects. For BSocSc(Psy) and BEd students with PS academic / teaching staff as supervisors of their research projects, the PS Department is the approving authority for ethics applications submitted by students. Students are required to observe the timeline and submit their proposals with documents required for ethical review to their supervisors for checking. After your supervisor has checked and approved your Ethics application, he / she will submit it to the Secretary of the DEC for arrangement of ethics review. If amendments are required, the DEC Secretary will convey comments made by DEC reviewers to students for revision. Students are required to revise and re-submit to their supervisors. DEC will review the ethics documents again and give approval when no further amendment is needed.

Similar to staff research, it takes at least four weeks from the date of submitting the ethics documents to the DEC (for UG) for approval. You are highly recommended to submit **at least a month** before you wish to begin the research.

Q2: How do I re-submit my Ethics application that needed amendments?

A: Revise it (**in track-changes form**) in line with the amendments requested, and then send it to your supervisors who will check it and send it back to the Secretary of the DEC. Revised materials can be submitted by email.

Q3: What kinds of consent forms do I need to submit with my Ethics application? Do I need to prepare the consent form and information sheet in both English and Chinese versions?

A: It depends on the age of your participants and where you will be conducting the research. [The PS Department has provided consent forms and information sheets for different age groups at https://www.eduhk.hk/ps/en/information.php?s=guideline&id=1689.](https://www.eduhk.hk/ps/en/information.php?s=guideline&id=1689)

Either Chinese or English is fine. If the document will be presented to participants in Chinese, you only need to provide a Chinese version to DEC for review. If the document will be presented to participants in English and Chinese, please prepare both English and Chinese versions. Be consistent in the information you provide in English and Chinese versions.

Be sure to edit this so that it's ready to give to participants, e.g. the lines for parent / guardian signatures should be deleted. Please see the "PS Department Ethics Guidelines" for instructions.

Q4: When can I collect my data / do my research?

A: Only after ALL of the followings:

1. You have received Ethics approval from the PS department (i.e. received notification, through your supervisor, that your ethics application was approved), AND:
2. If you are doing research at a primary or secondary school, you have gotten approval for carrying out the research from your mentor teacher or principal of your school, AND
3. If you are doing research with children that requires the consent of parents (see "PS Department Ethics Guidelines"), you have received the consent of parents; AND
4. You have received consent / assent from your participants.

Q5: Do I really have to ask my school principal if I can send consent forms to parents?

A: YES! These are the EdUHK rules, so you need to make a good-faith effort. Show your principal / mentor teacher the Parent Consent and Information sheet, and tell your principal / mentor teacher that EdUHK rules say that you should send it home to parents. If they say that they really can't allow it, please talk to your Honours Project supervisor about what to do.

Q6: What if my principal says that he / she doesn't want me to send consent forms to parents?

A: In most cases the principal should be OK with you sending parental consent forms home with students. Special cases will need to go back through the Ethics process: you'll submit a revised Ethics application, and you will need to explain fully why you can't get parental consent. If your research can only be done when parental consent is bypassed; and your research is minimal risk (see "PS Department Ethics Guidelines"); and the school has strong reasons for not wanting to send consent forms to parents; and your EdUHK principal supervisor agrees that in this case parental consents aren't required, your application may still be approved.

Q7: If I get the school principal's consent, do I need to ask students as well?

A: In almost all cases, absolutely yes. Details might depend on your research methods. The usual rules are:

- **Observations** with no other interactions with / identifiable data collected from students do not need consent from students / parents, but do need consent from the school.
- For other methods, for primary school children (ages below 9), because written consent may not be understandable, you must get verbal assent (see "PS Department Ethics Guidelines"). It's especially important that you should verbally remind them that their participation is voluntary and there is no penalty (to their grade or future treatment) if they don't want to participate.
- For all other children and adults (ages 9 and up), their signature on the HREC-provided consent form is required.

Q8: The Ethics application requires me to submit the "questionnaire and / or interview script," but I am still finalizing the exact questions that I will ask and might want to change them slightly later. What should I do?

A: As long as experimental procedures will not change in *ethically important ways* from the information provided in the Ethics application, it does not have to be the final draft of the exact material to be given, as long as it is complete enough for us to evaluate whether or not the questions are about sensitive topics or might cause discomfort. For example, examples of questions that will be asked can be provided instead of a full final questionnaire.

After ethics approval, students and supervisors should ensure that any future changes are not major, and if any major or sensitive changes are required, they should be re-submitted to the ethics committee. For example: do not newly ask any potentially sensitive information of the participants (e.g. drug use; sexual activity; etc.), newly recruit children as participants, or introduce new recruitment procedures that could put pressure on potential participants to participate (e.g. asking one's own students to participate, offering an irresistible reward), or change anonymity or confidentiality of data (e.g. taking videotapes or other recordings that haven't yet been ethically approved). Any such changes should be re-submitted to the ethics committee for approval.

Q9: Any special instructions if I want to make videotapes or recordings of the classroom or interviews?

A: If you do interviews and wish to record them, since the sound recordings will be possibly identifiable and thus not anonymous, please **explain in the application form Part IV (2)** how you will store them confidentially and securely (e.g. on what computers / devices they will be stored; can you store them on a private password-protected laptop and delete them from the mp3 recorder?), and state that they will be destroyed after a certain time period. We recommend that videos or recordings be fully deleted / destroyed from all storage devices as soon as the Board of Examiners meeting is complete (when you receive your grades for the Honours Project).

Videotaping of a normal class lesson is OK and automatically approved, as it is essentially an observation of public behavior. But if you will do any videotaping of activities that are *different* from the public activities students would do during a normal classroom day (e.g. interviews, private conversations between classmates), please edit your Ethics application to reflect this so you can get further instructions.