

TO: QEPC Principal Investigators, 2003-2004

FROM: John P. Fackler, Jr., chair
Quality Enhancement Plan Council

SUBJECT: Institute Review Board Approval for QEPC Surveys

The IRB has the responsibility to make sure that all Texas A&M human subject relationships with any research activity comply with Federal guidelines. Falling short of this can cause Federal grants to A&M to be in jeopardy. Since some QEPC surveys include interviews with present and former students, these interviews and survey questions may be subject to IRB scrutiny. Program evaluations are NOT research and do not fall under the IRB purview. However, only the program evaluator can make this distinction. While some of the funded evaluation efforts listed on the attached IRB form probably involve no research, caution should be used conducting human subject interviews in order to make our evaluations.

The Office of the Vice-President for Research is in charge of the TAMU IRB. Because the QEPC involves human subjects through the various interview processes being proposed, there are some concerns among PIs that IRB oversight may hamper assessment efforts being proposed.

The three levels of IRB approval.

There are three levels of IRB approval as mandated by the Federal government, *exempt, expedited, full*. However, these three levels relate to what is described as research. Program evaluations specifically are exempt as stated in the Federal guidelines. However, publication of survey results may cause a survey to be viewed as research. Most QEPC efforts are for program evaluation and not research.

Note: If a PI on a QEPC grant is concerned that questions being asked in order to evaluate the effectiveness of a program or activity may require IRB evaluation, or there is a possibility that the data obtained may be interpreted as part of a research effort, it is appropriate for the PI to contact the Office of the Vice President for Research for clarification.

The QEPC Executive Committee believes that most QEP surveys will be an evaluation and therefore not subject to IRB purview. However, in some situations that impinge upon research, an expedited review may be appropriate. ***Only you as PI can determine the intent of the survey process.***

The purpose of the attached streamlined version of IRB approval is to facilitate the use of commonly used assessment tools (e.g., surveys, pre/post tests, portfolios) for the purpose of research efforts. The programs listed are ones we believe should be exempt from IRB review. Your signature indicates concurrence. As you develop and employ evaluation tools to assess your programs, please consider the following points. Your adherence to these guidelines will be critical to exemption from IRB review. Please contact Simone Tiu or me if you still have some questions. ***If you can agree to these guidelines, please sign the attached form and return it to Eileen Grey in the Office of the Provost.***

1. QEP assessment should be for program evaluation purposes only.
2. Confidentiality of students should be assured. Assessment findings should be reported in aggregate form without disclosing individual identities.

3. Evaluation surveys will continue to be an important tool for assessing program effectiveness. Thus, ensuring that the survey process is used properly will ensure that students are comfortable and interested in helping us improve our programs.
 - a. Students should not believe that they are being coerced into completing questionnaires. Be sure that your instructions do not suggest that survey completion is a requirement.
 - b. Confidentiality of survey respondents should be assured. Survey responses should be reported in aggregate form without disclosing individual identities.
 - c. Avoid any questions that deal with physical/behavioral aspects. Confine your questions to PROGRAM effectiveness. If you wish to deal with sensitive items, you should submit your survey to the IRB for review.

Attachment: IRB blanket exemption for proposals 2003-2004