

## Obtaining Informed Consent: Student guidelines

Social scientists believe that a great deal of potential harm can be avoided by obtaining informed consent of research subjects prior to the research. In essence, informed consent means that subjects:

- are made aware that they are the subjects of a research project,
- are told what the purpose of the research is, are forewarned about what their participation will involve,
- are not forced in any way to participate, and
- are given the opportunity to withdraw their participation at any time.

Research practices that violate the principle of informed consent include those that involve deception and/or coercion. The two are related in the sense that if a researcher does not tell people that they are being studied (deception), the researcher is therefore forcing the people to participate (coercion). Coercion can occur by itself when people are made aware that they are the subjects of research but not given the option of non-participation.

While some professional researchers do use deceptive and coercive research practices, these are currently very controversial in the social science community and researchers who engage in such practices are expected to justify them by demonstrating that their research has great social benefits. Additionally, these kinds of proposed research projects often face opposition when presented to institutional committees that approve and/or sponsor research.

*Source: UCSB Writing Program Research Guidelines*