

Title: “When Does a Class Project Become Research? Teaching Human Subjects Research Ethics from Intro Psychology through Senior Capstone”

Speaker: Karen Gunther, Wabash College and Nestor Matthews, Denison University

Abstract

Psychology research methods education spans the psychology curriculum. This might include Intro Psych, Stats and Research Methods courses, Course-based Undergraduate Research Experiences (CUREs), and Senior Capstone. These create powerful opportunities for students to learn about research ethics. But they also raise ethical and regulatory questions for psychology instructors. When does a classroom project become human-subjects research and thus require IRB approval? Does conference presentation change the answer? How can psychology instructors achieve educational goals with hands-on experiences while also protecting human subjects and not over-taxing IRBs?

This interactive workshop brings together faculty experiences from teaching research methods and ethics across the psychology curriculum, and from serving on Institutional Review Boards. Through case studies and small-group discussions, workshop participants will help each other navigate common psychology research ethics questions that arise when students embark on conducting human subjects research.

We invite workshop participants to share, by December 6 (email to matthewsn@denison.edu), examples of cases or ethical questions that have emerged when teaching research ethics in their own courses. The workshop will focus on helping instructors recognize common challenges, anticipate ethical concerns (e.g., to submit or not to submit an IRB proposal?), and develop effective approaches for mentoring psychology student researchers. Participants will leave with practical strategies and a shared collection of resources that can support teaching ethical human subjects research on their own campuses.

Bio

Nestor Matthews, PhD, is Professor of Psychology at Denison University, where he also directs the college’s Neuroscience program. Across the past 25 years at Denison, he has taught Introduction to Psychology, Research Methods & Statistics, Research in Sensation & Perception (a C.U.R.E.), Research in the Psychology of Music (another C.U.R.E.) Advanced Statistics for the Behavioral Sciences, and Introduction to Data Analytics. Nestor is a member of Denison University’s IRB, and chairs the Denison Psychology Department Research Review Committee. Since 2020, he has served as the Secretary to the Psychology Division of the Council on Undergraduate Research (CUR). His research focuses on vision and hearing, with an emphasis on how these sensory systems improve with practice. He regularly attends NITOP, and is a recipient of Denison University’s Brickman Family Teaching Excellence Award.

Karen L. Gunther, PhD, is a Professor of Psychology and Chair of the Neuroscience minor at Wabash College in Crawfordsville, IN. She has taught Introduction to Psychology, Stats and Research Methods, Sensation & Perception and Research in Sensation & Perception, Principles of Neuroscience, Cognitive Neuropsychology, Literature Review, Senior Capstone, and a freshman tutorial on Science & Pseudoscience. She has served on Wabash’s IRB committee since 2008, and chaired it 2019-2025. She has been an elected councilor/representative for the Council on Undergraduate Research (CUR) since

2010, was secretary for the Psychology Division 2011-2020, and has chaired the Psychology Division since 2020. She also served on CUR's DEI/Broadening Participation committee 2018-2026. Her research has focused on color vision for the past three decades, but now she is finally getting around to starting to study procrastination and its effects on men's mental health.