

A Bridge to Somewhere: Alternative Perspectives on Reviewing Internet Research and e-Research

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ABSTRACT

The goals of this session are to promote discussion of current institutional review board processes and procedures related to internet research and to develop alternative review procedures.

General Terms

Management, Legal Aspects

Keywords

Internet research, regulatory ethics, institutional review boards

1. INTRODUCTION

In the past decade, "virtual research"-- empirical investigations conducted via the Internet-- has increased dramatically across a variety of disparate disciplines. At the same time, federal, state and academic regulations continue to become increasingly stringent especially as they relate to social scientific studies of cyberspace. Given the range of ethical ambiguities and administrative conundrums inherent to Internet research, exploring alternative IRB review processes and procedures is an urgent necessity for both the protection of subjects as well as scholarly engagement. Drawing on the current work of Ess and Buchanan, recently funded by the National Science Foundation, our goals for this session are multiple:

1. To contextualize the current discussions of IRB review of research in general, and Internet-based, or e-research, in particular
2. To present common complexities in Internet-based research around such research principles as informed consent, privacy, subjectivity and objectivity, ownership, and attribution
3. To examine the review process itself by having example protocols available and the panel of speakers will present their "findings" based on their expert perspectives
4. Based on goal 3, to discuss similarities and differences in the review process to illuminate the complexities of IRB review
5. To present alternative models to the current review model to more appropriately address emerging forms of Internet-based and e-research.

This session is intended to be highly interactive and participatory. The organizers will share two-three examples of an Internet-based/e-research scenario. Examples include: studies of family violence-related online bulletin boards and research on adolescents' use of social-networking sites to share information related to sexual practices. The organizers will ask the speakers to review the scenarios prior to the conference. Each speaker will come prepared with a "typical" IRB review and will describe their reviews to the participants. This exercise will promote an open and transparent discussion of the sometimes confusing research ethics review process of internet research studies, and will enable participants to engage in the discussion and develop alternative review models collaboratively. Researchers and review board/research regulators will serve on the panel to provide different and alternative insights into the extant review model.

2. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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