Guidance for the Use of Deception and Incomplete Disclosure in Research

I. To What Does this Guidance Apply?

This guidance defines the standards and parameters for the use of deception and incomplete disclosure in research.

Definitions

a. Deception: Occurs when a researcher gives subjects false information about some aspect of the research.
b. Incomplete Disclosure: Occurs when a researcher withholds information about the real purpose or nature of the research.

II. Policy Statement

The University recognizes that the use of deception and incomplete disclosure in research are both valuable research techniques, yet they present special challenges to researchers to ensure that the research is conducted ethically. Deception and incomplete disclosure should only be used in research when necessary to prevent the confounding of study data, and only when approved by the IRB.

III. Consent Procedures Related to Deception and Debriefing

If feasible in the context of the study design, potential participants will be advised in the consent form that the information they are given is not complete and that they will be debriefed after the research is completed.

The following statement, or some similar statement, should appear in every consent form/informational letter for studies involving deception:

> "Research designs often require that the full intent of the study not be explained prior to participation. Although we have described the general nature of the tasks that you will be asked to perform, the full intent of the study will not be explained to you until after the completion of the study. At that time, you will be provided with a full debriefing which will include an explanation of the hypothesis that was tested and other relevant background information pertaining to the study. You will also be given an opportunity to ask any question you might have about the hypothesis and the procedures used in the study."

IV. Exceptions to Debriefing Requirement

There are certain circumstances under which the IRB may waive the requirement for full disclosure when a study involves deception. An example of a circumstance in which debriefing may not appropriate is: When the debriefing regarding deception may cause more harm than the deception itself. For example, if a student is selected for participation in a study about group behavior based previously measured "negative" behavior or characteristics, it might not be appropriate for the debriefing to describe the selection process.

V. Delayed Debriefing (When Debriefing Would Compromise Study Results)

If a study requiring debriefing will run over several days or weeks, subjects who have completed the study might tell others about it. If they have been debriefed and thus know the real purpose of the study activities, they might share that information with prospective subjects, thus compromising the scientific validity of the study. Under these circumstances, the IRB may approve a delayed debriefing. There are several strategies to handle providing subjects with a delayed debriefing.

If names, e-mail addresses, and or addresses are collected as part of the study, debriefing information can be sent via e-mail or mail when the study is complete.

If names and contact information are not collected, researchers could:

- Give subjects a URL where they can get debriefing information after a particular date upon which the information will be available.

- Have each participant address an envelope to themselves before they leave the study session and send them debriefing information when the study is completed.

VI. Debriefing as an Educational Tool

Some of the University's subject pools require that feedback be provided at the conclusion of participation to further the education of the student participants. In such cases, it is appropriate to provide participants with a simple, clear, and informative explanation of the experiment's purpose and the methods that were used, as well as bibliographical citations advising them where they can obtain additional information on the subject being studied.

VII. Debriefing Procedures

The debriefing process, including any written materials, will be explained to the IRB as a part of the submitted Human Subjects Application (HSA). The debriefing should include a detailed description of the ways in which deception was used and explain why the principal investigator was unable to disclose this information prior to the study (see, *Template for Debriefing Form*). The researcher is responsible for ensuring that the subject leaves the research setting with an accurate understanding of the deception unless waiver or delayed debriefing has been approved by the IRB.

VIII. Template for Debriefing Form

Debriefing documents are reviewed by the IRB along with all other documents. Please utilize the instructions and accompanying template outlined below for writing an appropriate and ethical document.

The document should be written at an 8th grade reading level or below so that the participant can understand its content and purpose. To the greatest extent possible, it should be written in non-technical, non-scientific, simple language regardless of how long and complex the study.

Please note:

- The document may be written in outline form, or like a letter.
- The debriefing document should be written in second person (i.e, you, your).
- The debriefing document should be available for each participant to keep at the conclusion of his/her participation, unless the IRB has approved an alternate method of debriefing (delayed, waiver, etc.)

Instructions and guidance are provided in *italics*. Please remove the italicized instructions from your document.

Title of the Research Study

Principle Investigator:

Thank the participant for participating (optional, but customary)

Purpose of the Study

If no deception was involved (i.e., debriefing is for educational purposes only), concisely remind the participant of the purpose of your study.

If deception was used, explain the deception:

- *Remind the participant of the reason originally given*
- *Clearly state that the original reason is not the real object of the study*
- *Explain what the study is actually designed to test*
- *Explain why deception was needed*
- *Explain why the study is helpful/useful*

Final Report

I you would like to receive a report of this study (or a summary of the findings) when it is completed, contact the primary investigator listed below.

Concerns

If you have any questions about the study, or about the deception involved, please feel free to ask the principal investigator now, or at a later time. If you have concerns about this study or your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact the Office of Research Compliance at (803) 777-7095.

Further Reading *(optional)*
In the event you would like to read more about the topic of this study, here are several articles/books/references you might find interesting:

List the bibliographical information here.

Please keep a copy of this form for your future reference. Once again, thank you for participating in this study.

Signature
Include contact information for yourself (and, if applicable, your faculty advisor)
Name, address, phone and email