

Students Conducting Studies Involving Humans Outside of Academic Work

Students conducting studies (or research) on human participants should note that there are various requirements within NTU, and controls under Singapore's legislations on such activities. These include:

- Singapore's Personal Data Protection Act ([PDPA](#));
- Singapore's Human Biomedical Research Act ([HBRA](#)); and
- NTU's [Policy on Research Involving Human Subjects](#).

Studies involving humans can include any of the following methods:

- i) Surveys;
- ii) Interviews;
- iii) Focus group discussions;
- iv) Observations (e.g. image recordings, audio recordings, visual observations);
- v) Obtaining identifiable private information or biospecimens; and/or
- vi) Any other forms of interaction or interventions conducted on humans.

(This list is non-exhaustive and non-definitive. The definition of what is considered "human subject" in research can be found [here](#).)

Students conducting studies involving any of the above methodologies are to ensure that you do not breach any of NTU's policies or contravene Singapore's legislations, which could lead to academic or criminal offences.

When is Ethics Approval Required?

For students who wish to conduct studies (or research) on humans that are part of your academic work or co-curricular activities (e.g. school clubs, interest-based clubs, hall councils, etc), ethics approval is required.

Before you can proceed to conduct your study as part of your co-curricular activities, you are to first obtain the necessary approval from your *student organisation's Advisor or Hall Senior/Faculty-in-Residence*. They will then advise on how to submit an application to NTU-IRB. Further details are available [here](#).

[For studies part of your degree programme, please refer to the "UG and PG degree by coursework" [page](#).]

Please refer to the guidelines in **Annex A** on key requirements to follow.

When is Ethics Approval NOT Required?

Generally, non-academic studies on humans do not require ethics approval. These include surveys and interviews of the following nature:

- Post-event surveys
- Surveys on student organisations' governance, services, facilities, etc.
- Survey on University's facilities and services (by Students' Union or Graduate Students' Association)
- Post-event interviews or surveys with event participants (*e.g., for marketing of future events*)
- Interviews for student organisation/hall committee positions
- Interviews with senior students/alumni/past students from academic programmes (e.g., URECA) seeking personal experiences and advice from junior members.

Even though ethics approval is not required for the above, please refer to the guidelines in **Annex A** when conducting such surveys or interviews.

If there is any intent to publish the results of your study in academic journals or at conferences, please write to the contacts below to enquire before conducting the study.

If you have further queries, please contact:

NTU Institutional Review Board	IRB@ntu.edu.sg
Director, Student Affairs Office	d-sao@ntu.edu.sg

Frequently Asked Questions:

Q1: I am conducting a survey to obtain feedback from students for a School/Hall's orientation programme. Do I need ethics approval?

No. Ethics approval from either NTU's Institutional Review Board ([IRB](#)) or a School Ethics Review Committee ([SERC](#)) is not required if the intention of your survey is not "[research](#)". Studies that do not require ethics approval include service evaluations and/or survey feedback on a particular programme. More examples can be found on the NTU-IRB guidelines [here](#).

However, students are still required to follow the **Key Requirements** stated in Annex A when conducting these kinds of surveys.

Q2: I want to conduct a survey to determine the success of my event. Is this considered research?

No. Post-event surveys are not considered [research](#), hence ethics approval is not required. Please check with your student organisation's Advisor or Hall Senior/Faculty-in-Residence if you are unsure.

However, students are still required to follow the **Key Requirements** stated in Annex A when conducting these kinds of surveys.

Q3: What are examples of studies that require my Advisor/Hall Senior/Faculty-in-Residence's approval and/or ethics approval?

If you are conducting a study that you would like to share with external parties, or if you intend to publish, then ethics approval is likely to be required. This is especially relevant to Graduate Subject Societies (e.g. Economics Society, Psychology Society, etc) who may want to publish their findings on journals/publications.

If the study is part of your academic research project/requirements (undergraduate or postgraduate), please refer to the NTU-IRB guidelines on "**Students conducting research involving human subjects**" [here](#).

Annex A:

Key requirements for conducting human studies (including surveys and interviews)

1. Informed Consent

Informed consent is a process necessary to ensure that the participant fully understands the intent of your study, and voluntarily consents to participate in your study. Informed consent must be obtained from participants prior to the start of your study, and is usually documented with an Informed Consent Form.

Please refer to the NTU-IRB's guidelines regarding "**Informed Consent**" [here](#). You may also wish to refer to examples and templates of **Informed Consent Forms** [here](#).

To ensure that you do not contravene PDPA's requirements, **informed consent from your participant is a must** if you are collecting personal data from your participants.

2. Data Handling & Storage

NTU takes a serious stance on: (i) protecting and maintaining the confidentiality of [personal data](#); and (ii) their [proper handling and storage](#).

Please ensure that personal data is secured by:

1. Encryption
2. Restricted folder access to authorised people
3. No sharing with unauthorised people (or external parties)
4. No publishing of personal data in the public domain.

Students conducting studies involving humans/handling personal data should complete the [PDPA course on NTULearn](#) to understand the basics of data handling. Please also note NTU's [Data Governance Policy](#), which requires that all data be properly labelled, stored, and handled according to its [data classification](#).