Participation in Psychological Research: Information for Students

As part of your psychology course, you are encouraged to participate in research projects conducted or supervised by the faculty of the department. The purpose of such participation is to give you some direct experience with real experiments and to give you a better idea of how the work of psychology is actually carried out. Participation is a course requirement for all sections of PSY 101.

SPECIAL NOTE: Students under 18 years of age may not participate in experiments without parental consent. Special options have been created for students under 18 to meet the participation requirement. Contact Leslie Baldwin, the Human Participation in Research (HPR) Secretary in Room 231, Psychology Building if you are under 18 and want to learn more about these options.

Steps in Research Participation: Registering as a Participating Student.

The purpose of this handout is to go over some of the things you will need to know before participating in psychological research. The first step is registering. This, like nearly all your scheduling activities is handled through a site on the Internet/World Wide Web. Its address is: http://psychology.msu.edu/HPRSystem/

And you can access it using standard Web browsers (such as Netscape or Microsoft Explorer) from any campus microcomputer lab facility. (If you don't know how to do this, ask the attendants at the facility to get you to the site.) This will bring you to the Participant login page. The first time you visit this page you must create your account. Click on the button that says Create an account - you will be directed to the page that says Enter the Account Creation ID. This semester your Account Creation ID is psych2009-- in the box used to enter the access code, type it just like this (in lower case), then click on Enter. You will now see the registration page - provide all the requested information. Once your account is created, you will be able to log directly into the system with your user ID and e-mail address. If you have participated in the HPR in previous semesters you will need to create a new account.

***Among other things you will be asked to select the course and section number to which you wish to have your participation credits credited. It is CRITICAL that you select the correct course and section number. If you select an incorrect course or section, the credits that you earn through participation will NOT be relayed to the proper instructor and will not be counted in calculating your course grade ***

During some semesters, experimenters may want to get some background information on those participating in their experiments. They do this by having students answer Global Questionnaires. The more of these that you fill out, the more experiments you will be eligible to participate in. So, after registering, you should click on the Answer Global Questionnaires button and see if any are posted.

Signing-up for research you can sign up for experiments 24-hours a day on the Web site. To do so, get to the Student Menu (following the procedure described above). Then, to see a list of all experiments that are currently recruiting participants, click on the Sign up for an Experiment button and follow the indicated directions. Please make sure you read the participant task and restrictions for the experiment you are signing up for.

Canceling appointments: Experimenters have usually invested a great deal of time and money in preparing an experiment. This goes to waste if you fail to keep your appointment. It is Psychology Department policy to deduct 1 participant-credit from a student's total whenever he/she fails to keep a research appointment. In effect, you would have to earn another participant-credit to make up for a missed study. Of course, sometimes due to illness or other unavoidable circumstances, you will not be able to keep a research appointment. In such cases, you can cancel your appointment by clicking on the button marked View/Modify My Schedule at the Student Menu on the Web site and following the instructions for canceling an appointment. Please note that you cannot cancel an appointment on or after the day of your appointment. This means that any cancellation must be done no later than 24 hours before your appointment. Failure to cancel or show up for an appointment will result in a NO-SHOW being charged to you (and 1 credit being deducted from your total). Exceptions will be made in the case of an emergency, contact the HPR secretary (lbaldwin@msu.edu) for more information. (You need to know the name of the experiment and the date/time you signed up for.)
If you lost the appointment time and place: Sometimes, people mislay the date-time-location information for an experiment they've signed up for. If this happens to you and you ever need to check on your appointments (where you're supposed to be and when), you can always click on the button marked View/Modify my Schedule at the Web site to get this information. You can save yourself a lot of trouble by writing down all the information and keeping it in a safe place.

Reporting for a research appointment: Be sure to give yourself enough time to get to the experiment on time, (Arriving 10 minutes before the experiment is to begin is suggested) If you are late, you could find the experiment in progress and the door locked. On rare occasions, an experimenter may not make his/her appointment with you because of unusual circumstances (e.g., a car breakdown, a personal emergency). If this happens contact Leslie Baldwin, the HPR Secretary in Room 231, Psychology Building or email her at: lbaldwin@msu.edu to report it (email is preferred).

Rights of Students Participating in Psychology Research

Participation must be voluntary/optional activities. First, it is Department, University, and Federal policy that no student be compelled in any way to participate in research. If you participate in research, it must be done voluntarily. Therefore, even in classes where research participation is required, students must be offered one or more alternative activities to meet their requirement. If you want to avail yourself of such an alternative activity, you may get information from your professor. Note that on rare occasions there are more people interested in participating in experiments than there are openings in the experiments. If this occurs this semester, additional alternative activities will be provided later in the semester.

Participation should be educational. Second, participating in research should be a learning experience for you. You have a right to obtain information about the experiments in which you serve as a participant. You are entitled to have your questions about the experiment answered. Also, at least five minutes of every experimental session must be devoted to teaching you something about the experiment. You are entitled to receive a written summary of the experiment, including the name and phone number of the person in charge of the experiment, whom you may contact if you have additional questions.

The right to discontinue participation: Third, the Department of Psychology is highly concerned that no study be conducted that would in any way be harmful to you. Even so, it is possible that in rare cases you will feel uncomfortable about participating in a study for which you have volunteered. Just remember, you always have the right to leave any experiment. You don't have to explain or justify why you want to leave, and you can never be penalized for leaving.

The right to receive earned credits: Finally, if you do what you're supposed to do (sign up properly, show up at the right place at the right time, etc.), you have a right to receive the credit you've earned. So, for example, even if an experimenter has an equipment breakdown, you're still entitled to receive credit for the time you've spent in the study. However, do not sign up for the same study twice. Please remember that credit values are based on the time it takes to complete a study, (1 credit equal to 30 minutes) and not the study itself.

Reporting problems: If you ever encounter some problem or feel that your rights have been violated, we want to know about it. Problems you have will be handled by Leslie Baldwin, the HPR Secretary, email address lbaldwin@msu.edu or come to Room 231 Psychology Building. They will be investigated and appropriate action will be taken. If the issue concerns an experiment you need to know the name of the experiment and the date/time you signed up for.
**Conclusions:** We want to emphasize that negative experiences are very rare; most students who serve as participants in research at Michigan State find their participation interesting and enjoyable. When you serve as a participant in psychological research you're benefiting personally by learning more about what the science of psychology is really about, but you're also benefiting many others. Others like the psychologists who are working to get a better understanding of interesting and important behavioral questions. Others like people who will benefit when that knowledge is ultimately applied to everyday human problems like loneliness, depression, divorce, and self development. And others like future generations of students. Who knows? Perhaps the research you participate in this semester will be featured in future psychology textbooks, just as some of the experiments you'll study this semester had their data supplied by previous generations of MSU students. We hope and expect that you'll put as much in and get as much out of research participation as they did.