

Department of Teaching, Learning, and
Foundations

College of Education

Eastern Illinois University



Handbook
For
Action Research

Graduate Research Committee – Spring 2010

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Preface

The Department of Teaching, Learning, and Foundations seeks to advance scholarly preparation by providing quality teaching and promoting excellence in research/creative activity in order for graduate students to exemplify best teaching practices for children from birth through age fourteen. Graduate students within the department have two options for their culminating experience in the Master's program. As their culminating experience, they can either complete a thesis or an action research project.

A thesis is scholarly research intended to advance knowledge within the academic discipline. Thesis research is conducted under the supervision of a thesis director and in consultation with a thesis committee composed of members of the graduate faculty. The EIU Manual for the Master's and Specialist's Thesis can be found at:

http://www.eiu.edu/graduate/pdf/thesisresearch_manual.pdf.

Action research is research that is specific to teachers and it involves a systematic inquiry completed by a teacher to improve one's practice. Action research is conducted within the teacher's educational setting and is intended to inform and improve a teacher's practice.

This handbook is intended for graduate students in the Department of Teaching, Learning, and Foundations who choose the action research option. The handbook will serve as a resource with regard to designing, implementing and reporting on action research completed by graduate students in the department.

What is Action Research?

Action research is defined as any systematic inquiry conducted by teachers, administrators, counselors or others with a vested interest in the teaching and learning process or environment for the purpose of gathering information about how their particular schools operate, how they teach and how their students learn (Mills, 2011). Action research is characterized as research that is done by teachers for themselves as a systematic inquiry into one’s own practice (Mertler, 2014).

Thesis vs. Action research

Thesis	Action Research
Completed in more than one semester but only charged/billed as one course	Completed in a semester and charged/billed as one course
Student selects chair and 2-4 other committee members from the graduate faculty, one of whom must be from the department and another must be from outside the department	Student does not select committee or chair.
Main goal – Scholarly contribution to knowledge in the candidate’s selected area of study	Main goal – Scholarly examination of classroom practice in order to improve the practice of the teacher
If study involves human subjects, it requires approval from Institutional Review Board (IRB); CITI training needs to be completed before IRB approval is sought. The study does not have to involve human subjects.	Requires approval from Institutional Review Board (IRB) under IRB exempt category (see pages 5 & 6 for details); CITI training needs to be completed before IRB approval is sought.
Approvals required prior to initiating thesis research: the proposal by thesis, chair & committee; approval of all Institutional Review Board (IRB) requirements, if involving human subjects	Approvals required prior to initiating action research: ELE 5900 instructor and committee feedback; IRB Board (including school building/district administrator where the action research will be conducted; letter of notification to parents).

Ethical Issues

Action research is completed in an educational setting and falls under the purview of social and behavioral research. As with any social and behavioral research, action research must stay within the ethical boundaries set forth for human research. The following important information with regard to ethics, compiled by CITI (the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative) needs to be adhered to with every action research project:

“One of the most important and challenging tasks that investigators face is identifying and evaluating risks associated with participation in research. Unlike biomedical research studies and clinical trials, in which the sources of risk may be more readily identifiable and quantifiable, risks associated with participation in social and behavioral science research are often more ambiguous and less predictable, such as individual reactions to certain events or questions.....

“The identification, assessment, and minimization of risk is paramount to the conduct of ethical social and behavioral research.”

From: <https://www.citiprogram.org/>

Before starting the action research process, all students are required to complete the CITI training available at http://www.eiu.edu/~grants/COMP_IRB_Training.php.

Exempt Research Categories

Like thesis research involving human subjects, action research projects need to be approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Since Action Research projects need to be completed within a semester time frame, it is imperative that they be planned so that they fall within the exempt category of the IRB guidelines. The exempt category guidelines are given in the form that follows. A copy of the form is available on the next page. An electronic copy is available at http://www.eiu.edu/~grants/COMP_IRB_Forms.php.

SPECIAL NOTICE ON EXEMPT RESEARCH

Effective January 21, 2019, the federal regulations for the protection of human subjects in research have been updated, resulting in revised and expanded categories of exempt research. Following is a brief summary of the most relevant changes. The EIU IRB Form B has been revised and expanded to comply with these changes.

Category 1: Research in Established or Commonly Accepted Educational Settings

This category has been amended to include a condition that the research is **not likely to have adverse impacts on students learning required educational content or assessment of educators** who provide instruction. The exemption may only be used for studies about **normal educational practices**.

Category 2: Educational Test, Surveys, Interviews, Observations of Public Behavior

These types of research still qualify for exempt review. A new subcategory was added that states if the research includes the collection of potentially sensitive or **harmful identifiable private information from adults, it may still be considered exempt if** an IRB conducts a limited IRB review and makes a determination that there are adequate provisions for protecting privacy and maintaining confidentiality.

Note: **Visual or audio recording is now a research method that may fall in this exempt category.**
***not research involving minors**

Category 3: Research Involving Benign Behavioral Interventions

There is now an exemption for research involving benign behavioral interventions* in conjunction with the collection of information from adults (this is only for behavioral research, not biomedical research). **It allows the collection of potentially sensitive or harmful identifiable private information from adults** if an IRB conducts a limited IRB review and makes a determination that there are adequate provision for protecting privacy and maintaining confidentiality. This exemption allows for both intervention and information collection.

Deception about the research's nature or purpose is allowed if the subject authorizes the deception.

*Benign Behavioral Interventions (BBI) – Are defined as being brief in duration, harmless, painless, not physically invasive, not likely to have a significant adverse lasting impact on subjects, and the investigator has no reason to think the subjects will find the interventions offensive or embarrassing.

Examples would include having the subjects play an online game, having them solve puzzles under various noise conditions, or having them decide how to allocate a nominal amount of received cash between themselves and someone else.

Category 7 & 8: Broad Consent

Allows for storage of private identifiable information or biospecimens prior to secondary research or analysis of existing private identifiable information or biospecimens.

EIU will not implement the broad consent categories at this time. We will continue to use the current practice of study specific consent or researchers may choose to use de-identified information or biospecimens.

Form B

Exempt Research Categories
(45 CFR 46.104(d))

For IRB use only IRB File No.: _____ Date received: _____ Approval expires: _____
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Principal Investigator: _____

Title of Project: _____

ONLY research activities in which involvement of human subjects will be in one or more of the categories specified below are eligible for exemption certification. If the research study involves a vulnerable population, such as children or prisoners, refer to 45 CFR 46 subparts C and D for protections afforded these groups.

Check the appropriate categories that apply to your research project:

_____ 1. Research, conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, that specifically involves normal educational practices that are not likely to adversely impact students' opportunity to learn required educational content or the assessment of educators who provide instruction. This includes most research on regular and special education instructional strategies, and research on the effectiveness of or the comparison among instructional techniques, curricula, or classroom management methods.

_____ 2. Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:

- (i) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of human subjects cannot be readily ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects;
- (ii) Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation; or
- (iii) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by § __.111(a)(7)¹.

Note: If the subjects are children, paragraphs (d)(2)(i) and (ii) of this exemption may only apply to research involving educational tests or observations of public behavior when the investigator(s) do not participate in the activities being observed. Paragraph (d)(2)(iii) of this exemption may not be applied to research involving children.

_____ 3. (i) Research involving benign behavioral interventions in conjunction with the collection of information from an adult subject through verbal or written responses (including data entry) or audiovisual recording if the subject prospectively agrees to the intervention and information collection and at least one of the following criteria are met:

- (A) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of human subjects cannot be readily ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects;
- (B) Any disclosure of the human subjects' responses outside the research would not reasonably place the subjects at risk of criminal or civil liability or be damaging to the subjects' financial standing, employability, educational advancement, or reputation; or
- (C) The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by § __.111(a)(7)¹.

(ii) For the purpose of this provision, benign behavioral interventions are brief in duration, harmless, painless, not physically invasive, not likely to have a significant adverse lasting impact on the subjects, and the investigator has not reason to think the subjects will find the

interventions offensive or embarrassing. Provided all such criteria are met, examples of such benign behavioral interventions would include having the subjects play an online game, having them solve puzzles under various noise conditions, or having them decide how to allocate a nominal amount of received cash between themselves and someone else.

(iii) If the research involves deceiving the subjects regarding the nature or purposes of the research, this exemption is not applicable unless the subject authorizes the deception through a prospective agreement to participate in research in circumstances in which the subject is informed that he or she will be unaware of or misled regarding the nature or purpose of the research.

____ 4. Secondary research for which consent is not required: Secondary research uses of identifiable private information or identifiable biospecimens, if at least one of the following criteria is met:

(i) The identifiable private information or identifiable biospecimens are publicly available;

(ii) Information, which may include information about biospecimens, is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects cannot readily be ascertained directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, the investigator does not contact the subjects, and the investigator will not re-identify the subjects;

(iii) The research involves only information collection and analysis involving the investigator's use of identifiable health information when that use is regulated under 45 CFR parts 160 and 164, subparts A and E, for the purposes of "health care operations" or "research" as those terms are defined at 45 CFR 164.501 or for "public health activities and purposes" as described under 45 CFR 164.512(b); or

(iv) The research is conducted by, or on behalf of, a Federal department or agency using government-generated or government-collected information obtained for nonresearch activities, if the research generates identifiable private information that is or will be maintained on information technology that is subject to and in compliance with section 208(b) of the E-Government Act of 2002, 44 U.S.C. 3501 note, if all of the identifiable private information collected, used, or generated as part of the activity will be maintained in systems of records subject to the Privacy Act of 1974, 5 U.S.C. 552a, and, if applicable, the information used in the research was collected subject to the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995, 44 U.S.C. 3501 *et seq.*

____ 5. Research and demonstration projects that are conducted or supported by a Federal department or agency, or otherwise subject to the approval of department or agency heads (or the approval of the heads of bureaus or other subordinate agencies that have been delegated authority to conduct the research and demonstration projects), and are designed to study, evaluate, improve, or otherwise examine public benefit or service programs including procedures for obtaining benefits or services under those programs, possible changes in or alternatives to those programs or procedures; or possible changes in methods or levels of payment for benefits or services under those programs. Such projects include, but are not limited to, internal studies by Federal employees, and studies under contracts or consulting arrangements, cooperative agreements, or grants. Exempt projects also include waivers of otherwise mandatory requirements using authorities such as sections 1115 and 1115A of the Social Security Act, as amended.

(i) Each Federal department or agency conducting or supporting the research and demonstration projects must establish, on a publicly accessible Federal Web site or in such other manner as the department or agency head may determine, a list of the research and demonstration projects that the Federal department or agency conducts or supports under this provision. The research or demonstration project must be published on this list prior to commencing the research involving human subjects.

(ii) Reserved

____ 6. Taste and food quality evaluation and consumer acceptance studies:

(i) If wholesome foods without additives are consumed, or

(ii) if a food is consumed that contains a food ingredient at or below the level and for a use found to be safe, or agricultural chemical or environmental contaminant at or below the level found to be safe, by the Food and Drug Administration or approved by the Environmental Protection Agency or the Food Safety and Inspection Service of the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Action Research Proposal

Action Research proposals need to be approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB). Since Action Research falls under the purview of research involving human subjects, graduate students need to use IRB Form A, Form B, and Informed Consent (see template) (or Waiver of Informed Consent [Form I]) for the proposal. An electronic copy is available at http://www.eiu.edu/grants/COMP_IRB_Forms.php.

Action Research Paper

Action research is a cyclical process that includes four stages: the planning stage, the acting stage, the developing stage, and the reflecting stage (Mertler, 2014). As graduate students plan, conduct and reflect on their action research, they are expected to adhere to the American Psychological Association (APA) style conventions for reporting their research. Graduate students must use a current edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association* and follow its guidelines, especially with regard to formatting the paper, correct and unbiased use of language, making in-text citations and including an accurate reference list. On the next page is a rubric that will be used for the evaluation of an action research paper. This rubric both outlines the sections that need to be included within the action research paper as well as delineates the expectations for each section of the action research paper.

Rubric for Action Research

* Subject to modifications by ELE 5900 Instructor

	Proficient	Advancing	Emerging
Rationale for topic selection and connection to classroom practice	Selection of topic is thoughtful and clearly connected to a classroom context	Selection of topic is based on classroom context but lacks specificity	Topic has not been fully developed based on classroom context
	The study has clear, practical applications to the resolution of a problem in education	The study has application to identification of a problem in education	The study's connection to a problem in education is not clearly evident
Writing quality and adherence to APA Style conventions	Abstract – clear and concise, ranges from 200-250 words		Abstract – needs more clarity and/or does not fall within the word limit
	Body of the paper – well organized structure, terms well defined to avoid unnecessary jargon, formatting of the paper follows current APA conventions		Body of the paper needs better organization, some use of unnecessary jargon noticed, formatting of the paper follows current APA
	In-text citations are appropriately cited		In-text citations – no more than 3 discrete kinds of errors
	References – No errors		References list – No more than 3 discrete kinds of errors
Literature Review	Reviews relevant and current research in an integrated manner	Reviews relevant research but lacks integration	Reviews research but studies not clearly related to the research question
Methods & Results	The methods and research design are clearly connected to the research question	The methods and research design are connected to the research question	The methods and research design are not clearly connected to the research question
	The sources of data are clearly aligned to the research question	The sources of data are aligned to the research question	The sources of data are not clearly aligned to the research question
	The analyses are accurate using all the data sources	The analyses are appropriate with most of the data sources used	The analyses do not make use of all data sources
	Results are clearly stated in an organized manner	Results are stated and organized	Results are minimally stated with no clear organization
Findings & Implications	Findings are clearly explained and implications for classroom practice are relevant and explicit		Findings are included but implications for classroom practice not explained and/or implications make limited contributions to practice
	Limitations are noted or addressed with suggested future studies		Limitations are not noted or addressed and/or future studies not suggested
Reflection and Action Plan	Reflection and action plan clearly indicate change in classroom practice based on study and give rationale for how the change may benefit students	Reflection and action plan consider some modification in classroom practice based on study; limited rationale provided for how the change benefits students.	Reflection & action plan indicate minimal consideration of change in classroom practice; no rationale provided for how the proposed change may benefit students

Expectations from Graduate Students

The Department of Teaching, Learning, and Foundations sets high expectations for all students. For graduate students who are in the process of completing their Master's degree, a final assessment is completed by a faculty committee. As action research is one of the options for a culminating experience for the graduate students, the faculty committee, put together by the course instructor for each student, will complete a final assessment of the graduate student after the presentation of action research findings. The rubric on the next page is used for this final assessment of the graduate student. As graduate students plan, report on and present their findings related to action research, they are advised to look at the specific sections of the rubric and provide evidence of these during the different stages of the action research process.

Rubric Used for Final Assessment of Master's Candidates

Candidate Demonstrates ...	Does Not Meet Standards	Meets Standards	Exceeds Standards	No Basis for Judgment
GRADUATE SCHOOL ITEMS				
a depth of content knowledge in the discipline				
effective use of technology as appropriate				
the ability to apply content knowledge to practice				
an understanding and respect for professional ethics in the discipline				
a respect for the professional environment through their honesty, integrity, and professionalism				
the ability to effectively evaluate situations and identify an appropriate course of action				
effective oral communication skills				
effective written communication skills				
effective, fair, and honest communication considering not only the message but also the				
an understanding of the role of research in the discipline				
the ability to conduct research and apply it to practice				
an understanding of individual differences in clientele				
a respect for all clientele by fostering a supportive and encouraging atmosphere in their workplace				
a respect for individual differences through the use of rich and varied approaches				
the ability to collaborate with other professionals to promote the success of their clientele				
the ability to effectively work with the community to promote the success of their clientele				
DEPARTMENTAL ITEMS:				
an ability to provide evidence of critical thinking and problem solving				
an ability to provide evidence of differentiation of curricula				

an ability to provide evidence of inquiry based instruction				
an ability to engage in reflective practice				

References

Mertler, C. A. (2014). *Action research: Improving Schools and Empowering Educators* (4th ed.) Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.

Mills, G. E. (2011). *Action research: A guide for the teacher researcher* (4th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson.