

## **GUIDELINES AND PROCEDURES FOR REVIEW OF RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS**

All students intending to use human subjects in GTU MA thesis or doctoral dissertation research must follow these guidelines and procedures. The purpose is to ensure an adequate review of the research regarding two central ethical concerns:

- that human subjects are treated in a manner consistent with their dignity and autonomy—specifically that they consent freely and in an informed manner to participation in the research;
- that they are protected from any risks or harms posed by the research.

The research review is **NOT** intended to assess either the value of the thesis/dissertation topic or of the research design.

### **STUDENTS MUST RECEIVE APPROVAL OF A FULL REVIEW**

#### **A. FULL REVIEW**

The student should submit the following (You **MUST** address each of the items. You may not need to address the items in exactly the way they are described here, for these are only suggestions. Make sure that your approach for each item makes sense for your research. **Consult the sample Human Subjects Protocol, consent form, and, if relevant, interview protocol, following these guidelines for an example of the documents required.**):

1. A **Research Overview**, explaining the following (BE AS SPECIFIC AS POSSIBLE):
  - a. The Nature And Purpose Of The Research: e.g. “My dissertation focuses on the relationship between ‘x’ and ‘y’. For my research on this relationship, I plan to interview 40 subjects regarding their perceptions of ‘a’, ‘b’, ‘c’.”
  - b. The Research Procedures: How will the research be conducted? What will it entail? e.g. “I will interview the subjects in their homes or a place of their own choosing. I intend only one interview per subject; the interview should last about one hour. I will take notes during the interview, I will only tape record the interview with the subject’s permission.”
  - c. Subject Recruitment And Selection: How will you generate a pool of subjects? How will you contact them?
  - d. Specify If You Have Any Relationship To These Subjects: e.g. teacher, pastor.
  - e. Risks And Benefits: State what benefits and what risks you perceive the research posing to the subjects.
  - f. Confidentiality and/or Anonymity: How will you preserve the confidentiality of the data and/or the anonymity of the subject and any factors that might identify a given subject? Confidentiality assures a subject’s identity is protected. Anonymity is only guaranteed when you have a third party interview your subjects.  
Consider the following questions in your overview:  
*How will data be stored? (The suggested standard is to: 1) store data in a secured/ locked manner, and 2) store any key which links the data to the names or identifiers of subjects in a secured/ locked manner away from the data)*  
*How long will the data be kept?*  
*How will data be destroyed?*

*What will happen to the data if something happens to you, preventing you from taking the provisions outlined here?*

*If appropriate, how will you collect and analyze the data to insure anonymity?*

*If appropriate, how will you officially report the data to insure anonymity?*

- g. **Copyright Protection:** indicate on the consent form that you retain all intellectual and commercial rights to the interview, though you freely consent to give the subject free access to cite or quote the work for the informant's own purposes.
2. A draft **Consent Form**. The Consent Form should be written in lay person's language, with as little professional jargon as possible, so that a layperson/ subject can understand what participation in the research involves and consent (should they desire) to such participation. Please specify the following:
    - a. The researcher's name and institutional affiliation, as well as the nature and purpose of the research. e.g. "My name is --- and I am a doctoral candidate at the GTU. I invite you to participate in research I am undertaking for my dissertation. I am examining how people think about 'x' in relation to 'y'..."
    - b. A statement of the procedures the research involves for the subject. e.g. An interview? How long? How many interviews? Where will they be held?
    - c. A statement of the risks and benefits of participation in the research to the subject.
    - d. A statement indicating how confidentiality and/or anonymity will be maintained. Include a section on the Consent Form **for subjects to agree or not agree to waive their right to confidentiality and/or anonymity**. Subjects should be informed of their rights, but by their signature on this section of the form make clear that they do not expect nor require confidentiality and/or anonymity.  
(Note: Anonymity means that neither the public nor the researcher can identify a given response with a particular respondent. Whereas confidentiality means that the researcher can identify respondents but promises not to divulge their identities to the public.)
    - e. A statement that the subject is free not to answer any specific question, and is free to terminate an interview or withdraw completely from the research at any time.
    - f. Include how a subject can contact the researcher, e.g. telephone number.
    - g. The form should end with a statement that the subject voluntarily and with understanding consents to participate, followed by signature and date lines.

NOTE: when the Human Subjects Protocol materials have been approved, the Consent Form submitted to informants should be printed on GTU Letterhead. The researcher should keep the original Consent Form signed by the subject and give a copy of the form to the subject.

3. A copy of the **survey instrument or schedule of interview questions** used in the research. If the instrument is not yet completed or the interview is to be open-ended, include some sample questions, indicating the nature of the information/data sought from the subject.
4. A **statement from the student's advisor/coordinator** verifying that he/she has read and approves of the protocol being submitted. The advisor/coordinator can simply send a separate email to the Associate Dean of Students for verification.

## **DEADLINES FOR SUBMITTING REVIEW MATERIALS**

Students should submit research material for review to the GTU Associate Dean of Students according to the following schedule:

**MA:** must submit the protocol and receive approval from the Human Subjects Protocol review committee before the start of field research;

**PhD:** must submit the protocol and receive approval from the Human Subjects Protocol review committee **after** successful completion of the comprehensive examinations and oral comprehensive examination, **before** the student's proposal presentation to the Doctoral Council **and before** the start of field research. If research is necessary for the Comprehensive Exams, the students must submit the protocol and receive approval from the Human Subjects Protocol review **before** the start of their research.

Students should submit their materials to the GTU Associate Dean of Students by email (as a PDF document if possible). The Associate Dean of Students will forward the document to the Human Subjects Protocol Review Committee member assigned to the student's review. The Associate Dean of Students will email the name and email address of the assigned committee member to the student. Students may seek the assigned faculty member's advice on the draft and/or ask questions.

## **COMPLETING THE PROCESS**

The assigned faculty member will consult with the Review Committee, if necessary, and determine a result within three weeks of receiving the materials from the Associate Dean of Students. He/she will inform the Associate Dean of Students by email of the status of the research materials. The materials may be approved "as is" or may require changes. Should any changes be stipulated, in most cases, the thesis/dissertation coordinator will make sure revisions are made and should notify the Associate Dean of Students by email. Infrequently, the assigned committee member may require the student to re-submit a revised draft to him or her before approving the materials. Finally, if materials are not approved, they will have to be substantially revised and re-submitted to the Committee via the GTU Associate Dean of Students.

**MA:** A copy of the approval email will be sent to the student, MA thesis coordinator, and The Associate Dean of Students. The student should send the approved protocol and supporting documents to the Associate Dean of Students to be placed in his/her academic file.

**PhD:** A copy of the approval email will be sent to the student and doctoral dissertation coordinator. The student should include the final human subjects protocol approval email, along with a copy of the approved protocol and supporting documents, with the dissertation proposal materials for Doctoral Council review.

# **SAMPLE HUMANS SUBJECTS PROTOCOL**

## **Humans Subjects Protocol for Dissertation Research**

[Researcher's Name]

[Researcher's Department and, if appropriate, School of Affiliation (for MA candidates, only)]

[Date]

### **Research Overview**

[a. The Nature of the Research] My dissertation focuses on the increasingly prevalent phenomenon of ad hoc memorial shrines dedicated to the victims either of murder or death as a result of traffic accident. Aspects of both the Ritual Studies and Cultural Geography literatures will help address some of the functions of these memorials. However, both to augment these theoretical and methodological approaches, and to provide the basis for a constructive assessment of the phenomenon, I also plan a small empirical study of several (perhaps two to five) of the shrines which have recently been erected and sustained locally. This study will involve interviewing people who have participated in spontaneous shrine building and maintenance in the Bay Area, as well as relatives and friends of the deceased. (It is not clear at this time whether or not these are two separate populations or not; the interviews themselves will help to clarify this point.)

[a. The Purpose of the Research] The purpose of the interviews is to determine the subjects' motivations in contributing to the memorials, and their beliefs about how the location and (reported) meaning(s) of the memorial relate to the deceased. Because this is a phenomenological rather than statistical study, the number of interviewees will be quite limited, perhaps ten to fifteen.

### **Research Procedures** (See also Confidentiality/Anonymity, below)

I will interview subjects at a place of their choosing. In most cases I intend one interview per subject, but especially with the first few interviews, reserve the option of more than one encounter if the subjects agree. Because I plan to make parts of the interviews open-ended, the interviews may take varying lengths of time, although I expect most will last about two hours. I will take notes during the interview and will tape the interview if the subject gives permission.

### **Subject Recruitment/Selection and Interviewer's Relationship to Subjects** (see also Risk/Benefits, below)

I will rely largely on referrals from friends and colleagues, supplemented by information in newspaper articles, to find potential interview subjects. I am already aware of some potential subjects associated with a few memorials. The major developer/maintainer of one shrine I intend to examine is a personal friend of mine, for example, and in another case the developers are friends of a colleague. [How will you contact them?]

Once identified, the subjects will self-select by either agreeing or refusing to be interviewed.

### **Risks and Benefits**

I believe there is almost no risk involved for any of the subjects. In at least one case, the respondent will be a personal friend of mine. To guard against bias, I will use the guidelines of this field research to assure that I treat this person and any respondent that I may know personally in a manner consistent with all others. Subjects will be told clearly about the project and the sorts of questions to be asked, before they agree to participate. Subjects will free not to answer any particular question. Additionally, if a subject feels that their particular shrine should not be included, I will drop it from the study.

I am aware of the range of emotions and reactions involved in mourning and will do my best to be respectful and circumspect about my respondents' involvement in the mourning process. All of the respondents will at least eighteen years old. To avoid any semblance of "ambulance chasing", I will select memorials that have been in existence for more than several months, or even several years, and avoid instances where the emotions are still very raw.

In one case a potential interviewee told me that she thought the opportunity to discuss the memorial would actually be therapeutic.

**Confidentiality/Anonymity** (Also see Research Procedures, above.)

I will know the identities of the respondents, but I will preserve their confidentiality in the dissertation assigning each a number which I will use to identify the respondent. The interviews will be treated with complete confidentiality. If the subjects request it I will make a write up of our interview, or a copy of the interview tape, available for their approval before that interview is considered for use in the dissertation. After each interview is completed, and while the dissertation is being written, I will store the resulting notes/recordings and data files in a secure lock box, with the conversion list which translates the names into respondent number kept in a separate secure location. The raw materials of the interviews (notes, recordings) will be kept only until the dissertation is successfully defended, at which point all supporting materials will be destroyed (notes and paper transcripts will be shredded; tapes will be dismantled and discarded). If it is considered necessary, I will draft a codicil to my will directing that all interview materials be destroyed if I should die before completing this phase of the dissertation preparation. (Note: anonymity can only be guaranteed if the researcher does not conduct the interviews).

## SAMPLE CONSENT FORM

### (Draft) Interview Consent Form

My name is [Researcher's name] and I am a doctoral candidate at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley. I invite you to participate in research I am doing for my dissertation. I am looking at the spontaneous shrines we see going up everywhere recently in memory of people who have died violent deaths. I'm interested in finding out why these memorials have been set up, why they are in a particular location, what the people who developed and maintain the shrine feel it means, and how memorial builders feel it is connected to the person who died.

You can help further my research by allowing me to interview you on this subject. I have a certain set of questions all ready to ask you, *but am also interested in hearing anything else you might have to say about the memorial that's not covered by my questions.* The amount of time the interview will take is hard to judge precisely, but I expect it will last around two hours. The interview can be held in whatever (mutually agreeable) place is best for you. I will need to take notes, but will tape record the interview *only if you agree.*

One person has told me she thought talking about the memorial she developed would actually be helpful to her. Even if you don't exactly feel the same way there is no risk involved because *whatever you tell me will be confidential and anonymous.* I will assign you a number ("respondent #\_\_\_") so your name will not appear in the dissertation and no one will be able to identify you by what you say to me.

*If you request* it I will prepare a write up of our interview(s) for you to OK before I use the material in my research, or if you prefer, give you a copy of the interview tape. In any case *you will always be free not to answer any specific question or questions, and you can back out of the study at any time.*

While I will retain all intellectual and commercial rights to the interview materials (copyright), I freely consent to give you access to the materials pertaining to your interview to cite or quote for your own use.

I can be reached at [Researcher's telephone number] or at [Researcher's email address].

*Thank you for your participation!*

I \_\_\_\_\_ voluntarily and with understanding  
*please print name*

consent to be interviewed by [Researcher's name] as a participant in [his/her] doctoral dissertation research on memorial shrines. I understand that I am free to not answer any specific question(s), and may terminate the interview and/or withdraw from the research project at any time. I understand that the reporting of my participation in this study will be entirely anonymous and confidential.

\_\_\_\_ I consent to the tape recording of my interview.

Please sign here \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

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[If the Researcher, instead, does not want to keep the respondent's name anonymous and/or responses confidential, he/she should seek the respondent's approval:

\_\_\_\_ I do NOT agree to waive my right to confidentiality.

\_\_\_\_ I DO agree to waive my right to confidentiality.

Please sign here \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Regarding confidentiality waiver]

## **SAMPLE INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

### **(Draft) Interview Protocol**

Note to HSP Committee: These are preliminary questions, and the list is far from complete as of yet. I expect interviews to be a bit open-ended, and that other pertinent questions will emerge both from the interviews themselves and from my searches of the Ritual Studies and Cultural Geography literatures.

1. What is your relationship to the person for whom the memorial was erected?
2. How old were they at the time of death?
3. How old were you when the memorial was erected?
4. What gave you the idea to build the memorial? (Why did you build this memorial?)
5. How soon after the death was the memorial made? (Was it a spontaneous act? Approximate date of erection, to determine how long memorial has been in existence)
6. Did any one else help you erect (and/or maintain) the memorial? If, yes, what was their relation to the deceased?
7. How did you decide what to include in the memorial? Do items used in the memorial have special meaning to you or to the deceased? If, yes, please explain.
8. Did you follow any (particular) ceremony when you set up this memorial?
9. Do you think making this memorial was a religious or spiritual act? How so?
10. Do you (and/or did the deceased) belong to a particular religion? If so, which one(s)?
11. How was it decided where to place the memorial?
12. How specific/precise was the placement of the memorial? How is the location related to the deceased? Could it have been anywhere else and mean as much?
13. Has the memorial been moved or relocated? (From/to where? When?) If so, why was it moved from the original location?
14. Has anyone objected to this memorial? If yes, please explain.
15. Do you visit the memorial? If yes, how often?
16. Do you visit the memorial more or less frequently than the grave site? Why?
- 17.. Can you tell me what this memorial means, to you, to the deceased?

18. Here are some possible reasons for creating a memorial. Do you personally identify with any of them? How would you put them in order of importance to you? (Which are of most/least importance?)

- to keep his/her memory alive for me
- to keep his/her memory alive for others
- as a way of mourning,
- as a means of sharing my mourning
- as a way of coping with the death
- to warn others
- as a way of bringing some closure to this event
- as a means of communing with a loved one (keeping in touch)
- to say good-bye
- as an expression of my faith or spirituality
- out of a need to do something tangible/physical to deal with the loss
- cannot explain exactly why I established the memorial

19. Is there anything else you can tell me about this memorial?