

Policy on Contacting Vulnerable Persons or Other Risk-Sensitive Populations

Responsible Executive	Dean of Faculty
Responsible Party	Office of the Dean of Faculty
Approval / Signature	Academic Affairs Committee
Pertinent Dates	Approved: 29 June 2022 Review Date: 2024
Related Policies	SIT IRB Policy and Procedure Handbook
Audience & Applicability	All SIT students, faculty, program staff, Office of the Dean of Faculty

POLICY

1. Purpose

This policy confirms SIT's commitment to the highest ethical standards for faculty or student work with vulnerable persons and other risk-sensitive populations including refugees, undocumented immigrants, and sex workers.

2. Policy Statement

In accordance with SIT's values and high ethical standards, SIT faculty, students or program staff are required to engage with vulnerable persons and other risk-sensitive populations with dignity and respect. Faculty, students, staff, who establish contact with vulnerable person(s) or other risk-sensitive population(s) for research, experiential activity, through a practicum or internship, or in a classroom setting must observe the following principles:

- Undergraduate students' contact with refugees and other vulnerable persons or other risk-sensitive populations is always facilitated through the professionals of relevant agencies or local NGOs;
- Graduate students or faculty who work directly with refugees or other vulnerable or risk-sensitive persons must have the relevant skills and experience as determined by their advisor or have at least completed CITI's course on Research with Vulnerable Populations and Consent Topics as attested by their advisor or supervisor;
[<https://about.citiprogram.org/course/cip-course-for-advanced-learners-research-with-vulnerable-populations-and-consent-topics/?h=vulnerable>]
- Students and faculty must ensure full protection of the confidentiality and anonymity of vulnerable and other risk-sensitive persons; however, if a person or an entire community says that they would like to claim ownership of their words and therefore make their identity known, the student or faculty will solicit insights from SIT IRB;
- Research will not be used to further a particular ideological, religious, moral or political standpoint;
- Whenever possible, vulnerable or other risk-sensitive persons should be made aware of SIT IRB protocols and the possibility to report problems or questions to the IRB at: irb@sit.edu;
- Vulnerable or other risk-sensitive populations persons are not to be treated differently or discriminated against on the basis of their gender,

- race, ethnicity, religion, sexuality, age, ability, citizenship, class, caste, country of origin or the language they speak;
- Whenever possible, students and faculty should coordinate with other organizations that provide support to combine knowledge and resources to better meet the needs of vulnerable or other risk-sensitive persons;
 - Every attempt should be made to protect vulnerable or other risk-sensitive persons from harm including harm resulting from assistance.
 - In our internal and external communication, vulnerable or other risk-sensitive persons are recognized as dignified human beings, not hopeless objects.
 - Whenever possible, a vulnerable or other risk-sensitive person is informed about any available support they can expect and allowed the possibility to confirm if they are interested in being engaged;
 - Students and faculty should make every effort to understand the needs of the vulnerable or other risk-sensitive person and try to meet their needs but they should not make a promise they are not certain to honor;
 - Any complaint or grievance received from a vulnerable or other risk-sensitive person will be considered and processed in accordance with institutional policies;
 - Students and faculty must not take pictures of/with a vulnerable or other risk-sensitive person and should not produce any visual material without SIT IRB approval or approval of the local authorizing institution;
 - Any student, faculty or staff who was a witness of the violation of any of the terms of this policy is required to immediately report it to their supervisor, the IRB at irb@sit.edu or SIT Office of Student Health, Safety and Well-Being at: studentwellbeing@sit.edu

3. Definitions

Below are SIT IRB definitions of vulnerable persons. SIT IRB full policy can be accessed at: <https://graduate.sit.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/SIT-IRB-Policy-and-Procedure.pdf>

1. *Members of economically disadvantaged groups.* If members of this group are interviewed about the hardship they experience, the IRB would consider whether benefit of the research outweighs the trauma. Graduate and undergraduate students might encounter members of

this group as part of their practicum or internship placement or during a field visit with an NGO or UN agency or in a classroom setting. This vulnerable population would then be able to experience coercion in the sense of being unable to refuse for fear of the withdrawal of support. Researchers or students must be aware of the process to avoid coercion.

2. *Refugee and internally displaced populations.* In addition to being economically disadvantaged whether in their home country, in a refugee camp or in resettlement, refugees may also have experienced different forms of violence. They may have been persecuted for reasons associated with class, caste, race, age, gender, religion, sexuality, nationality or citizenship status, ability, and/or political association, among other possibilities.
3. *Populations vulnerable in the research site.* Researchers should know whether participants they might interview are vulnerable or risk-sensitive in the local context. Such vulnerability might be a consequence of class, caste, race, age, gender, religion, sexuality, nationality or citizenship status, ability, and/or political association, among other possibilities. For example, in the US and other countries, undocumented migrants would fall into this category.
4. *Children:* with the exception of research concerning normal educational practices conducted in an educational setting, all research involving this vulnerable subject population must be submitted for full review.

4. **Procedures**

- a. A graduate or undergraduate student or faculty who intends to contact a vulnerable or other risk-sensitive person for research, field visit, or in a classroom setting or to provide material or other form of support is required to undertake a course that is either offered on an SIT program or is vetted by SIT IRB or training workshop on the relevant ethical skills to ensure they don't harm their participants
- b. A graduate or undergraduate student or faculty who intends to contact a vulnerable or other risk-sensitive person must be aware

of the available mental and psychological resources to provide their participants in the context of a crisis situation

- c. It is highly recommended that graduate or undergraduate students or faculty work through the professionals in the field when they contact a vulnerable or other risk-sensitive person
- d. Any form of assistance or support must be provided in a way that preserves the dignity of the vulnerable or other risk-sensitive person.

5. Exceptions

There are no exceptions to this policy. Any research data collected in violation of this policy is dismissed. Any violation that puts a vulnerable or other risk-sensitive person at physical or emotional risk will be reviewed in accordance with the relevant disciplinary policy.

6. Contact Information

For information on this policy contact the Office of the Dean of Faculty at Kim.Lier@sit.edu