



**Social Science Department**  
**WPI**  
**Participant Pool and Sona Systems Guidelines:**  
**For Instructors**

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### 1. Introduction

The following concerns the inclusion of a Research Requirement in courses dealing with that would like the students to get a hands-on experience with Social Science oriented research that deals with Human Subjects.

The purpose of the Research Requirement is: 1) to enhance the education of students in courses discussing social science methodology and human subjects research by providing them with hands-on experience as a participant in human subjects research, and 2) to enable researchers using human subjects to collect data more efficiently.

Social Science is unique among the sciences in its ability to engage students in active, cutting-edge research. Physics, Chemistry, and Biology do have laboratory components to their work, but it is rare that students in those courses experience novel research as it happens. Our participant pool provides an opportunity to show Social Science methodology in action, instill excitement about the discipline, provide an occasion to imagine life as a Social science major or professional, and teach something about current research and the practice of social science. As such, all studies submitted through the participant pool will clearly define how it is related to social science to ensure the studies meet the educational goals for the participants.

Sona Systems software is used to manage the Participant Pool and the Research Requirement. This is a web based system that can be accessed from most computers with internet access ([wpi.sona-systems.com](http://wpi.sona-systems.com)). All students will log into this system and sign up for available studies through this system. The system will automatically keep track of credits and penalties and will calculate credit reports for you to use for grading purposes.

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### 2. Access to the pool

As an instructor agreeing to have the Research Requirement in your course, you will be given an instructor account in Sona Systems. You never need to log onto this account, if you choose not to. As you are generous enough to offer the Research Requirement in your class, we simply ask that you be vaguely familiar with the standards and procedures to answer any simple and easy questions your students might have. You should not need to troubleshoot any issues that arise; rather, you can direct all questions/issues to the Participant Pool Coordinator, Jeanine Skorinko, [skorinko@wpi.edu](mailto:skorinko@wpi.edu).

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### **3. Ethical Guidelines, Educational Mission, and Debriefing**

#### Ethical Guidelines:

While we can encourage our students to learn about the research process by including a Research Requirement in our courses, we cannot force our students to participate in studies. Thus, each student has a choice in how they would like to complete their requirement. They may participate in studies, they may complete an IRB approved alternative assignment (see Appendix A for this assignment), or they may do a combination of these activities. To ensure that our students are aware of these options, the WPI IRB requires that we administer an informed consent to our students prior to completing the research requirement (contact [skorinko@wpi.edu](mailto:skorinko@wpi.edu) for this PDF). In addition, all participants under the age of 18 are considered Minors. Students who are considered Minors must obtain Parental Consent and Assent prior to their participation in the Participant Pool. Please note that these participants must still give consent to participate in individual studies in the pool (contact [skorinko@wpi.edu](mailto:skorinko@wpi.edu) for this PDF)

To be eligible to use the Participant Pool, the researchers must have their studies approved by the IRB (Internal Review Board) and they must include a debriefing form that is educational in nature, explaining the study in layman's terms for our students. In addition, all researchers and all research assistants must complete an online training course on Protecting Human Subjects prior to being allowed to run studies through the Participant Pool. All these ethical guidelines are in place for the protection of everyone involved.

Students are given informed consent prior to participating in any study (unless exempt status by the IRB), and they may leave at any time in the study if they are uncomfortable or do not wish to participate any longer. They will still get credit, as long as they showed up on time. If a researcher is late to an appointment or fails to show up, the participant will also get credit.

#### Educational Mission:

One of the main goals of the Participant Pool is to enhance the education of students in courses discussing social science methodology and human subjects research by providing them with hands-on experience as a participant in human subjects research, and teach them about the current research and practice of social scientists. As such, all studies submitted through the Participant Pool need to ensure the studies meet the educational goals for the participants. Because of the variability in methodologies and types of research, there are very few specific rules for how to exactly meet the educational mission. Instead, it is the responsibility of each research team to determine how best to provide educational value in their research protocol. The vast majority of studies will accomplish this during the process of debriefing.

#### Debriefing:

All participants must be debriefed. Participation in research should be an educational experience. Proper debriefing should fully inform the participant about the research and explain any deception used in the study. Failure to debrief participants adequately is grounds for losing your Participant Pool privileges. To use the pool, researchers must submit debriefing forms or scripts *before* they may run participants. These debriefing scripts will include the experimental question, the hypothesis, the way in which answers are evaluated, the broader issues addressed by the study, and how

and participants can obtain copies of the findings. Whenever possible, the debriefing will be done in person, immediately following participation.

*Note: Studies with Exempt IRB status typically do not need to provide informed consents and debriefing forms.*

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#### **4. The Requirement**

For each class that requires research participation, students will need to earn a set number of research credits. Students should not receive a grade for this experience, as it will be hard to assess learning and it is impossible to grade a participant's performance in a study. Failure to complete this requirement should result rather in deduction of their final grade.

At time point in time, the Participant Pool Chair recommends deducting 1 percentage point from the final grade per credit not completed for the requirement. Thus if the student earned a 90% in the course but failed to complete the two experiments required, their final grade will be reduced to an 88%. But, if they failed to do one credit, then their grade would be an 89%.

The student may earn experiment credits by participating in research studies posted on Sona-Systems or by completing the alternative assignment (see next section). Students are allowed to do a combination of participating in studies and completing alternative assignments.

How many credits does a participant need? At this time, with the participant pool being new, you, the instructor, get to pick that number. There are two stipulations to this:

- 1) all students in your course must at least earn 1 experiment credit and may not earn more than 5 experiment credits (as approved by the IRB). As the pool is new and the number of studies is not great, 1 experiment credit = 1 experiment. Experiments as of right now are not based on time because all studies in the pool are around half-hour experiments. Thus at this point in time, requiring 2 experiment credits in your class will equal 1 hour of their time outside of class.
- 2) Before you set the requirement check with the Participant Pool chair (skorinko@wpi.edu) to ensure that enough studies will be available that term in the pool.

As of right now, requiring 2 credits seems to be working just fine.

***Requirement Deadline: Participants have until the last day of classes each term to complete the requirement (via studies or the alternative assignment).***

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#### **5. Alternative Assignment**

While we can encourage our students to learn about the research process by including a Research Requirement in our courses, we cannot force our students to participate in studies. Thus, each student has a choice in how they would like to complete their requirement. They may participate in studies, they may complete an IRB approved alternative assignment (see the Appendix A for this assignment), or they may do a combination of these activities.

The alternative assignment will allow participants to learn about research by reading empirical psychological articles and writing brief summaries of these articles (see Appendix A for Alternative Assignment description). The alternative assignments will be turned into the Participant Pool chair and they will be credited via Sona-Systems. All credit reports you receive will have credits done through studies and the alternative assignment.

Participants can earn 1 experiment credit by participating in one of the studies in the participant pool, or by completing the alternative activity.

At this time, a “credit” is basically equivalent to approximately an hour of their time. The alternative assignment was designed such that it should take participants about the same amount of time to complete one of the assignments as it would to participate in a study.

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## **6. Rights and Responsibilities of Students/Participants and Experimenters**

Both the Students/Participants and the Experimenters have certain rights for the participation and responsibilities to uphold for the Participant Pool to work efficiently.

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### **a. Students/Participants**

#### *Rights of Participants:*

Participants have the right to leave an experiment at any time if they are uncomfortable, without penalty. Participants also have the right to receive credit for their time if they properly signed up and showed for a scheduled appointment.

#### *Responsibilities of Participants:*

Participants need to attend scheduled appointments or cancel within 12 hrs of the appointment. Participants need to be on time for scheduled appointments as well. Failing to be on-time and failing to show for an experiment will result credit penalty for that study (and each no show). The number of credits lost will depend on how many credits the study was worth. Participants who “earn” penalties will subsequently need to complete additional credits to make up for the loss in credits and enable them to complete the requirement.

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### **b. Experimenters**

#### *Rights of Experimenters:*

Experimenters are reserved the right to not allow a participant to participate in their experiment for no credit if the participant is late to the appointment or treats the experimenter in an extremely disrespectful or threatening manner. If any participant should be disrespectful or threatening, the experimenter will contact the Participant Pool Chair, and the Chair will investigate the matter further.

#### *Experimenter Responsibilities:*

Experimenters need to ensure all studies are approved by the WPI IRB. They need to cancel their appointments within 12 hours prior to the scheduled appointments, or they are required to grant participants in those sessions credit for their time. They also need to make sure they are on-time for their scheduled appointments. Participants will receive credit if an experimenter is late or misses an appointment.

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### **c. Experiment Postings/Signing Up/Pre-Selection**

All experiments will be posted on Sona Systems ([wpi.sona-systems.com](http://wpi.sona-systems.com)).

**Experiment Postings:** In order to ensure that participation is randomized with no selection effects, the experiments listed contain only brief titles and descriptions. The available experiments listed on Sona will appear in a randomized fashion--they will be in a different order (e.g., "first," "second," "tenth") every time participants log in. More detailed information will be given once participants arrive at the experiment via the informed consent form.

**Signing Up for Experiments:** All participants must create an account on Sona-Systems and link their credits to your course. (see the How to Sign Up Guide in Appendix which you can add to your syllabus if you'd like).

**Pre-Selection:** Depending on the needs of the researchers, your students may be asked to participate in something called “Pre-Selection”. Pre-selection is to be used to determine whether or not participants are eligible for their studies and is comprised of different survey questions that will address these needs. All items are approved by the IRB, and the

Experimenters have IRB permission to use this data to purposefully select participants to come into the lab and participate in their studies, if they meet the qualifications of the study. Pre-selection is not used to collect experimental data. Participants will receive experiment credit for participating in Pre-Selection.

Note: Sona-Systems has a “pretesting” for students when they log in. These two features are not the same. The IRB has approved that a few demographic questions can be asked when participants log into Sona for the first time. There are 10 or fewer questions, and it takes only a few seconds to answer them. No credit is given for this. Typically, the demographic questions assess the student’s gender, age, ethnicity, and college/university they are enrolled in.

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## **7. Penalties**

One of the responsibilities of the your students as participants is that they show up on time or cancel their appointment with adequate notice should they not be able to participate in their scheduled timeslot. In order to deter participants from ignoring their study commitments and in order to ensure that all participants are being treated equally in the system, participants who fail to show up for a study will “earn” a penalty for the amount of credits that the study was worth, and will need to make this deficit up in additional credits (experiments or alternative assignments).

More than 2 no-shows to experiments may result in a ban from being eligible to participate in experiments—as determined on a case by case basis by the Participant Pool Chair. Participation in excess of 10 credits per term will also be reviewed by the Participant Pool Chair.

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## **8. Credit Reports**

At the end of the term on the last day of classes, the Participant Pool coordinator will send out credit reports (via an excel sheet) to each instructor. The credit report will include only students from your course and will display numerically the number of credits they earned (e.g., 0, 1, 2, 3, etc.). These reports will include any alternative assignments turned into the Participant Pool Chair. [\(Back to top\)](#)

## **9. Syllabus Statement**

In order to have the Research Requirement in class, your syllabus needs to include a Research Requirement Statement. A syllabus statement is included in the Appendix for your use (and editing as required).

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## **10. Discussing the Requirement with Your Students**

You will also be required to tell the students about the Research Requirement, and the students must complete an informed consent acknowledging simply that they learned about the requirement and understand it. Please contact the Participant Pool Chair if you need this informed consent. In addition, anyone under 18, must get parental approval to participate (again, contact the Participant Pool Chair if you need this informed Consent). The Participant Pool Chair has created slides you use. In addition, upon asking nicely and upon the availability of the Participant Pool Chair, she may come and do a quick intro to the Research Requirement in your course. [\(Back to top\)](#)

## **11. Contact Information**

**Participant Pool Chair: Jeanine Skorinko, Ph.D**

[skorinko@wpi.edu](mailto:skorinko@wpi.edu)

**AK 121**

**x5451**

**Internal Review Board (IRB) Chair: Kent Rissmiller, Ph.D, [kjr@wpi.edu](mailto:kjr@wpi.edu)** [\(Back to top\)](#)

**Appendix A:  
Alternative Assignment**

**Alternative Credit Assignment**

**Instructions:** If you would prefer not to take part in experiments, you can learn about research in another way. You can read and summarize articles (1 research credit each) from one of the journals listed below. This is not an all or none policy. You may combine experiment credits with alternative assignment credits (e.g., 5 credits experiments and 1 alternative assignment). Alternative assignments will not count towards extra credit.

**Due Date:** \*\*Alternative assignments are due on the last day of our class—**October 14, 2008**. There are NO exceptions to this rule. Your name must be at the top of **each** assignment.

\* Step 1: For each credit you need, please find an article from a psychology journal listed below (e.g., Psychology Today does not count). The article has to have been published within the last few years (2000-present)

\* Step 2: The WPI library has a number of psychology journals. You will need to retrieve the article yourself. You will need to hand in the first page of the article with your assignment. Please check the WPI library for the exact location, as they may not be available online.

\* Step 3: Read the article. You don't have to read and understand all of the statistical parts of the results section. The authors usually summarize the findings in English at the beginning of the Discussion section.

\* NOTE: You will need to photocopy/print the first page of this article and hand it in with your assignment. Failure to do so will make your assignment incomplete and you will not be given credit!

\* Step 4: After you have read the article, you will need to write a 2-3 page typed summary of the research question, methods, and findings of each article, ending with at least one paragraph giving your own critique, or ideas for further research. Be sure to include the reference of the article at the end.

\* See the template on myWPI of how to set up your alternative assignment.

\* Step 5: Hand in your alternative assignment by hardcopy to Professor Skorinko.

\* Reminder: You must hand in the following for each assignment completed: a written *non-plagiarized* summary that is 2-3 pages long, a copy of the first page of the article, a reference for the article, and your name.

**Academic Honor:** By turning in the alternative assignment, you are automatically stating that it is your own work. Professor Skorinko checks these summaries and reports violations of academic honor to the relevant professor and the Dean of Student life. Plagiarism (i.e., copying directly from the article) will not be tolerated and credit will not be given for plagiarized summaries.

**Possible Journals to Use:**

Below is a list of appropriate journals that may be used for this assignment. In order to ensure that you read an empirical article of good quality, you should read articles from these journals (e.g. Psychology Today is not acceptable, nor are “pop” magazines such as “Time”).

Journals (alphabetical order):

Journal of Applied Social Psychology

Journal of Experimental Social Psychology

Journal of Personality and Social Psychology

Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin

**Appendix B:  
Alternative Assignment Template**

Your Name  
Your Email  
The Date

Title of the Article

Begin your 1-2 page summary of the research question, methods, and findings of the article here. End your summary with at least one paragraph giving your own critique, or ideas for further research.

When you have finished your summary, don't forget to put your Reference!

Also, don't forget to copy the first page of your article and attach it to this summary.

References

Author, A., Author, B., & Author C. (Year). Title of the article: Notice only the first word of the title and after the colon is capitalized. *Journal Name*, Vol #, Number, 1-13.

Don't forget to attach the first page of the article with your assignment!

**Appendix C:**  
**Syllabus Statement**  
**Edit As Necessary for Your Course**  
**Highlights in Yellow Are Common Things That May Change**

**Research Participation Requirement:** An important goal of this course will involve instilling in you an appreciation of the research process and scientific approach. Since the material that you will learn in this course is based on **experimental psychology**, I would like you to contribute to the research community by participating firsthand in the research process. All students enrolled in this course are expected to participate in **two** social science experiments. The purpose of this requirement is twofold: 1) to help WPI faculty conduct research, and 2) to give you a better understanding of what research participants experience. Certain ethical guidelines govern this research.

How Do I Complete This Requirement? You can sign up for experiments via an Experiment Scheduling Website call Sona-Systems, or you can complete an Alternative Assignment (see below). This must be completed by the last day of class!

How Do I Sign-Up For Experiments? First, you will need to create an account on Sona-Systems (see instructions below). Be sure to indicate that you need to credits for this course. After you create the login account, you will be able to click on available studies and see what timeslots are available that fit your schedule. Then you can sign up. *Please note: If not studies are available, keep checking, if all the timeslots are taken, the studies will not show up on the list of available studies—as all the sessions are full.*

- Go to <http://wpi.sona-systems.com>
- Click on “Request an account here” on the left side of the page
- Complete the registration form.
- Sona Systems will send an email to you with log in information including a username and password.
- Click on the link provided and enter your user name and password.
- Once you are registered, you must fill out a short demographics questionnaire. It should only take a few minutes.
- To sign up for experiments, click on “Study Sign Up” near the top of the page.
  - Note only studies with available timeslots will be posted. Should you not see any timeslots, check back later.
- You may change your password, email address, or contact information at any time by clicking on “My Profile” at the bottom of the page

Research Appointments: It is important when participating in research experiments to show up on-time for the scheduled experiment. If you realize you cannot attend the experiment, you must cancel your appointment at least 1 hour prior to the appointment. Failure to show-up (or adequately cancel) an appointment will result in a research credit penalty. You can remove this penalty by completing an additional experiment. For instance, if you miss one appointment you will need to participate in 3 experiments to fulfill the requirement instead of two.

Participant Rights: Your rights as a participant in research are paramount. Upon arriving at a study, you should expect to be asked to provide written informed consent before participating. This consent form indicates that you understand what to expect in the study, and you agree to participate. If you decide that you are uncomfortable participating in the experiment, you may decline participating in the experiment at anytime and you will still earn credit for participating. However, you must show up for the experiment in order to earn credit. After the study is over, you should be debriefed, meaning that the experimenter tells you what the study

was examining, either verbally or in writing. You also have the right to learn the overall findings (but not individual feedback) of the study when it is completed. Talk to the experimenter if this interests you. If the experimenter fails to show up for the experiment, you will still earn full credit for the experiment. Please contact the experimenter and the Participant Pool Chair, Professor Skorinko (skorinko@wpi.edu) if this occurs.

**Alternative Assignment:** You also have the right to not participate in experiments. If you prefer not to take part in the research experiments, you may complete an alternative assignment to earn credit. For this alternative assignment, you will need read and summarize empirical social psychological articles found in either: the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, or the *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*. Each article summary will earn you one credit, and it should take about 1 hour to complete each summary. Complete comprehension of all of the statistical analyses in the results section is not necessary. The authors usually summarize the findings in English at the beginning of the discussion section. Each assignment is checked for plagiarism and the WPI Academic Honesty policy is in effect for this assignment. **For further instructions on this assignment, please see the instructions and template posted on myWPI.**

**Grade/Penalty:** As it is impossible and unfair to grade your performance as a participant, you will not receive a grade for this experience but rather a failure to complete this requirement will result in a reduction of your final grade. Each experiment is worth 1 percentage point of your final grade. Thus if you earn a 90% in the course but fail to complete the two experiments required, your final grade will be reduced to an 88%. *Note: not making up penalties incurred by no-showing to experiments can result in additional final grade deductions.*

**Extra Credit Opportunities:** After completing your research requirement, any additional experiments you participate in will earn you extra credit. In addition, throughout the term, the professor may ask you to participate in some short surveys. Since this will be very short surveys, they will not be able to fulfill the research requirement, but will enable you to earn extra credit. The amount of credit may vary depending on the length of the experiment (e.g., a longer experiment will be worth more extra credit than a shorter one). *Completing additional alternative assignments will not earn you extra credit.*

**Appendix D:  
How to Sign Up for Studies Guide**

To sign up in Sona Systems as a Participant in the **Participant Pool**:

- Open a new browser.
- Go to <http://wpi.sona-systems.com>
- Click on “Request an account here” on the left side of the page
- Complete the registration form.
- Sona Systems will send an email to you with log in information including a username and password.
- Click on the link provided and enter your user name and password.
- Once you are registered, you must fill out a short demographics questionnaire. It should only take about 2 minutes.
- To sign up for experiments, click on “Study Sign Up” near the top of the page.
  - Note only studies with available timeslots will be posted. Should you not see any timeslots, check back later.
- You may change your password, email address, or contact information at any time by clicking on “My Profile” at the bottom of the page