

CSCI 2300 – Constructing an (E)thical Framework (v1.0)

Due: April 5, 2023

While universities have institutional review boards (IRB), HCI researchers are still ultimately responsible for their own ethical conduct of research. Not only does the definition of human subjects research not include some types of HCI work that involves people, but different IRBs have different interpretations the federal Common Rule from which they are based on. It is a common misconception that IRBs review all studies involving human subjects.

Categories of HCI research not necessarily covered by many IRBs (including the one at Brown) are: 1) web scraping of user-generated content or social media posts/comments as long as personally-identifiable information (PII) is not collected, 2) naturalistic (observational) studies where there is no intervention and no PII is collected, 3) lab studies evaluating the effectiveness of new interaction techniques or systems involving sensing and wearables (these are often considered “Program Evaluation” and not human subjects research), 4) crowdsourcing work where the research is not *about* the crowd worker but rather about having crowd workers contribute to a task, 5) collaborative research with a company where the study is conducted at the company, for example in this controversial study by Facebook and Cornell.

For this assignment, select one of the above category of HCI study where IRBs can decline to review, and propose a policy for that category of research that could be used to determine whether an HCI study satisfactorily protects participants based on your own ethical framework. Identify 2–3 HCI papers that involve studies with the category you chose (look through recent proceedings from CHI and CSCW). **What are the risks to the participants, and what policy would mitigate those risks but also does not impose an undue burden on the author?** Consider modern perspectives of labor, data ownership, power dynamics, scalable computational techniques, and the risks of deanonymization; feel free to reference the recent readings and discussions in class from Mar 8 and Mar 15.

1 Submission

This assignment is meant to be doable in a week, so please enjoy your Spring Break. There won't be a midpoint, but before class on April 5, submit a final report no more than 1,000 words to Canvas. We will discuss your proposals in class.

Grading will be based on: demonstrating a clear understanding of the selected category, describing the participant risk, having proposed a policy that could apply to existing HCI studies, and the likely effectiveness of that policy.