The IRB & Research in Writing Studies

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Contact

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Writing Studies

The broad research I conducted focused on Writing Studies. I’m referring to the Classification of Instructional Programs (CIP) code designation for 23.13 “Rhetoric and Composition/Writing Studies.” Like Elliot et al. (2015), when use the term “Writing Studies,” I am referring to all the fields subsumed within 23.13:

- 23.1301: Writing, general,
- 23.1302: creative writing,
- 23.1303: professional, technical, business, and scientific writing;
- 23.1304: rhetoric and composition;
- 23.1399: rhetoric and composition/writing studies, other.
IRBs and Writing Studies Research

Funded by a CCCC Research Initiative

Part of a larger examination of the intersection of federal policies
Norbert Elliot, NJIT & Joe Moxley, USF are consultants on the project

Purpose

provide heuristics and narratives to expand the discipline’s understanding of
how federal regulations intersect with disciplinary agendas
reshape Writing Studies researchers’ orientation towards the work of IRBs and
provide a conscientious and thoughtful meditation on the faults, as well as
the assets, that IRB review affords researchers.
Research Goals

• Craft a timely overview of the shifting approaches to human subjects protections in Writing Studies research, with a focus on technical writing researchers’ abilities to navigate policy change and IRBs’ technical interfaces.

• Provide analysis of position statements by Writing Studies and technical writing researchers regarding human subjects protections.

• Collect narratives from thought leaders in the field regarding research and human subjects protections - past, present, and future.

• Enhance Writing Studies researchers’ understanding of, and ability to navigate, human subjects protections, oriented in more general notions of justice and beneficence.
Research Questions

• How can we identify pertinent variables of training for Writing Studies researchers, and technical writing researchers more specifically, related to human subjects protections? What methods can we use to investigate broad categories of influence by IRBs and tailor support for researchers?
• Can we provide guidance on modes of crafting documents for IRB review?
• How do Institutional Review Boards staff (street-level bureaucrats), interact with researchers to shape methods and methodologies in our discipline?
• Can we create a new taxonomy to explain variables that result in best protections for human participants in Writing Studies research?
Existing Knowledge

Public Policy: NPRM & Final Rule
  CCCC Response to the NPRM

Extra-disciplinary
  Schrag (2010), Schneider (2015)
  Klitzman (2015), Stark (2012)

Writing Studies
Methods

Mixed-methods approach

- 269 survey participants, 90% confidence level (lower for ATTW members)
  \( (z = 1.65, \epsilon = .05 \text{ for } 5\% \text{ margin of error}, p = .5 \text{ [normal distribution]}) \)
- Interviews to collect narratives from thought leaders

Policy analysis

- Common Rule (1991)
- Notice of Proposed Rulemaking (NPRM) (September 2015)
- CCCC Comment on NPRM (January 2016)
- Final Rule (January 19, 2017)

Sample Size: \( \frac{\frac{z^2 \times p(1-p)}{\epsilon^2}}{1 + \left( \frac{z^2 \times p(1-p)}{\epsilon^2 N} \right)} \)
Results

- “Professional, Technical, Business and/or Scientific Writing” was represented by 27.13% of respondents

- Over 45% of respondents have enrolled their own students in research; this population requires special attention within our field
Results

• Over 35% of Writing Studies scholars purposefully design their studies to avoid IRB review
• Respondents largely found their formal ethics training rote; encountered frustrations not with policy, but with implementation
Findings

RQ1: Pertinent variables for training?
IRB is referred to and often viewed as a legitimating factor; raises the question: how do we navigate this as a discipline? Does IRB review and approval indicate legitimacy?

RQ2: Can we create a new taxonomy/determine variables?
Consider IRBs to be, in many respects, participant advocates

RQ3: Guidance on crafting our documents
IRBs and international research- impact of new policy updates effective 1/18
IRBs as Learners- b/c of policy updates, consider IRBs learners, too

RQ4: How do street-level bureaucrats interact w/ researchers?
IRBs optimally can be viewed as partners in constructing successful, ethical research agendas with high probability of hitting enrollment goals
Conclusions & Contributions

(1) Because Writing Studies--and technical writing-- research is generalizable, and therefore federal regulations are applicable, though not positivist, as frequently claimed,
(3) a justice-oriented approach to the responsibility of IRBs is a fruitful, generative way to engage with the IRB review process.

• Technical writing scholars should address local implementation of federal policy, rather than lobby for changes to federal policy.
• Technical writing researchers need to be aware of forthcoming updates (January 2018), so they can best advocate for their work when they interface with IRBs. Inquire with your local IRB for information about these changes.