

**The University of Melbourne
Melbourne School of Psychological Sciences**

Policy Document for Research Experience Program (REP)

The policy of The Melbourne School of Psychological Sciences for its Research Experience Program (REP) and the administration of the program is designed to assure high standards in the School's guidelines for research education and training, provision of appropriate supervision for all student researchers, administrative oversight, and academic monitoring of the REP and associated programs.

The organization and procedures of the REP have been examined and revised by the School and by the University of Melbourne's Behavioural and Social Sciences Human Ethics Subcommittee (HESC) from time to time. The current set of guidelines are designed to ensure maximum benefit and protection for all participants.

The REP is overseen and monitored by the School HEAG and the REP Convenor independently of the normal convening duties of first year psychology subjects. The REP Convenor is the person whom first year students should contact if they have concerns about the program including if they choose to not participate in the program and wish to undertake an alternative way of gaining research experience and knowledge.

Within the School of Psychological Sciences a diverse set of research interests that are currently being pursued by staff and postgraduate students. Many of the research programs within the School are recognized internationally and are contributing to contemporary psychological knowledge and understanding.

No proper training in psychology and its ethical underpinnings is complete without an understanding of the perspective of the research participant. Providing beginning students with the opportunity to participate in actual research projects gives them access to aspects of the research process that might not be obvious from their learning in lectures and laboratory classes. For example, the program gives students access to information about theory testing, and to different ways of asking people questions and of analysing data. It also supports students' understanding of the importance of research participants being enabled to freely consent to participate in research, to have the option of withdrawing that consent, to have ready access to support and further information in case of any concerns or worries, and to be fully debriefed about the aims and rationale of research procedures.

Aims

The Research Experience Program (REP) has four aims focusing on ethically conducted and educationally-appropriate research. These are important aims in a discipline where empirical investigations are the primary means of advancing the understanding of human psychology. The aims are:

1. To give students in their first year of psychological studies first-hand understanding of empirical research and of the construction of psychological knowledge. This understanding is enhanced by being participants in research projects undertaken by academic staff, fourth year (e.g., honours) students, and postgraduate students.

2. To give postgraduate and fourth year students appropriate training in research ethics and management, by conducting research under the direct supervision of experienced academic researchers.
3. To provide academic and student researchers with an avenue for recruiting samples of research participants with a set of responsible and ethical procedures for interacting with student participants in monitored research environments.
4. To provide for the Melbourne School of Psychological Sciences, a set of procedures that ensure high standards of research involving student researchers and student participants.

Policy for first year psychology students and their involvement in the REP

The program provides a "participant's eye view" of how research should be conducted under respectful and carefully controlled and monitored conditions. Students experience the way contemporary psychological research respects the privacy and integrity of participants. Students are given:

- (i) a choice of projects from a large set,
- (ii) appropriate information for choosing projects, and relevant information for giving their informed consent,
- (iii) an alternative research experience if they find it unacceptable to be involved in empirical research,
- (iv) appropriate ways of gaining support if needed,
- (v) appropriate follow-up information and feedback.

In short, the program models the university's ethical guidelines and standards in a practical way for first year students to experience and to learn from as part of their training in psychology. There are well-advertised guidelines to allow students to decline to participate in the program or to withdraw from individual studies without prejudice of their academic progress. Attached is a copy of the relevant entries in the subject manual. (Attachment No. 1).

Policy for staff and student researchers and their involvement in the REP:

- (i) Researchers must follow the NHMRC principles of informed consent, confidentiality, and privacy and adhere to these throughout the research project.
- (ii) Researchers must apply the REP and the School, agreeing to follow this policy and the procedures of the REP.
- (iii) Researchers must have their REP application approved by the School HEAG and the REP Convenor.
- (iv) Researchers must make their findings available to students via LMS and by emailing the research participants directly. This should be done in a way that gives them insight into the research questions, methodology, results and conclusions. This reporting requirement is in addition to the information contained in Plain Language Statements and Debriefing documents.

Procedures for participation by first year students

Each student enrolled in the two first year psychology subjects is expected to undertake 5 hours of research participation. There are two semester long subjects: Mind, Brain and Behaviour 1

(PSYC10003) is offered in Semester I, and Mind, Brain and Behaviour 2 (PSYC10004) in Semester II. Thus, over a full year, each student undertakes 10 hours of active research experience across the two first year subjects.

Because the REP emphasises the importance of a range of research experiences, participating students are expected, where possible to divide their participation time between projects involving standardized questionnaires (e.g., self-report personality inventories) and projects involving non-questionnaire activities (e.g., reaction time studies using computers). Within the five hours for each subject, students need to choose a minimum of 2 hours each of NQ (Non-Questionnaire) and Q (Questionnaire) studies as part of these five hours. Q/NQ studies counts as both/either.

No individual project or participation is compulsory for any first year student.

Students are provided with a short description of the project, through an advertisement approved by the Melbourne School of Psychological Sciences Human Ethics Advisory Group (HEAG) and where appropriate, by the Behavioural and Social Sciences-HESC, on which to base their choice.

Student Choice of Projects: Approved projects are advertised online at <https://unimelb.sona-systems.com/> and on the first year psychology site within the University of Melbourne's Learning Management System (LMS) for the 1st year subject. No other advertisements or enticements are permitted in lecture or laboratory classes. Only the HESC-approved advertisement may be used for recruitment purposes.

The restriction of research advertisements to a specific online site means that all projects are carefully vetted against HESC approvals, and that the advertisements are checked for their suitability.

Projects are advertised from the first day of the semester, so that it is possible for students to have this part of their course commitment completed before pressure of other assignments builds up later in the semester. Each semester numbers of students avail themselves of this opportunity. Where students have difficulty attending during the daytime they are able to contact researchers and arrange participation times to suit their situations.

Students sign-up for a specific data collection session in the projects they have chosen. Each student is credited on the on-line system by the researcher soon after the completion of the data collection session.

Students who have concerns about participating in research through the REP are encouraged to meet with the REP Convenor and to discuss these concerns. This provision is drawn to students' attention in: the first lecture, the printed Manual distributed to all first-year students, an email sent out to students in the first week of the semester, and the first laboratory class where tutors explain course requirements in detail.

If a first year student does not wish to participate in the Research Experience Program, then an alternative research experience will be provided by the REP Convenor, which deals with some aspect of research participation and ethical issues in psychological research.

Procedures for Researchers participating in the Research Experience Program

Psychology staff and fourth-year and postgraduate research students may apply to participate in the REP program as researchers under the condition that an academic member of the school specifically accepts responsibility for the project as Principal Investigator.

REP applications are downloaded Melbourne School of Psychological Sciences website, complete it, save it and submit it electronically via email to REP-psych@unimelb.edu.au

- All REP projects must be approved by the Psychology **Human Ethics Advisory Group** (HEAG) and monitored by the REP Convenor. Projects not already approved within the School (approved by outside ethics committees or other HEAGs) must obtain the signed approval of the Psychology HEAG. All researchers are required to provide a completed copy of the REP application, a copy of their ethics application, approval letter, and debriefing statement.
- (i) All researchers are required sign an application to the REP stating that they have read and will abide by REP policies and procedures.
- (ii) Information about the Research Experience Program is available for potential participating researchers on the School web site in the research section
- (ii) Applications are processed by the School's professional staff, and managed and monitored by the REP Convenor. No research may commence until the researchers have the signed approval of the HEAG and the REP Convenor.

Quotas of participants

A limit of 100 participation hours *for each advertised project* in each semester is imposed (80 hours for a fourth-year project), to ensure equity of access, and to ensure a range of projects from which first year students may choose their five hours participation. Each academic or postgraduate student has access to 100 participation hours per semester (or 80 hours for a fourth-year student).

These quota restrictions imply that:

- Each REP Advertisement can advertise for the equivalent of 100 hours at a maximum of REP allocation (or 80 if for a fourth-year project).
- This 100 hours can be made up solely of one researcher's allocation, or it can comprise less than 100 hours for each of two or more researchers that come to 100 hours in total (e.g., Researcher A uses 60 hours of her allocation of 100 hours in one semester, and her PhD student uses 40 hours of his allocation in the same semester).
- This form of sharing enables the same researcher to access the REP for more than one research project, while ensuring that each project only uses 100 hours at a maximum.
- However, these restrictions can mean that a particular research project may be restricted to advertising for less than 100 hours, if all researchers do not have 100 REP hours left in total between them from their individual allocations.
- Any researchers' REP allocation hours cannot be traded or given to other researchers for their own project, if that researcher is not a member of the project (according to the Ethics form).

Researchers who wish to access more than 100 hours for a particular research project (or who do not have 100 hours left in total between them) may be offered access to additional participants by the REP Convenor only after all initial requests by researchers have been met and exhausted.

Issues related to conduct of research projects

- *Amount of time on individual projects.* To achieve variety across the 5 hours of participation, any single REP project should involve no more than 2-hours participation time. Where projects require more than one hour of participation time a combination of methods is preferable (e.g., a questionnaire and a computer-based task or a physical manipulation task).
- *Risks to students.* Any risk to participants must be declared in the appropriate HESC Ethics Application form, and such risk will be carefully assessed by School's HEAG and the University Behavioural Social Sciences-HESC before approval is given. For approval to be given, HEAG and HESC need to be assured that all risks have been minimised wherever possible, and that appropriate strategies are in place to deal with any adverse circumstances arising from such risks. High risk projects are not suitable for the REP and will not be approved by HEAG and BSS-HESC.
- *Confidentiality.* Projects of choice are a personal matter for each 1st year student. Confidentiality of procedures and data management are approved by the School HEAG.
- *Dependency issues.* Where the principal investigator in a research project is teaching in a first year subject, the researchers are expected to provide the HESC and the student participant with a clear indication of how the researcher is dealing with dependency issues. This criterion applies to lecturers, and to tutors (tutors may not advertise or recruit in their own lab classes). Any dependency issue needs to be explicitly stated in the Plain Language Statement provided to participants, with an explicit indication that students will not be penalised in any way either if they do not consent to participate or if they withdraw their participation after giving initial consent.
- *Withdrawal from a project.* The Plain Language Statement makes clear that participants have the right to withdraw without penalty, both before and after having signed up for a project. If any student withdraws his or her participation once a project has started, that student will still obtain the participation credit indicated in the Plain Language Statement.
- *Incentives.* Researchers are not permitted to offer further incentives to students (e.g., payment) unless there is a specific reason approved by the BSS-HESC.
- *Support.* If an adverse event occurs during or after participation, the provision of support and/or counselling to student participants is the responsibility of the principal researcher in the project. If it is a fourth year or postgraduate student project, the responsible researcher is the supervisor of the student researcher. Student researchers may not provide support or counselling to REP participants. If the REP participant wishes to complain about the project, s/he is directed to the HESC in the Plain Language Statement. For this and any other concern with the conduct and running of any research project by any 1st year student should be directed to the supervisor or to the REP Convenor if they involve administrative matters.
- *Referral.* The Plain Language Statement and/or Debriefing Statement must include contact information for referral in case a student may have concerns raised as a result of their participation. In the first instance, the supervisor (or staff member who is the principal investigator) will see the student and arrange a referral. If the project has clinical implications and the supervisor is not a clinician, the researchers are expected to give the name of a clinician who has agreed to see the student for referral purposes.

Research Training for Student Researchers

The fourth year of study in psychology includes a compulsory subject: PSYC40006 'Theories and Ethics in Psychology'. In that subject, students are introduced to the theory and practice of ethical research and receive detailed instruction in these two areas (as well as practical instructions in

completing Ethics Application forms). Students are given tutorials in HESC procedures and adequate opportunity to discuss the ethical issues involved in their own research and in research more generally.

Monitoring the Operation of the Research Experience Program

The REP will be approved by the HEAG and monitored by the REP Convenor. Student participants and student researchers are encouraged to give feedback about their experiences of the REP through:

- *Access to the REP convenor and the First-Year Convenor.* It is stressed from the beginning of the semester, both verbally and in the printed First Year Subject Manual, that any students who may have any concerns about the REP should meet with the REP convenor to discuss those concerns.
- *Staff-student liaison meetings.* Each semester a formal staff-student liaison meeting is held seeking student comment on how the course is progressing. Each of the laboratory classes (approx. 30 classes per semester) is invited to send a representative to the meeting. The Research Experience Program is discussed at these meetings.
- *Laboratory classes.* Tutors who are taking the laboratory classes in PSYC10003 and PSYC10004 are encouraged to include discussion of the ethics of research participation when it is pertinent to the research methods issues being dealt with in their classes. This provides tutors with an opportunity to receive informal feedback on the current operation of the Research Experience Program and any problems being encountered by participants. Tutors have a briefing meeting with the 1st year subject convenor each week and any issues raised in their classes can be brought up in this forum, and then subsequently brought to the attention of the Convenor of the REP.
- *** do we need this for the future?* The substance of the concerns raised with either convenor tends to be timing of projects and broken appointments. To address issues of timing students are encouraged to contact the researchers conducting the project (s) chosen and arrange a special session at a time convenient to them. This has worked well as researchers are generally keen to accommodate all potential participants.

If it happens that a researcher has not keep a scheduled appointment and a first-year student has been left waiting, then the REP credit advertised for that study is given to the student in lieu of the failed appointment. In practice, this occurs infrequently. However, if it does occur, then REP student should contact the Convenor of REP to inform her or him that it happened to them and to get the REP credit (after the incident has been investigated).

Attachment No. 1: REP Statement in 1st Year Manual

4.2.2 Research Experience

Psychology is a science that relies upon research to confirm or refute the validity of its theories. As such, no education in psychology is complete without training in research, which involves an element of participation and experience. It is through being a research participant yourself that you gain insight into the research process and, are better able to evaluate research findings and design and conduct your own research. To obtain this practical experience Psychology PSYC10003 students are required to participate in five hours of research being conducted by staff and students of the department. Reports of findings from these research projects will be posted on Learning Support System (LMS) at the end of the year.

Research Experience Requirements:

Complete a minimum of five hours of participation in research projects. Include a minimum of 2 hours each of NQ (Non-Questionnaire) and Q (Questionnaire) studies as part of these five hours. Q/NQ studies counts as both/either.

- Register on-line for the projects you are interested at <https://unimelb.sonasystems.com>. **You will receive additional instructions near the start of semester on how to register for an REP online system account.**
- Hours need to be completed by Friday, 26 May, 2017. Researchers will provide you with credit towards the completion of your hurdle requirement via the online REP system following your participation.
- If you have an objection to participate in the research experience program you must discuss this with either the coordinator in the first instance (Simon Cropper) or the REP Coordinator early in the semester who will be happy to talk to you about it. If you chose not to participate in research, then an alternative writing assessment may be assigned