

Ethical Review of Case Studies - LREB Guideline
(Provisionally Approved by the Scholarly Activity Steering Committee, October 28, 2016)

Guideline:

Langara researchers or students who conduct a case study investigation of a specific living individual or who conduct a series of such case studies must have ethical approval from the Langara Research Ethics Board, as follows:

1. **Langara researchers** who conduct case studies on individual living humans for research purposes are required to make application to the Langara Research Ethics board for review and prior approval of such research before case study participants can be recruited and research on them commenced. See the "[Request for Ethics Review Application Form](#)" and the [timetable](#) for Langara Research Ethics Board meetings.

2. **Langara instructors** who require or permit **students** to undertake case study research on individual living humans must have their relevant course(s) reviewed by completing the "[Application for Course-Based Research](#)." This application must be approved before individuals are recruited to participate in such research. Applications can be made any time, but are encouraged in the semester before the course is taught.

Exception: This guideline does not include student interviews with living persons that do not require students to design and attempt to replicate a case study investigation for research purposes. For example, LREB review would not be required for course work that requires students to gain experience of interviewing skills or to interview individuals to find evidence of current social or psychological theories. While such interviews raise ethical issues that students should be educated about, they do not attempt to replicate a scholarly research case study per se, and so are not subject to LREB review. See the Background section for clarification of the nature and aims of research case studies.

Background:

Case studies of particular individuals are common elements of scholarly research programs. These are often described as "n of 1" studies. Although case studies will typically not answer specific research questions, and thus not definitively extend the boundaries of human knowledge, they often contribute to human knowledge by being hypothesis-generating, by providing information on which more systematic investigations can be based, or by pilot testing a theoretical model or intervention. Case study research commonly observes methodological standards for qualitative research. Case study research is a recognized research activity in many disciplines, including psychology, criminology, anthropology, sociology, and health care.

Rationale for Research Ethics Board Review:

Case study research on living humans raises all the ethical issues presented by research involving larger populations of individuals. These include issues of informed consent, protection of participant confidentiality, minimization of risk to participants, and the need to justify the social value of the

research. Often case studies raise these issues in acute form, since the contact between researcher and research participant is face-to-face, so that the research participant is not anonymous. Information sought in case studies is frequently personally sensitive and, as noted, case study research sometimes involves gathering data on experimental interventions on particular individuals. These are all reasons for ethical review of case studies.

Questions:

If you are not sure whether your, or your students', activities require ethics review by the Langara Research Ethics Board or have other questions about ethical review of case study research, please contact the chair of the LREB, John Russell at jrussell@langara.ca, 604-323-5453.