There are multiple organizations at NPS that engage in data collection using surveys, questionnaires, interviews, or focus groups. The NPS IRB reviews only those data collection activities related to human subjects research. To ensure NPS is in compliance with applicable DoN, DoD, and Federal survey policies (all of which consider questionnaires, interviews, and focus groups equivalent to surveys), an NPS survey policy is needed. This requirement has been discussed with the NPS Chief of Staff. Until such time as an NPS survey policy has been written and promulgated, the IRB plans to operate under the guidelines and principles outlined below.

Decisions made by the IRB must balance the needs, responsibilities, and risks related to the research subjects, the student, staff, and faculty researchers, and the institution. NPS is unique in that it is the only institution in the Navy that confers graduate degrees in a wide variety of academic disciplines. In order to maintain its standing and credentials, students, staff, and faculty must engage in research and publish their findings. A significant portion of this research involves collecting data from human subjects. The NPS IRB reviews well over 100 protocols each year and more than 70% of them involve the use of surveys, questionnaires, interviews, or focus groups. Inordinately constraining survey policies will negatively impact completion of student theses and capstone projects and jeopardize the research of faculty members whose careers depend on such research. Further, survey policies only limit access to potential research subjects; they do not offer any additional protection or risk reduction to the subjects. The protection of subjects is assured by the policies enforced by the IRB.

The NPS IRB is responsible for ensuring NPS researchers comply with all applicable human subjects research policies. Current human subjects research policies make reference to survey policies but do not require the IRB to monitor compliance with the survey policies. Therefore, until such time that NPS develops and distributes a survey policy, the IRB intends to review human subjects research protocols based on the existing IRB policies. If the protocols include a survey, the IRB will review the survey to ensure the following:

- Questions are appropriate;
- Information obtained will be safeguarded properly;
- Researcher has obtained permission from the local commander/director to administer the survey;
- Subjects provide their consent and that consent is documented;
- Subjects have the right to withdraw from the research at any time.

The IRB also will inform researchers of the applicable (DoN, DoD, and Federal) survey policies and encourage them to seek whatever approval may be required based on the number of subjects to be surveyed and the organizations by which the subjects are employed. The IRB will only monitor compliance with IRB policies; at present, the IRB is neither staffed for, nor charged with, monitoring compliance with survey policies.

Drafted by:
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