IRB Statement Regarding Human Subjects Research and Covid-19

Given the current COVID-19 pandemic, the Carthage College Institutional Review Board (IRB) hereby informs the Carthage College community that all research using human subjects must conform to Carthage College guidelines established for maintaining human safety during the on-going COVID-19 crisis. Links to these guidelines and information on Carthage’s plans, policies and response to COVID-19 can be found on the following webpage: https://www.carthage.edu/carthage-covid-19/

Guidance from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
As stated by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), “Given the current circumstances, the research community is encouraged to prioritize public health and safety.” As a general matter, OHRP [Office for Human Research Protections] wants to reassure the research community that OHRP will take into account the specific circumstances that institutions and investigators are experiencing, and will use available flexibility in its decision making as institutions and investigators implement actions necessary to protect public health, while still appropriately protecting research subjects.” OHRP Guidance on COVID-19

In-Person, Face-to-Face Research
Many faculty and students conduct research using methods that require direct face-to-face contact – individual interviews, group interviews, guided discussions, guided exercises, etc. Due to potential risks to investigators and participants, the IRB encourages that human research be conducted remotely via a secure platform (phone, Zoom, other means) whenever possible. Research proposals that include in-person, face-to-face contact must follow current CDC, OHRP and Carthage College guidance for human safety during the on-going COVID-19 crisis.

Ensuring Confidentiality
For research requiring video interviews, investigators are urged to use on-line, college-approved platforms, such as Zoom or Google Meet. Up-to-date versions of these platforms must be used to ensure that security is maintained. When using on-line platforms to conduct research, investigators need to be sure that participants are adequately protected. Investigators also need to ensure that interviews are conducted in secure environments that protect the participants. For example, conducting interviews in spaces where conversations can be overheard or participants can be seen, must be avoided. As would be expected in any data collection procedure, all data collected must be secured in a safe place, and must follow IRB guidelines for protecting participants.

Active Studies
If COVID-19 affects a current protocol you have registered with the IRB, you should submit an amendment noting COVID-19 risk mitigation strategies and if necessary an updated consent form/statement to the IRB.

Questions
For more information, or to discuss implications for a specific project reach out to irbchair@carthage.edu

Optional COVID-19 and Human Subjects Research Training is available through CITI:
- Follow instruction here to access CITI’s free “COVID-19: Back to Campus (Fall 2020)” course
- Complete the supplemental module: COVID-19: Human Subjects Research (ID 20083)
- For assistance with CITI contact: irb@carthage.edu or smueller2@carthage.edu