Northern Virginia Community College
Office of Institutional Research, Planning, and Assessment

RESEARCH PROPOSAL GUIDELINES

As part of the education community, Northern Virginia Community College recognizes the importance of scholarly research both to the continued improvement of education and to the development of knowledge. This document is provided to help researchers both inside and outside the College who wish to request NOVA cooperation in research projects. The information in this document was drawn from the 2010-2011 NOVA Faculty Handbook (pp. 7-13 to 7-16) and should not be interpreted as superseding the guidelines and policies stated in that document.

Any researcher not employed by the College but desiring the College's cooperation in a research project and any NOVA faculty or staff member wishing to conduct research on any campus should submit a brief research proposal to the College's Office of Institutional Research. The proposal should contain the following elements:

1. A description of the research project, including a summary of recent relevant literature, the variables to be used and how they will be measured, how the research instrument(s) will be administered, desired sample(s), the research hypotheses, plans for data analysis, and a time frame.

2. An explanation of how the proposed research will benefit NOVA.

3. A description of the researcher's credentials.

4. A copy of each research instrument to be used.

5. A signed agreement to provide NOVA with a final report of the project that includes findings and implications.

6. If the research involves the use of human subjects, include the following items in the proposal.

    (a) A signed Agreement to Protect Confidentiality of Individual Information

    (b) A signed agreement to comply strictly with the American Psychological Association's Ethical Principles in the Conduct of Research With Human Participants (see the attached document), and any additional information necessary to explain how the proposed research complies with those principles.

    (c) The researcher's immediate supervisor's name, address, and telephone number and a statement that questions of ethical conduct in the research project may be addressed to that person, and a signed agreement to provide copies of the form to all subjects (and legal guardians of subjects who are minors.)

    (d) An explanation of how the use of class time will be avoided or minimized.

    (e) An explanation of how the researcher will insure that participation by any faculty member, staff member, or student is strictly voluntary and without inducement, and how prospective participants will be assured that no negative effects regarding employment, course work, or grades at the College will result from a decision not to participate.

The research proposal must be approved by:

1. The Office of Institutional Research

2. The Human Subjects Committee (if the research involves the use of human subjects)

3. The NOVA President or the Provosts of the appropriate campuses (depending upon whether the research is institutional in scope or involves only certain campuses).

The Office of Institutional Research coordinates the approval process. Researchers may contact that office for information about a proposed project's status.

Ethical Principles in the Conduct of Research With Human Participants (American Psychologist, Vol. 45, No. 3, March 1990, pp. 394-395, American Psychological Association, Inc., 1200 17th Street, NW, Washington,D.C. 20036):

1. In planning a study, the investigator has the responsibility to make a careful evaluation of its ethical acceptability. To the extent that the weighing of scientific and human values suggests a compromise of any principle, the investigator incurs a correspondingly serious obligation to seek ethical advice and to observe stringent safeguards to protect the rights of human participants.

2. Responsibility for the establishment and maintenance of acceptable ethical practice in research always remains with the individual investigator. The investigator is also responsible for the ethical treatment of research participants by collaborators, assistants, students, and employees, all of whom however, incur parallel obligations.

3. Ethical practice requires the investigator to inform the participant of all features of the research that reasonably might be expected to influence willingness to participate and to explain all other aspects of the research about which the participant inquires. Failure to make full disclosure gives added emphases to the investigator's responsibility to protect the welfare and dignity of the research participant.

4. Openness and honesty are essential characteristics of the relationship between investigator and research participant. When the methodological requirements of a study necessitate concealment or deception, the investigator is required to ensure the participant's understanding of the reasons for this action and to restore the quality of the relationship with the investigator.

5. Ethical research practice requires the investigator to respect the individual's freedom to decline to participate in research or to discontinue participation at any time. The obligation to protect this freedom requires special vigilance when the investigator is in a position of power over the participant. The decision to limit this freedom increases the investigator's responsibility to protect the participant's dignity and welfare.

6. Ethically acceptable research begins with the establishment of a clear and fair agreement between the investigator and the research participant that clarifies the responsibilities of each. The investigator has the obligation to honor all promises and commitments included in that agreement.

7. The ethical investigator protects participants from physical and mental discomfort, harm and danger. If the risk of such consequences exists, the investigator is

required to inform the participant of that fact, secure consent before proceeding, and take all possible measures to minimize distress. A research procedure may not be used if it is likely to cause serious or lasting harm to participants.

8. After the data are collected, ethical practice requires the investigator to provide the participant with a full clarification of the nature of the study and to remove any misconceptions that may have arisen. Where scientific or humane values justify delaying or withholding information, the investigator acquires a special responsibility to ensure that there are no damaging consequences for the participant.

9. Where research procedures may result in undesirable consequences for the participant, the investigator has the responsibility to detect and remove or correct these consequences, including where relevant, long-term aftereffects.

10. Information obtained about the research participants during the course of an investigation is confidential. When the possibility exists that others may obtain access to such information, ethical research practice requires that this possibility, together with the plans for protecting confidentiality, be explained to the participants as a part of the procedure for obtaining informed consent.