

Grand Valley State University
Human Research Review Committee

HRRC Guidance on use of email for conducting research activities

Issued: April 10, 2012

<http://www.gvsu.edu/hrrc/email-surveys-72.htm>

Guidance

To avoid invasive or burdensome numbers of invitations to participate in research, requests to recruit students, faculty, and staff via GVSU e-mail must be approved by the Office of Institutional Analysis (OIA).

Procedures

1. Requests for e-mail contact for the purposes of administering surveys or inviting participants to enroll in research including interviews or focus groups, should be directed to the Office of Institutional Analysis (OIA). Send a brief description of the proposed research that includes all of the following information:
 - a. the target population(s) of interest,
 - b. the nature of the research study,
 - c. timing of desired initial contact,
 - d. the number and timing of reminder or follow-up contacts, if any.
2. Requests to OIA for sending mass e-mails for research purposes must allow at least one week between the request and the sending date the initial e-mail message.
3. Approval by the OIA to send surveys or invitations to participate in research does not imply HRRC approval. However, OIA will provide a letter to the researcher expressing its intention to provide the e-mail contact, which will be useful in support of the HRRC proposal. As such, it's advisable to seek OIA support before submitting a proposal to HRRC.
4. OIA will review requests in consultation with the appropriate university offices that may be affected (e.g. Athletic Department, Dean of Students, Provost, human resources, etc). OIA will review all requests for compliance with relevant university policies and competing requests for messaging, as appropriate.
5. The OIA does not release email addresses or other individually identifiable information directly to researchers. The OIA will send the requested message text and appropriate email address lists, including return addresses or other contact information as requested by the researcher, to Information Technology for transmission.
6. OIA approval and the assistance of IT is not required when invitations to participate in research are on clearly-defined groups for whom a GVSU employee or student has both the administrative responsibility and the list of current email addresses. For example, faculty may survey students enrolled in their academic courses via Blackboard, athletic coaches may survey athletes, clubs and GVSU organizations may survey their members, etc. HRRC approval may still be required.

7. The university encourages the use of random sampling to reduce the burden of requests on individual invitees. Researchers need to present a compelling rationale if they intend to contact entire populations (e.g. all faculty, all undergraduate students, etc.)

GVSU encourages sound research by and about its students, faculty, and staff, but also respects and honors the privacy and valuable time of those constituencies. Electronic mail presents a powerful and easy means of contacting potential participants for human subjects' research, but that ease creates a potential for invasive or overwhelming contacts by researchers. The following statements establish the conditions under which the university will provide support for research efforts that involve mass e-mails to students, faculty, or staff.

1. Requests for e-mail contact for the purposes of survey or focus group research should be directed to the Office of Institutional Analysis (OIA). Please send a brief description of the proposed research, including the population(s) that you wish to contact, the subject and nature of the research, and the timing of contact (including any follow-up contacts).
2. OIA will review requests in consultation with the Office of the Dean of Students and/or the Provost's Office (depending whether contact is requested with students, faculty, or both). Requests will be reviewed for compliance with FERPA and university policy. Consideration will also be given to issues of timing, burden on respondents, and overlap with other research projects.
3. The university will not release email addresses or other individually identifiable information directly to students. Instead, student researchers will provide the text for their messages to OIA. OIA will send the message text and the email address list to the university's Information Technology department, who will send the message (with a return address specified by the researcher).
4. E-mail messages must be sent in such a way that individual recipients cannot identify other recipients (e.g. never list all recipients in the "To" or "Cc" fields of an e-mail).
5. Research projects must be approved (or deemed exempt) by HRRC. Administrative approval under this procedure does not imply HRRC approval. However, OIA will provide a letter expressing its intention to provide support for e-mail contact, which will be useful in support of the HRRC proposal. As such, it's advisable to seek administrative support before submitting a proposal to HRRC.
6. Research on small, clearly-defined groups that have a GVSU employee responsible for that group's oversight does not need to be approved by central administration. For example, a teacher can approve a survey of his/her class, a coach could approve a survey of his/her squad, etc. These projects do still need HRRC clearance.
7. Requests for mass e-mails must allow at least one week between the submission of all required information (including HRRC clearance) and the date the first e-mail message is to be sent.
8. The university encourages the use of random sampling to reduce the burden of requests on individual invitees. Researchers need to present a compelling rationale if they intend to contact entire populations (e.g. all faculty, all undergraduate students, etc.)

Be sure to include the following disclaimer regarding internet security in all electronic surveys:

You are asked to voluntarily provide specific information to this web site. You may skip any question, or stop participating at any time. The information collected will be used for the stated purposes of this research project only and will not be provided to any other party for any other reason at any time except and only if required by law. You should be aware that although the information you provide is

anonymous, it is transmitted in a non-secure manner. There is a remote chance that skilled, knowledgeable persons unaffiliated with this research project could track the information you provide to the IP address of the computer from which you send it. However, your personal identity cannot be determined.