

Melbourne School of Psychological Sciences Research Experience Program (REP) Policy

This policy of the Research Experience Program (REP) in the Melbourne School of Psychological Sciences (henceforth “the School”) is designed to assure high standards in the School’s guidelines for research education and training.

The organization and procedures of the REP have been examined and revised by the School and, from time to time, by the University of Melbourne’s Psychology, Health and Applied Sciences Human Ethics Sub-committee (HESC). 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’s Human Ethics Advisory Group (HEAG) and the REP Convenor independently of the coordinators of the first-year psychology subjects. The REP Convenor (Pete Koval) is the person who first-year students should contact if they have concerns about the program (p.koval@unimelb.edu.au).

BACKGROUND

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 research projects gives them access to aspects of the research process that might not be obvious from their learning in lectures and laboratory classes. In particular, the REP program gives students a first-hand understanding of the importance of research participants being freely able to consent to participate in research, having the option of withdrawing their consent, having access to support and further information in case of any concerns, and being fully debriefed about the aims and rationale of the research project.

AIMS

The REP has three main aims:

1. To give first-year psychology students a first-hand understanding of empirical psychology research by being participants in research projects within the School.
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 within the School an avenue for recruiting research participants.

INFORMATION FOR FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS

The REP provides a "participant's eye view" of how research should be conducted under respectful and carefully 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 choose not to be involved in empirical research, (iv) appropriate ways of gaining support if needed, (v) appropriate follow-up information and feedback.

Students enrolled in both first-year psychology subjects may participate in 5 hours of research participation per semester (i.e., 10 hours in total during first-year). Students who choose to participate in the REP will be awarded 1% course credit per hour of research participation completed, up to a maximum of 5% per semester. Note that students are not eligible for additional course credit beyond 5 hours (5%) per semester.

Because the REP emphasises the importance of a range of research experiences, participating students are expected to divide their participation between web-based research projects, labelled “online” (e.g., questionnaires, experiments etc. completed remotely via web-based platforms), and projects involving face-to-face activities in the lab, labelled “offline”, for

which participants must attend the lab in person. Each semester, **students may complete a maximum of 3 hours of projects of any single type** (i.e., max. 3 hours of online or 3 hours of offline projects). The remaining 2 hours should comprise projects of the other type. While most REP studies will be either “online” or “offline”, some may combine online and offline methods and will therefore be categorised as “on/offline” - these studies may be counted as either type.

No individual project or participation is compulsory for any student.

Students are provided with short descriptions of REP projects, through advertisements approved by the School’s HEAG and, where appropriate, by the University’s Psychology Health and Applied Sciences Human Ethics Sub-Committee (HESC).

Approved projects are advertised at <https://unimelb.sonasystems.com> and on the first-year psychology site within the University of Melbourne’s Learning Management System (LMS). No other advertisements or enticements are permitted in lecture or laboratory classes. The School endeavours to ensure that some REP projects are advertised from the first day of the semester to enable students to complete their REP participation early in the semester if they wish to do so.

Students sign-up for a specific REP study and, where relevant, students select a specific session-time to complete the study. Students may contact the responsible researcher(s) to arrange an alternate time to participate, although no guarantees are made. **Students are credited by the responsible researcher via the SONA systems web platform as soon as possible after completing their participation.**

If it happens that a researcher does not keep a scheduled appointment, the REP credit advertised for that study is given to the student in lieu of the failed appointment. In practice, this occurs very rarely, but if it happens the student should contact the REP Convenor (p.koval@unimelb.edu.au) who will investigate the issue.

Students who have concerns about participating in research through the REP may contact the REP Convenor (p.koval@unimelb.edu.au). This provision is drawn to students’ attention in the first lecture, and the first laboratory class each semester and is also clearly stated in the subject manual available on LMS. Any student who does not wish to participate in the REP but would like to be eligible for the additional 5% credit per semester may contact the REP convenor to arrange an alternative task, which deals with some aspect of research participation and ethical issues in psychological research. Students wishing to make use of this alternative provision should contact the REP convener as early as possible in semester (i.e., within the first few weeks) to allow sufficient time for the necessary arrangements to be made.

INFORMATION FOR RESEARCHERS

Researchers wishing to access the REP must (i) follow the NHMRC principles of ethical research, (ii) complete an REP application (see below) and have it approved, and (iii) summarise research findings for students via LMS and by emailing the participants directly. Summaries of REP projects should clearly inform participants about the research questions, methodology, results and conclusions. This reporting requirement is in addition to the information contained in the Plain Language Statement (PLS) and Debriefing Statement.

Research students from within the School may apply to access the REP as long as an academic staff member of the School accepts responsibility for the project as Principal Investigator. REP studies are approved for a single semester and researchers must apply to have their study extended for the following semester if they wish it to continue running (see below).

How to apply for access to the REP as a researcher:

- 1) Download and complete the application forms (available on the School website)
- 2) Send the completed REP application form to REP-psych@unimelb.edu.au along with the following documents:
 - a. copy of ethics application and approval letter
 - b. REP advertisement (NB. only the REP advertisement approved by the relevant ethics committee may be used)
 - c. debriefing statement

- 3) Please wait until your application is approved before commencing recruitment.
- 4) REP studies are approved on a semester-by-semester basis. For REP studies running for more than one semester, please contact REP-psych@unimelb.edu.au to apply for an extension.

Issues relating to conduct of REP research projects:

Participant Quotas. Researchers are allocated the following maximum number of REP participation hours per semester:

- academic staff, PhD and MPhil students: 100 REP hours per semester
- fourth-year and MPsyh students: 80 REP hours per semester

Researchers may combine their REP allocations to run larger studies as long as all researchers involved have been approved as study investigators by the relevant ethics committee.

Time involvement per project. To achieve variety across the 5 hours of participation, no single REP project should involve more than 2 hours participation time (unless approved by the REP coordinator). Projects requiring more than one hour of participation time should aim to use a combination of online and offline methods.

Risks to students. REP studies should avoid/minimise risk to student participants wherever possible, and appropriate strategies should be in place to deal with any adverse circumstances arising from any such risks. High risk projects are not suitable for the REP. Any risk to participants must be justified in the relevant ethics application.

Dependency issues. Where the principal investigator is teaching in a first-year subject, the researchers are expected to clearly indicate how the researcher is dealing with inherent conflict of interest. This criterion applies to lecturers and tutors (NB. tutors may not advertise or recruit in their own lab classes). Any dependency needs to be stated in the PLS with an explicit indication that students will not be penalised in any way if they do not consent to participate or if they withdraw their participation after giving initial consent.

Withdrawal from projects. The PLS 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 their participation once a project has started, that student should still receive the number of REP credits indicated in the PLS.

Incentives. Researchers are not permitted to offer further incentives to students (e.g., payment) for REP projects, unless there is a specific reason approved by the relevant ethics committee.

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. For fourth-year or postgraduate student projects, the responsible researcher must be the student's supervisor. Student researchers should not provide support or counselling to REP participants. If REP participants wish to complain about a project, they are directed to the relevant ethics committee in the PLS.

Referral. The PLS and/or Debriefing Statement must include contact information for referral in case a student has concerns relating to 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, a clinician's name and contact details should be included in the PLS and/or Debriefing Statement.