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Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) Series 3:

Navigating Ethical Considerations in SoTL Research.

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Land Acknowledgement



Art by Christi Belcourt

<https://www.instagram.com/p/Cia4T9euYUu/>

We wish to acknowledge this land on which the University of Toronto operates. For thousands of years it has been the traditional land of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and most recently, the Mississaugas of the Credit River. Today, this meeting place is still the home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island, and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work on this land.

Access Check

Encourage you to check, identify, and question your learning environment for any of the following and welcome comments if there are elements that we can support to reduce barriers.

- Technology
- Resources
- Pace
- Sound



Timeline of the SoTL Series



Learning Outcomes

By the end of this workshop, participants will:

- Differentiate SoTL research from reflective practice and quality assurance activities in their own courses and identify when REB review is required.
- Explore ethical considerations related to instructor-student power relationships in their SoTL project and identify strategies to mitigate each ethical risks
- Consider whether, or in what ways, students are a vulnerable research participant group
- Identify potential data sources for a SoTL question (e.g., existing coursework, surveys, focus groups, institutional data) and specify how they will address privacy, and confidentiality.



Poll 1: Where are you on your SoTL journey?



Which of the following best describes your relationship with SoTL right now?

- **The Curious Observer:** I'm interested, but I haven't started a project yet.
- **The First-Timer:** I have a research question but haven't navigated the research ethics approval yet.
- **The Active Researcher:** I'm currently collecting data or mid-project.
- **The Seasoned Scholar:** I've published SoTL work and survived the ethics process multiple times.

Poll 2: Your Feelings about Ethics in SoTL



When you think about submitting an REB application for a study in your own classroom, what is your primary "gut" feeling?

- **Confidence:** It's straightforward; I know exactly what's needed.
- **Confusion:** I'm not sure if my classroom activity even counts as research and requires an ethics application.
- **Anxiety:** I'm worried the "red tape" will interfere with my actual teaching.
- **Skepticism:** I feel like researching my teaching methods shouldn't require "permission."

Agenda

| Why we need SoTL Research Ethics | How we navigate SoTL Research Ethics |
|---|---|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">1) Three Core Principles of the TCPS22) Dual Role of Instructor-Researcher3) Students as prospective participants4) Distinguish between reflective practice and research5) Helps us think through our SoTL design6) Expectation of SoTL journals | <ol style="list-style-type: none">1) Encouraging students to participate2) Different data sources3) Secondary Sources of data4) Methods and tools5) Protocol sections |



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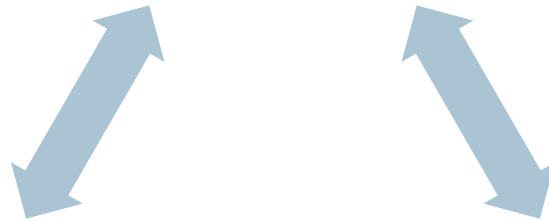
Why We Need SoTL Research Ethics.

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Three Core Principles of the TCPS2

Respect for
Persons

Including their autonomy to freely choose to participate or not.



Concern
for Welfare

Including privacy, informed and ongoing consent, and minimizing risk/maximizing benefit

Justice

Treating people fairly and equitably

The Dual-Roles of Instructor-Researcher

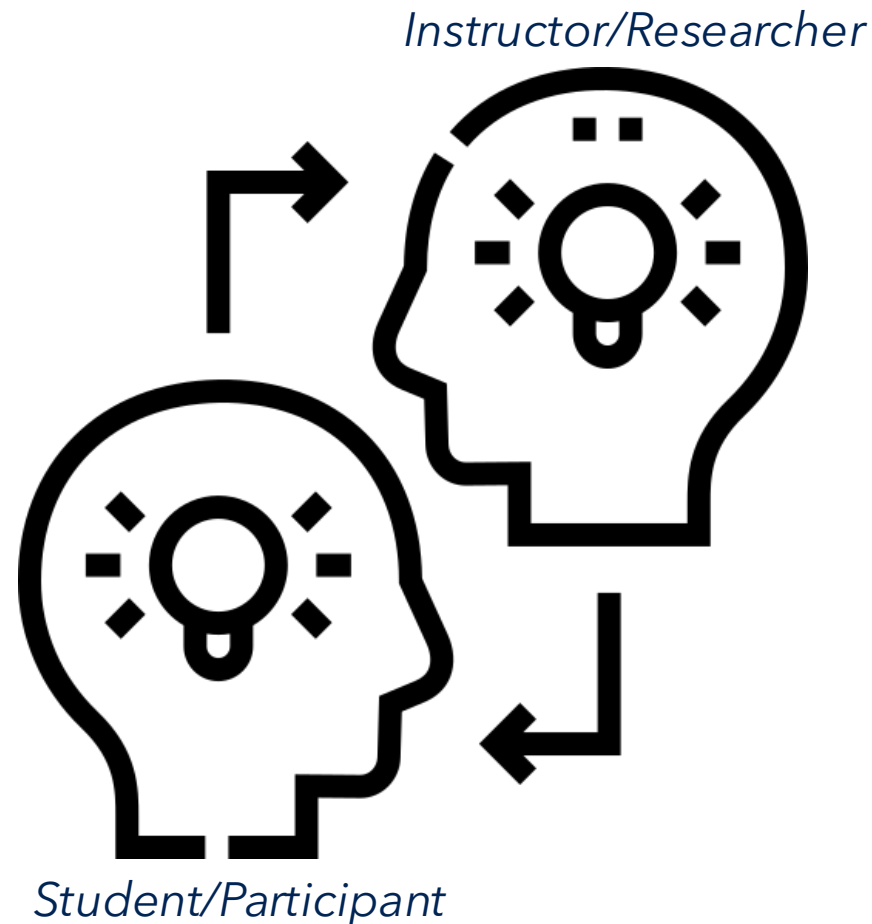
| Feature | Instructor Role | Researcher Role |
|--------------|---------------------------------|---|
| Primary Goal | Student Learning | Knowledge Generation |
| Data Use | Grading & Feedback | Analysis & Publication |
| Timing | Real-time (during term) | Retrospective (usually post-term) |
| Access | Full access to student identity | Access to de-identified data or data made confidential |

The Dual-Roles of Instructor-Researcher

The power differential between students and instructors must be minimized in SoTL research

Students must not be burdened or disadvantaged (in terms of time, access to study materials) because of their instructor's research agenda ([Elgie et al., 2014](#))

Students are learners first, and research participants, second (*more on this later*)

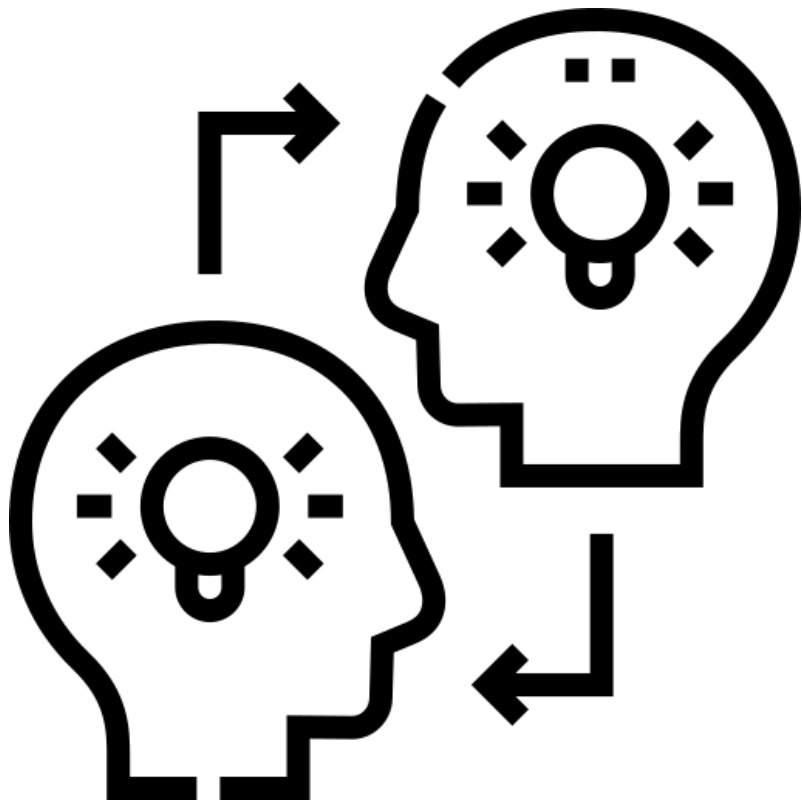


Management of "real, potential or perceived conflicts of interest" in terms of separation of instructor role from role as researcher (e.g. delay or withhold dissemination of research outcomes or to use inappropriate recruitment strategies)

The Dual-Roles of Instructor-Researcher

Tips for navigating these research relationships

Instructor/Researcher



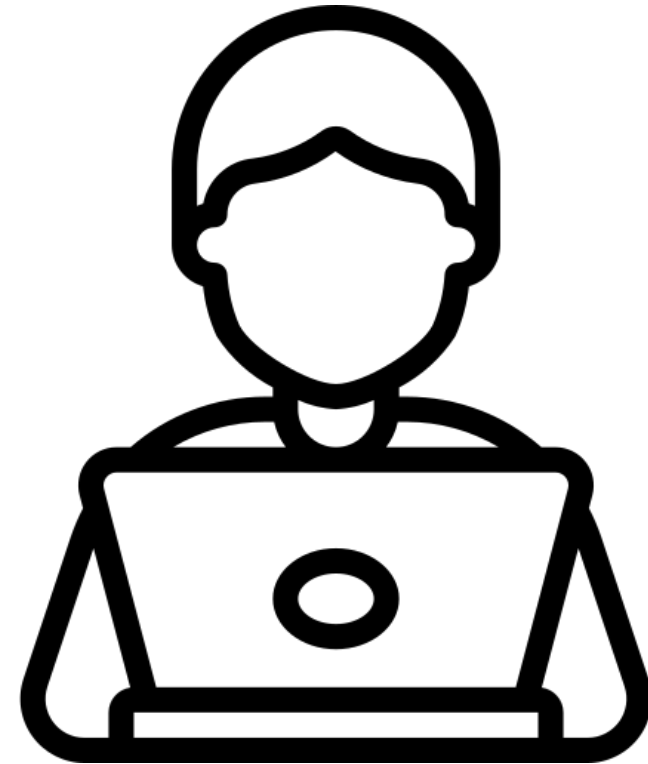
Student/Participant

1. Use a third party, like research collaborators or research assistants, who are not in an instructor role. They can introduce the study and manage the consent process; conduct interviews, deploy survey instruments; de-identify data.
2. Analyze data after course (final grades are submitted).
3. Be transparent about these steps throughout, and most especially in the consent process.

[\(Elgie et al., 2014\)](#)

Design your research and recruitment with student perspectives in mind

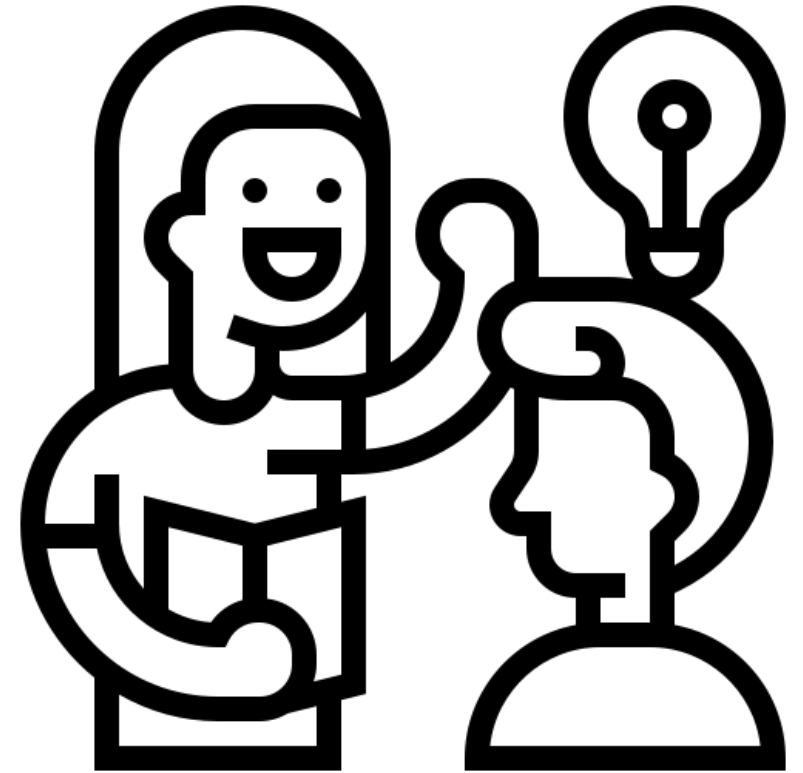
- **How** will students learn about the study?
- **What** do students need to know?
 - Students need sufficient information to make an informed decision to participate or not
- **Why** would students want to become research participants?



Cyr, D., Childs, R., & Elgie, S. (2013). *Recruiting Students for Research in Postsecondary Education: A Guide*. Toronto: [Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario](#).

Students are learners first, research participants second

- Your research plans cannot interfere with their student experience
- Provide clear rationale and importance of research for the course and/or other instructors and courses
- Share that participating may have an educational benefit to their (or others') learning
- Incentives: cannot be coercive (*more to come!*)
- Managing participant contextual vulnerabilities e.g. power differential
- Confidentiality/anonymity—protection of student identities, data security, timing of access to data, etc.



Are students a vulnerable population?

No!

And also...

In the context of teaching, it is important to note that there exists an “inherent power difference between instructor-researchers and students, which increases the vulnerability of students as potential research participants”

[McGinn \(2018\): 6](#)

SoTL Inquiries: Quality Assurance, Reflective Practice or Research?

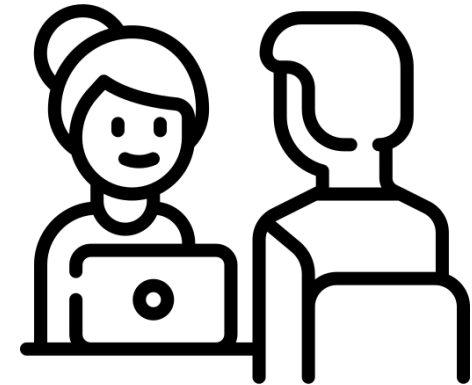


Quality Assurance & Reflective Practice

Non-research activities that use methods similar to those employed in research. When in doubt, consult the U of T's REB.

- Regular course work, student outcomes (grades)
- Reflective activities for pedagogical development, program evaluation, course evaluations

SoTL Inquiries: Quality Assurance, Reflective Practice or Research?



Quality Assurance & Reflective Practice

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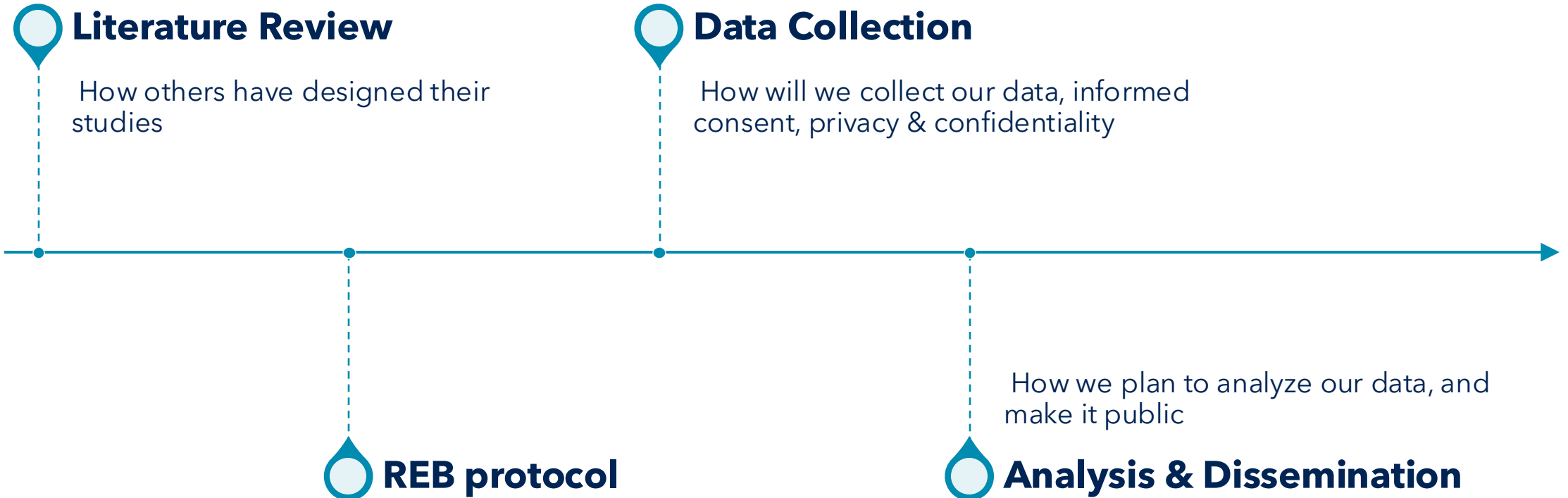
- Regular course work, student outcomes (grades)
- Reflective activities for pedagogical development, program evaluation, course evaluations

Research

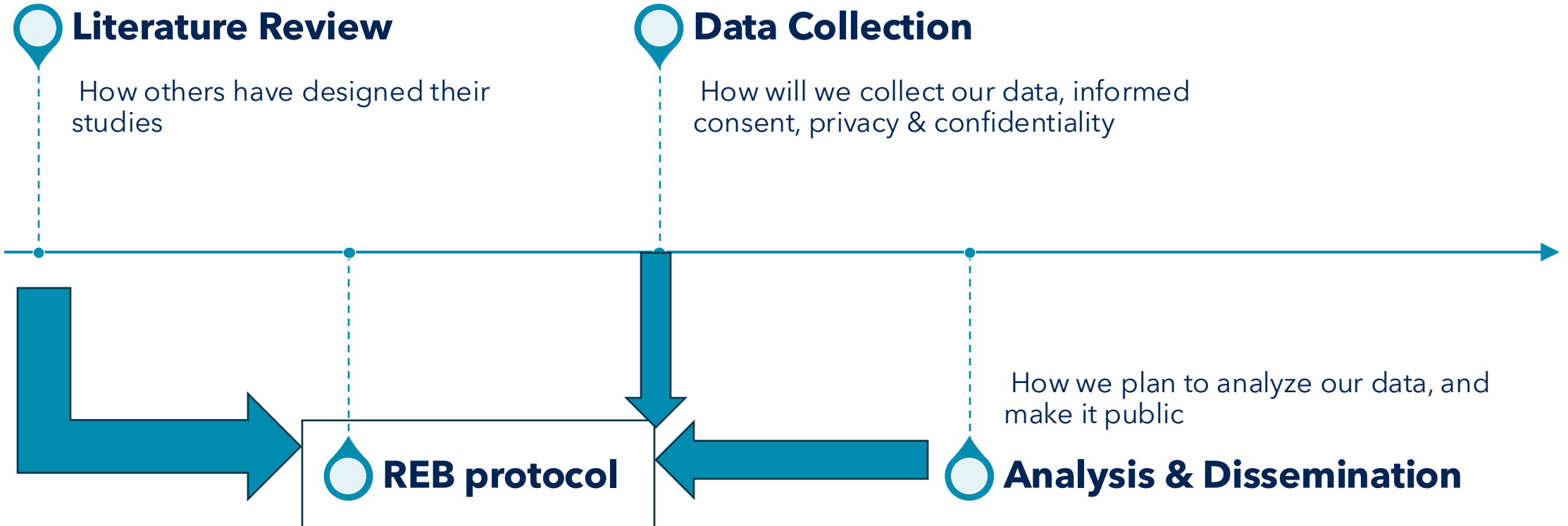
Produce results and sharing/disseminating through systematic inquiry and investigation

- Interviews, focus groups, questionnaires about student perceptions/experiences in a course or with an assessment
- Student work from a course, student outcomes (grades), could include regular course work or additional activities

Helps us think through SoTL Design



Helps us think through SoTL Design



Expectations from SoTL Journals

| SoTL Journal | Ethics Expectations |
|---|---|
| Teaching, Learning and Inquiry | "You have followed ethical practices and processes. If the submission includes human subjects, the project has been successfully reviewed according to the institution's research ethics committee guidelines. Include an Ethics statement when relevant" |
| CJSoTL | "Research Papers and Research Notes involving human participants include a statement within the body of the manuscript indicating that the required ethics clearances were received for the work." |
| Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education (Taylor & Francis Journal Ethics Guidelines) | "Prior to starting the study, where appropriate, researchers should have obtained all necessary ethical approval from a recognized institutional review board (IRB) or other appropriate institutional authority." |



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How We Navigate SoTL Research Ethics.

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Poll 3: Which of the following sources of student data do you believe are permissible to use for SoTL research *without* obtaining REB approval?

- De-identified student reflections from a required course assignment.
- Direct quotes from a private mid-semester feedback survey.
- Final grades from a course taught three years ago.
- Discussion board posts from your current LMS (Canvas/Blackboard).
- None of the above—all require some form of ethical oversight/review.

Data Sources

Direct Student Work (Artifacts): Anything students produce as part of their normal course requirements

- *Examples: Essays, lab reports, projects, assignments*

Perceptual Data (Self-reporting): This captures how students feel about their learning or a specific teaching intervention

- *Examples: surveys, interviews, focus groups*

Process and Engagement Data: Digital Footprints in the form of learning analytics

- *Examples: time spent on a module, number of discussion posts, likes, number of times video was watched*

Consent and Secondary Use of Information for Research Purposes

*Secondary use refers to the use in research of information **originally collected for a purpose other than the current research purpose.** Common examples are social science or health survey data sets that are collected for specific research or statistical purposes but then re-used to answer other research questions. Information initially collected for program evaluation may be useful for subsequent research.*

Article 5.5A - identifiable data

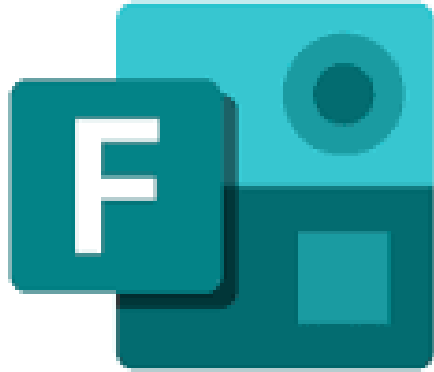
Must satisfy the REB that:

- a. identifiable information is essential to the research;
- b. the use of identifiable information without the participants' consent is unlikely to adversely affect the welfare of individuals to whom the information relates;
- c. the researchers will take appropriate measures to protect the privacy of individuals and to safeguard the identifiable information;
- d. the researchers will comply with any known preferences previously expressed by individuals about any use of their information;
- e. it is impossible or impracticable to seek consent from individuals to whom the information relates; and
- f. the researchers have obtained any other necessary permission for secondary use of information for research purposes.

Article 5.5B: non-identifiable data

[5.5A \(TCPS2\)](#)

Survey Tools for U of T Researchers



- Recommend Microsoft Forms, not Quercus, for full anonymity
 - All U of T instructors have [access to Office365](#)
 - NB: the Quercus survey tool has an option to create an anonymous survey, but settings can be changed afterwards thereby revealing the students' identities



[REDCap](#)

REDCap (Research Electronic Data Capture) is a free and secure web application that U of T faculty and researchers can use to build and manage online surveys and databases specifically geared to support online or offline data capture for research studies and operations.

Data Collection, Privacy and Consent



| | Surveys | Interviews | Focus Groups | Use of Course Work |
|---------|---|-----------------------------------|---|-------------------------------------|
| Privacy | Confidential or anonymous; data security; survey tool | Confidentiality; data security | Same as interviews; additionally, diminished privacy ('social risk') due to group environment | De-identification; data security |
| Consent | Electronic ("By clicking here...") | Electronic or paper | Electronic or paper | Electronic or paper |



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Overview of select ethics protocol sections

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Access MRHP through this link (or web search 'U of T my research'): <https://easi.its.utoronto.ca/administrative-management-systems/my-research-mr/>

4: Potential Conflicts

Under heading "Research Relationships": Must explain any pre-existing relationship between the researcher and the participant (e.g. instructor-student), especially for relationships in which there may be an actual or perceived power differential.

- This is the starting point of what should be a throughline in your protocol
 - For example, your consent process should make sense in the context of any pre-existing relationship

5: Project Details

- Two sections: rationale and methods
- Rationale – think of this as akin to a literature review; avoid jargon, and be thorough
- Methods:
 - formal/informal procedures to be used
 - data to be collected (where and from whom)
 - how data will be analyzed; will you be using GenAI for transcription? Analysis?
- The first "upload" area of the protocol
 - submit copies of questionnaires/surveys, interview guides, and/or other instruments used

6: Participants and Data

- Three sections: participants, recruitment, and compensation
 - Participants:
 - inclusion/exclusion criteria
 - sample size
 - whether (and for what purpose) personally identifiable information will be collected
 - Recruitment
 - Describe recruitment (attach flyers, emails, materials)
 - Compensation

Compensation: Incentives for Participation

- Financial, in-kind, or other
 - Course credit (bonus point)—must also offer equivalent credit for students who do not choose to participate in study; for example, these students are given option to complete an assignment that will take the same amount of time as students participating in study; remember the dual role - involve a third party
- Cannot be so significant that it is coercive
- Consider what happens if a participant withdraws

9: Consent

- Describe process used to obtain informed consent and how it will be recorded (is it written, electronic, or verbal?)
- Students must actively choose to opt-in (positive consent)
- A consent letter must contain specific pieces of information
 - What will happen from the participants' perspective?
 - Are distinct consent options appropriate?
 - Use accessible language (layperson's terms) on all materials, including consent
 - See <https://research.utoronto.ca/informed-consent>

11: Confidentiality and Privacy

- What steps are you taking to ensure privacy in your data collection, storage, analysis, and dissemination?
- Two sections: confidentiality and data protection
- Confidentiality:
 - Anonymity, confidentiality, and de-identification are distinct
- Data protection:
 - Recordings, written records, etc
 - Data retention (for how long, and why)

12: Level of Risk & REB

| Group Vulnerability | <u>Research Risk</u> | | |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|---------------|-------------|
| | Low | Medium | High |
| Low | 1 | 1 | 2 |
| Medium | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| High | 2 | 3 | 3 |

Risk level = 1: Delegated Review; Risk level = 2 or 3: Full Board Review

SoTL is usually Low/Low

Take a moment:



- Consider a possible timeline for your research ethics submission:
 - When you teach
 - Your course of interest
 - Sabbatical
 - Grant funding sources, deadlines, and project eligibility
 - Literature review on your topic
 - Time to connect with REB, with SoTL colleagues
 - professional development opportunities (e.g., workshops, conferences)

Next Session:

Quantitative Research Methods in SoTL

Faculty Co-facilitator:

Prof. Rutwa Engineer

Assistant Professor, Teaching Stream,
Mathematical and Computational Sciences,
UTM

Online on Tuesday, April 14th, 2026

11:00 pm - 1:00 pm on Microsoft Teams



Resources:

- [U of T Research Libraries – SoTL Research Guidelines for Ethical Research Practice](#)
- [Division of the Vice-President, Research & Innovation: Schedule an Ethics Consultation](#)
- Email ethics.review@utoronto.ca for general inquiries
- Access [MRHP through this link](#)

[Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans – TCPS 2 \(2022\)](#)

References

- Cyr, D., Childs, R., & Elgie, S. (2013). *Recruiting Students for Research in Postsecondary Education: A Guide*. Toronto: [Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario](#).
- Elgie, S. (2014). *Researching Teaching and Student Outcomes in Postsecondary Education: An Introduction*. Second edition. Toronto: *Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario*. [Research-Guide-II-2014.pdf](#)
- Fedoruk, L. (2017). *Ethics in the scholarship of teaching and learning: Key principles and strategies for ethical practice*. Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning Guide Series. Calgary, AB: Taylor Institute for Teaching and Learning at the University of Calgary. www.ucalgary.ca/taylorinstitute/guides
- McGinn, M. K. (2018). Teaching and researching ethically: Guidance for instructor-researchers, educational developers, and research ethics personnel. *The Canadian Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning*, 9(1). <https://doi.org/10.5206/cjsotl-rcacea.2018.1.2>

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- Baker, J. & McCloy, C. (2025). Navigating Research Ethics and SoTL - SoTL Series: Part IV. [SoTL REB Apr 30.2025](#)

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Workshop Feedback for the "Scholarship of Teaching & Learning (SoTL) Series 3"





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Thank you!
Any Questions?

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