

TRANSCRIPT

IATL Research Ethics: Guidance and Training

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SLIDE 1

Hi there. My name is Heather Meyer and I'm Associate Professor and Director of Studies at IATL. In this presentation I'm going to give you the guidance and support you'll need if you are thinking about conducting research involving human participants on an IATL module.

It's absolutely essential that you watch this video in full before you start completing your ethics application. So let's get started.

SLIDE 2:

This training is an introduction to the IATL ethics review process. It's going to provide you with some background to the ethical requirements for collecting information about people in your research, and it will also give you some information and guidance on the process of getting ethical approval for assessments on IATL modules that involve collecting information about people.

It's worth noting that this training has been adapted from the university's much longer approved training provided by Epigeum. If you wish to access this course, you're more than welcome to do so, and I've provided the link right there.

SLIDE 3:

So the first question is, why are you being asked to do this?

It is a university requirement to get ethical approval BEFORE you begin any data collection from human participants. There are lots of benefits to this process.

For one, it helps enormously in shaping your research to achieve its intended outcomes.

It encourages us to think really critically about the 'who, what, where, when, how, and why' we are carrying out this type of research.

It also enables us to ensure that we keep ourselves and our participants out of harm's way. And that we thoroughly consider any implications our research may have on our research environment.

Therefore, receiving ethical approval really helps us to build confidence in how we conduct our research. It gives us the institutional support for our work, and it provides us the reassurance that our research plans are ethical and safe.

SLIDE 4

It's important to say that all of us, no matter where you are, no matter what your role is at our university, and we are all part of a research community.

All researchers, and that includes you as a student researcher, have a fundamental responsibility to understand and follow guidelines and rules set out by our university. If you want to see more, you can access that information here, but I'm going to go through the key information you'll need to know so that you can ethically carry out your research.

It's very important to protect the rights of human participants in our research. For research communities like ours, conducting research with human participants depends on people trusting us as researchers. People will stop trusting researchers and ultimately universities if their rights are not being respected.

So in a nutshell: If you follow this process, IATL will support your research plans and work with you to ensure the best possible outcomes for your ethics application and your research.

SLIDE 5

There are four basic principles to consider when conducting research involving human participants.

The first principle is that all participants in the research must give voluntary informed consent. This means that they should be asked if they want to participate without any pressure, and they should know everything there is to know about what they're signing up to do.

The second principle is that any risks to individuals, whether it's you as a researcher or your participants that you're recruiting, should absolutely be minimised. There should be no unavoidable risks.

The third principle is that participants should always be free to end their participation. This means that they're able to withdraw from your study at any time, and wherever possible, are also free to withdraw their data from the study at any time. It's important to note that people change their minds all the time about participating, and that we should always provide pathways to do this, as researchers.

And finally, principle number four is that the benefits of the research that you are conducting should always outweigh the risks that you are taking.

SLIDE 6

It's important for you to know that this process is for all student research using information collected from human participants. And this guidance is meant for research conducted on IATL modules only. As such, we have put up a few parameters. Given our modules are generally only 10 weeks long, it is very likely that you will not have the time or the resources to go through the necessary training that is required to conduct research involving the following:

On IATL modules, you are not allowed to conduct research involving children. This means anyone under the age of 18.

You are not allowed to conduct research involving anyone with a learning or physical disability, or a mental disorder who has difficulty communicating or protecting themselves. you need more guidance on this, you can have a look at what these definitions mean by seeing the webpage via the link listed here.

Students on IATL modules are also not allowed to use deception. For example, this means you are not allowed to record people when they don't know that they're being recorded, or telling participants certain things that aren't true in order to extract information, and so on.

You're also not allowed to pay your participants or offer any form of incentive to take part in your study.

Please keep these restrictions in mind when developing your project with us.

SLIDE 7

So, taking all of this into consideration, what do you need to do to prepare for your IATL Ethics Application? There are three essential steps that will help you prepare a successful Ethics Application.

The first is to read all the information available on IATL's research ethics web page. The link is given here.

Next, you'll need to have a discussion about your initial research plans with your IATL module convener as early as possible. It's very, very important that they are aware of your intended research project, so that they can guide and support you in its development.

And third, which is something you're already doing – you will need to watch this guidance and training video in full. Please no skimming!

SLIDE 8

So to go into a little bit more detail, this is the overarching process.

As I mentioned, you'll need to read the information available on the IATL ethics web page.

You'll need to have that chat with your IATL module convener. And in this discussion, you can actually ask, is ethics approval even required for this project? This is a really important discussion to have.

As mentioned, please then watch this guidance and training video in full.

After all of this, you can then start your application form. There are three key documents that form part of the ethics application. The first is the application form itself. Then you'll have a participant information leaflet (which is a document that you will be giving to your participants to inform them with all of the details of the research project and what their involvement entails). And finally, the consent form you will need to create that you will then give to your participants to sign before you begin your data collection.

Once you've completed all of these documents, you'll send them to your IATL module convener, who will already be well aware of your research project plans. They'll go through your application, sign it, and then send it back to you.

After you have their signature, you will then sign the ethics application form and send all three of these documents to the e-mail address you see here by Friday 5:00 PM in week nine of the term in which IATL module is running.

Please be aware that you will not be able to conduct any research involving human participants, if you cannot get your application form sent in to us by this date. This is because the IATL Ethics Review team needs time to go through your application packet. So this is the reason for this deadline.

Your ethics application will then be reviewed, and an outcome letter will be sent back to you via email.

SLIDE 9

If you want a detailed visual of the IATL ethics process, a really nice depiction of this process is available on our web page. The link for that is here. I put a little snippet here for reference.

As I mentioned, your IATL Module Convenor will support you throughout this process. Please speak to them as early as possible to discuss the following:

You'll want to discuss your research project plans, including why collecting data from your participants is necessary for your project.

It's an opportunity to go over your research design - and when I speak of research design, I'm specifically speaking about your methodology, because this will likely involve the ethical considerations that will need to go under review in your application form.

This is a chance to raise any additional questions about the ethical approval process that you may have.

And it's an opportunity to go through a concise timeline and important deadlines to ensure your project can remain feasible – taking of course into account the deadline in Week 9 that I was speaking about in the previous slides.

So discussing your project with them in advance is absolutely essential, and you can get a lot of support from them.

SLIDE 11

Now, one question that we get a lot is: What forms do I fill out?

If you are collecting data from human participants, either through interviews or questionnaires, you'll need to complete the full ethics application, and again, the deadline for this is Friday, 5:00 PM in week nine of the term in which your IATL module runs.

You will have to have received an approval letter from IATL BEFORE you begin collecting data from your participants. So, please do not start interviewing or sending out questionnaires (etc) until you receive an approval letter from us.

Our biggest tip here is to start the process early.

Now for some IATL projects, you won't necessarily be *collecting data* from participants, but perhaps you want to nonetheless involve humans in your projects. For example, you want to stage a play, or you want to film participants in a room while you do a presentation, or you want to record actors in a play. For these kinds of projects, you'll need to collect consent from your participants BEFORE they begin performing in your project. So for this, it's really, really good to reach out to your module convenor.

So there are two pathways here. The appropriate forms are available for both pathways on our IATL Ethics Webpage.

We're going to continue speaking about the full ethics application here.

SLIDE 12

When you submit your ethics application form, the people reviewing your application are going to consider the following:

Who your potential participants are, and what your recruitment process looks like

What your plan is to collect consent from your participants

Your thoughts on keeping everyone involved safe

The considerations you've made about keeping certain information confidential. That means keeping certain personal data out of your research project.

The considerations you've made to make sure that your participants cannot be identified. So perhaps you'll give them a fake name (a 'pseudonym'), or a number in your project.

The level of risk and potential harm to the participants and you as the researcher

And how you aim to collect, store and use the data you are collecting.

SLIDE 13

Here are your possible outcomes.

As mentioned, after you submit your Ethics Application to IATL, you will receive a letter via email, from IATL's Ethics Lead, which will confirm the outcome of your application after it has gone through review. There are four possible outcomes:

One is that you'll get a full approval. This is where no amendments are required, and you can then carry on with your project straight away.

Another option is a conditional approval, with minor amendments required. This means that you have to make the amendments, they are probably very small, and you resubmit the application for approval. You'll then very likely get an approval letter, if you have satisfied these.

The third option is that you get a conditional offer, but there are major amendments required. This usually happens when there is some form of risk involving the safety or the wellbeing of you or your participants. Or if there's a very key methodological issue that will impact the ethics of your projects.

And the final outcome is 'not approved'. This rarely happens, but when it does, it means that the that the project you're proposing is just not feasible from an ethics standpoint, and therefore you must consider a new project entirely. This might also happen if IATL doesn't feel that there is enough time to carry out your research. For example, if you want to travel to another country to carry out a longitudinal study, realistically, you're not going to complete that within the time you have on your IATL module and its assessment deadlines.

I'd like to add here that it is pretty normal to get a conditional approval in the first instance, and this is why we are asking you to submit your ethics forms early. Please don't be discouraged if you receive a conditional approval. This happens all the time and it's a normal and helpful process in making sure that your research is sound.

Remember that IATL is helping you to ensure that your project is safe and ethically sound. And again, this is why this process needs to be started as early as possible.

SLIDE 14

We've put together some tips from our team based on previous assignments that have been submitted from students on IATL modules.

The first to start early.

Use the support and resources that are available to you. For example, IATL runs ethics workshops during the term, where you can come in and actually fill out the ethics forms with a member of our team. Look out for these workshops, they'll run once or twice per time.

Keep good records. This includes holding onto your ethics approval letter that will be emailed to you from the IATL research ethics sub-Committee. Keep all of your signed consent forms from your participants. Keep all the templates of the approved final application form, consent form and participant information leaflet, because those you'll need to submit with your IATL assignment on Tabula. And any communication you have with your participants should be documented and saved. You never know when you're going to need these things again.

Try to limit the use of jargon in your ethics application documents. It makes the review process faster.

Properly and honestly inform your participants. Remember that any form of deception is not allowed.

Think through carefully the risks or things that might not go according to plan. For example, what happens if a participant of yours says 'no. I don't want to be recorded when I give my answer'. Do you have a backup plan? These are things to think about.

And make sure that you ethically use the data that you collect from your participants. This means that you should really make sure that you're not purposely, but also inadvertently, manipulating or misrepresenting the data you collect in your work to make the research appear more sound.

SLIDE 15

Keeping all of these things in mind, you should be aware of the fact that human participants research is regulated by our university, and you should know where to report any concerns. If you would like to report a significant concern of something that has happened during your research journey, I've put in the e-mail address of our research governance team.

Also know that you should always reach out to your module convener or the IATL ethics lead for support. Please do have a look at your IATL Student Handbook for more important information about the ethics process.

SLIDE 16

This concludes the training and guidance video. We wish you all the very best on your research journey and are so pleased that you are considering doing research involving human participants on your IATL module. Thanks very much for listening.