

## Participant Pool Frequently Asked Questions

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## GENERAL

What is the "Research Participation Requirement"?

The requirement is that you earn "credits" of approved research-related activities. You can earn 1 credit by participating in an approved research study posted on Sona Systems, or by spending approximately 1 hour on the alternative activity. Thus, people often refer to credits as "hours" or "credit-hours".

Why should I participate in studies?

Research participation gives you an understanding of the methods used by social scientists, and allows you a first-hand look at social science research. It would be great if you could learn about it by doing laboratory work in introductory social science courses, but the large number of students in these courses and space limitations make this impractical. As a substitute, the your professor is offering you the opportunity to participate in experiments in return for credit toward your course grade.

By serving as a participant in experiments, you also contribute to advancing the understanding of human behavior. Many of the studies in which you participate may be published in journals and books.

How do I decide whether to participate?

You can make this decision in two steps. First, you can decide whether or not you agree to participate in experiments at all.

Later on when you arrive at each experiment, you will be given another consent form--a paper that is specific to that particular experiment. It will tell you in more detail of what you can expect in that experiment so that you can make an informed decision about whether you are willing to participate at that time.

You should remember, though, that even after you have consented and have started to participate in any experiment, it is always up to you to decide whether you want to continue. If, as the experiment is underway, you decide you would rather not participate, you may notify the experimenter and stop participating at any time. You will receive credit for the amount of time you have participated.

What is "Pre-Selection" ?

Depending on the term, you may have the option of getting some credit by participating in pre-selection. This involves completing a series of questionnaires about you, your personality, and your attitudes. Responses you give during pre-selection are used to determine whether you can participate in some of the experiments. You are not required to participate in pretesting, but if you do not you may be ineligible for later experiments.

How do I sign up?

The "Sign-Ups Site" is located at <http://wpi.sona-systems.com>

This site is actually created and maintained by a company called Sona Systems. The point of this site is simply to let people post studies for you to participate in, and for you to sign up for these studies. This site has the most current record of the studies you have signed up for, and the credit you have received from them.

How do I fulfill the requirement without participating in studies?

The alternative to participating in a research study is to read an approved article in a psychology journal and write about it. See your course syllabus for specific information. After you have checked your course syllabus for specific instructions (e.g., which journals are acceptable), you should visit the alternative assignment webpage for specific directions on how to complete the assignment.

Each alternative assignment would be equivalent to participating in one research study. Writing such summaries does not usually take longer than 1 hour for each article, but it is likely to be less interesting than participating in experiments.

NOTE: This is not an all or none policy. You may combine experiment hours with alternative assignment hours (e.g., 5 hours experiments and 1 alternative assignment).

**ACADEMIC DISHONESTY:** By turning in your alternative assignment, you are automatically stating that it is your own work. The Participant Pool Coordinators do check these summaries and report violations of the honor code to the relevant professor-- plagiarism (i.e., copying directly from the article) will not be tolerated.

What if I have a problem?

Problems with participating in research, signing up for research, or getting credit can and should be reported to the Participant Pool Coordinator by submitting a Support Request or via email [Skorinko@wpi.edu](mailto:Skorinko@wpi.edu). The experimenter is obliged to be on time, to protect you

from any physical or psychological harm, to give you a complete explanation (both verbally and in written form) of the study at its completion, and to treat you in a respectful manner.

## PARTICIPATING IN STUDIES

Am I required to participate in studies?

No. You do not have to participate in any research studies. See the FAQ "How do I fulfill the requirement without participating in studies?" in the General section.

What if I am under 18 years of age?

Before participating in experiments, you must have your parent or guardian sign and return a Parent informed consent agreement.

What is research participation like?

There are many different kinds of experiments done by faculty and students in Social Science. You might be asked to fill out questionnaires about yourself or your experiences. You might take tests of your memory or reaction time, or be asked to report your perceptions of a video presentation or computer display. You might be asked to meet and talk with other participants in a group discussion, or to play a game. You might be videotaped or audio taped during an experiment, or have your heart rate or other bodily responses measured.

Being a "guinea pig" in psychology experiments can be enjoyable, but there are also times when it might be an effort or might be repetitive. Sometimes this can't be avoided, but the special concern of the Department is that your participation not be harmful or unpleasant. To examine the risks and benefits of the research, all experiments are reviewed in advance by a committee of faculty--and also by a University Institutional Review Board. No study can be performed without the approval of these groups. But of course, you are the one who can ultimately decide if you would like to participant in a particular study or not.

How do I sign up for studies?

You will sign-up for studies at: <http://wpi.sona-systems.com>

At that site, you will be able to see a list of experiments with open appointments. It will tell you the location and time that you would need to be there and how much credit it is worth. It may also indicate who is eligible for the study, such as only people who are right handed or taller than 5'11". Please make sure you fit the requirements before signing up.

What do I need to bring with me to an appointment?

You should bring with you the study name, the date and time, and the location so that you can make sure you are in the right place. You can find/check this information at the Sign-Up site, and you will receive an email confirmation when you sign up for a study, as well as a reminder the day prior.

Where do I go for my appointment?

When you signed up to participate in a study, it should have indicated where to go at the scheduled time. If you do not remember, log into the Sign-up Site and check your Schedule or see the reminder email you were sent.

Can I talk about the study with my friends?

You should not discuss the experiments you have been in with your classmates, if asked by the experimenter not to do so. In many studies, people will react in a fake manner if they know precisely what the experiment is about in advance. If the experimenter asks you not to talk about his or her study, please do not do so.

Can I wait until the end of the term to participate?

We encourage you NOT to wait until the end of the term to participate. Many experiments close prior to the end of the semester, and it is not guaranteed that there will be enough appointments for everybody who wishes to participate, nor that the appointments will be at a convenient time. Thus, if you wait until the end of the term and cannot fulfill your requirement, you will not be given any sympathy .

## RIGHTS & RESPONSIBILITIES

### What are my Rights?

-You have the right TO LEAVE an experiment at any time if you are uncomfortable, without penalty.

See FAQ Below: "Can I change my mind about participating?"

- You have the right to RECEIVE CREDIT for your time if you properly signed up and showed for a scheduled appointment.

See FAQ Below: "What should I do if the experimenter is late or doesn't show up?"

### What are my Responsibilities?

- You MUST ATTEND appointments you have scheduled or cancel within 24 hrs of the appointment.

See FAQ's Below: "What if I sign up but realize I can't attend the study?" and "What happens if I don't show up for an experiment?"

- You must BE ON TIME.

See FAQ Below: "What happens if I am late to a study?"

- You must be ATTENTIVE & RESPECTFUL to the researchers.

Please recognize that the researchers who conduct studies hope to publish their findings. Participants who are disruptive, do not pay attention, or do not do their best on all tasks waste everybody's time and energy.

### Can I change my mind about participating?

Even after you have consented and have started to participate in any experiment, it is always up to you to decide whether you want to continue. If, as the experiment is underway, you decide you would rather not participate, you may notify the experimenter and stop participating. Just quietly tell the experimenter and leave the room or follow other instructions you were given. You will receive credit for the amount of time you have participated.

### What should I do if the experimenter is late or doesn't show up?



Occasionally, researchers will need to cancel appointments. They must do so at least 12 hours prior to the appointment or you should receive credit (email the contact person if you did not).

If you show up and nobody is there, first check to make sure you are at the correct room at the correct day and time. You must wait at least 15 min for someone to show, then you should leave a note with your name and details (e.g., email address, what happened) AND email the contact.

What if I sign up but realize I can't attend the study?

Once you sign up to participate in an experiment, you have an obligation to appear for the experiment at the proper time and place. You may cancel on the sign-ups website as long as it is at least twelve (12) prior to the appointment. Some experimenters may allow you to cancel on the website with less notice. If so, that information will be in your confirmation email.

If you sign up for an experiment and fail to keep the appointment, you will be penalized the number of credits the study was worth (e.g., .5 credits for a .5 study, 1 credit for a 1 credit study, 2 credits for a 2 credit study). If you realize that you cannot attend the appointment and it is less than 12 hours before, you should still email or call the experimenter to let them know--they may let you cancel without penalty.

What happens if I don't show up for an experiment?

If you fail to show up for your appointment, you will be penalized the number of credits the study was for (e.g., .5, 1, 2, etc). This means that you will need to complete extra credits of experiment hours (e.g., 7 instead of 6).

What happens if I am late to a study?

When you sign up to participate in an experiment, you have an obligation to be on time. Occasionally, the experimenter will still have time for you to participate, but that is typically not the case. Because of this, you may be penalized the number of credits the study is worth. This means that you would need to complete extra experiment hours to make up for the penalties (e.g., 7 instead of 6).

You should realize that it is necessary to start on time in order to finish on time, both for other participants in the same session, and for sessions scheduled afterwards. Since participants must be given instructions, it is not possible for somebody to simply join a study in progress. Thus, from the experimenters perspective, arriving late is often just like not arriving at all.

Even if you know you will be late, it is best to get there as quickly as possible just in case it is possible to participate, or to get information about how to reschedule.

## CREDIT ISSUES

What is a credit?

One credit is equal to one experiment that does not exceed 1 hour. It is awarded for specified research activities, like participating in studies or writing reports about research articles.

How do I earn credits?

The most common way of earning credits is to participated in research studies. See the FAQ "How do I sign up for studies?" in the Participating in Studies section.

Is it possible to lose credits?

Yes. If you are late or do not show to an appointment you scheduled, you will the number of credits the study was worth (e.g., .5 for a .5 study, 1 for a 1 credit study, etc.). Everybody's time is valuable, both yours and the researchers. This policy is enforced in the hopes that everyone will simply practice common courtesy.

How does credit get awarded?

After your appointment, the experimenter will update your credit status at the Sona site. If you have not received credit within 3 days, you should email the experimenter using the information on the Sona site, or on the debriefing form you were given at the experiment.

You can check the number of credits you have earned from experiment participation through the Sona site, and your total number of credits.

Your instructor or teaching assistant will explain how credit for participation influences your grade in your class.

How many credits do I need to complete?

This depends on the class you are taking.

What if I already completed the requirement in another class?

You will still need to do the requirement for the current class you are taking. If you have issues signing up because you've participated in all the possible studies, please notify the Participant Pool Chair, Professor Skorinko, skorinko@wpi.edu

What should I do if I did not get credited for an experiment that I participated in?

If this situation arises, the first step is to politely email the experimenter of the study. You should be able to access this information via your debriefing form or through the Sona site. If you have difficulty contacting the experimenter, then you may submit a support request to the Participant Pool Coordinators.

There are no studies posted, how do I get credits?

In general, when studies have available timeslots, they will appear for you to select. If the timeslots are full, then that study will not be shown for you to see as a possible study to participate in because there are no available times.

If it is at the beginning of the term and you are interested in participating, you should just wait for a little while. It can take a few weeks for appointments to get posted. There will definitely be enough appointments posted for everybody who wants to participate to do so, as long as you do not wait until the very end of the term.

If it is at the end of the term or you are not interested in participating, see the FAQ "How do I fulfill the requirement without participating in studies?" in the General section.

## THE PARTICIPANT POOL

When do experiments begin running?

Experiments usually being running within the first full week of the term, all running experiments will be posted on the Sona Site.

When do experiments stop running?

The official end of participant running is the last day of classes. This means that all studies must be completed on this day AND all alternative assignments must be handed in on this day. Credit reports are sent to professors at 5pm on this day. The Participant Pool closes after credit reports are sent. If you participate in any studies or complete any alternative assignments after the Participant Pool has closed, then you must contact your professor. Thus, you may participate in studies after the official closing date of the Participant Pool, but it is your responsibility to ensure that your credit has been awarded and reported to the proper place--the Participant Pool Coordinators can not help you.

Where is the Participant Pool Office?

The participant pool does not have an office. If you need to deliver paperwork, such as the parent consent form or the alternative assignment, you will need to go to the Social Science Department Mailroom, in AK. You may place all Participant Pool materials in Professor Skorinko's mailbox. If you need assistance, please talk to Pam Riley, the department secretary.

If you need the answer to a question, please submit a Support Request or email [skorinko@wpi.edu](mailto:skorinko@wpi.edu). We will respond to your question as soon as possible.

When is my support request going to get answered?

The Participant Pool Chair does attempt to answer support requests as quickly as possible. However, the Chair is a busy person, too, and may take a few days or up to a week to get to and answer your question.