

Institutional Review Board (IRB)



THE IRB STUDENT TOOLKIT



PART OF

AMERICAN PUBLIC UNIVERSITY SYSTEM

Institutional Review Board

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About the IRB Student Toolkit

Conducting human subjects research can be a rewarding experience for both you and your participants. This packet is designed to help prepare you for what your IRB application. Enclosed are templates, a list of common IRB application errors, recommendations on the use of AI tools in applications, and an example IRB application you can use to build your own.

About the IRB

An Institutional Review Board (IRB) is a committee established to review and approve research involving human subjects. The IRB ensures that all human subject research is conducted in accordance with all federal, institutional, and ethical guidelines.

Our goal is to provide all AMU/APU community members with information, guidance, forms and related materials needed to secure IRB approval for human subject research. The IRB at AMU/APU was established to review, approve, require modifications to, or deny any human subject research conducted under the aegis of AMU/APU.

What is the aegis of AMU/APU?

- The research is sponsored by AMU/APU
- The research is conducted or directed by any employee or trainee of the university in connection with their AMU/APU responsibilities
- The research involves access to any property or facility of AMU/APU
- The research involves AMU/APU faculty, staff, and/or students. This research may also need approval by the Internal Research Review Board (IRRB). Learn more about the IRRB [here](#).

University IRB Disclosures and Overview

- [IRB Overview](#)
- [Research Ethics Training](#)
- [IRB Application Process](#)
- [Research Guidelines](#)
- [FAQs](#)

How to Contact the IRB

You can reach the IRB office with any questions or concerns at apus-irb@apus.edu

Common IRB Submission Errors

You will need nearly every item on this list in your IRB application. To facilitate a faster review process, you should consider preparing and thinking through all these before starting your IRB application.

CITI Social and Behavioral Research training

- ☐ Complete the Social and Behavioral Research training module. You will attach the completion certificate to your application. Registration instructions are [here](#).

Justification for the project

- ☐ Why is human subjects research important for this project? In what ways does your research project provide new ways of looking at your research question?
- ☐ Identify what kind of data you intend to collect: surveys, interviews, observations, etc.

Research activities

- ☐ Carefully think through each stage of your project, from recruitment to reporting the data. You will need to provide details of who, what, where, when, and why you are collecting data.

Recruitment material

- ☐ Create **every** example of recruitment material in your IRB application. This includes flyers, phone scripts, social media posts; all examples of what you intend to use are necessary before the application can be approved.
- ☐ List your mycampus.apus.edu email address on your recruitment material.

Consent forms

- ☐ Use the template provided for your consent form. Carefully read through and remove **all bracketed blue text** in the template.
- ☐ Describe how and when you are collecting consent.
 - Make sure it is convenient for your participants to provide consent. Example: provide the consent form as the front page of your survey.

Protecting data

- ☐ Describe precisely how you are protecting participant information when you are collecting and reporting data. Only collect information that is necessary for your

study.

- (Example: there is no need to collect demographic information such as salary range if it doesn't relate to your study in any measurable way.)
- ☐ **If you are collecting private, identifiable information:** how are you obscuring that information to protect your participant's identity?
- ☐ Include a digital and physical data protection plan.
 - AMU/APU requires that you retain data for at least 5 years.

Organizational Permission

- ☐ If you're collecting data from an organization that is not publicly available, or conducting activities on a work site, [use our template](#) to request permission from an appropriate supervisor. You must attach this permission as part of your IRB application. ****Note:** this is not a requirement for all IRB applications.

Literature

- ☐ Identify how your study fits into the broader literature of your topic. How is it new?

Using Artificial Intelligence in Your IRB Application

Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools, including large language models like ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, and others, are increasingly available to students conducting research. These tools can assist with writing, summarizing literature, drafting survey questions, and more. However, using AI in human subjects research raises ethical and regulatory questions that AMU/APU IRB takes seriously.

This section helps you understand when and how AI use in your research must be disclosed, how it affects your IRB application, and what safeguards you need to put in place. The guidance below draws on considerations developed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Secretary's Advisory Committee on Human Research Protections (SACHRP), which formally examined AI's intersection with human subjects' research regulations.

Before You Continue

AI tools are not a substitute for your own judgment as a researcher. The IRB evaluates your understanding of your research design, your participants' rights, and your data protection plan. All researchers remain fully responsible for the accuracy and ethical integrity of their IRB applications, regardless of what tools assisted in drafting them.

What Counts as "AI Use" in Your Research?

AI Use in your research project can take several forms. It matters whether AI is being used to help you write your application, or whether AI is actually part of how you collect or analyze your data.

Type of AI Use	Examples
AI to prepare your application	Using ChatGPT to draft your consent form, research summary, or recruitment email
AI to search or synthesize literature	Using AI tools to summarize articles or identify themes in prior research
AI as a data collection method	Having participants interact with or respond to AI-generated prompts
AI for data analysis	Using machine learning tools to code qualitative data or identify patterns in survey responses
AI as the subject of research	Studying how people respond to or interact with AI systems

Each of these uses has different implications for your IRB application. The sections below address the most common scenarios for AMU/APU researchers.

Using AI to Help Write Your Application

Using AI tools to help draft, edit, or improve your IRB application is permitted at AMU/APU, subject to the following requirements.

Consent Forms Must Be Customized to Your Study

Consent form language generated by AI tools is often generic. You must carefully review and revise any AI-generated consent language to ensure it accurately reflects:

- The actual risks and procedures in your specific study
- How your specific data will be stored and protected
- The correct level of confidentiality or anonymity that applies to your study
- Contact information for the AMU/APU IRB (apus-irb@apus.edu)

Common Error to Avoid

Students sometimes submit AI-generated consent forms that reference risks or data practices that do not match the rest of their application. For example, an AI tool might include language about audio recording when the student's study uses only written surveys. Read every line of your consent form carefully against your actual research plan.

Cited Sources Must be Verifiable

AI language models sometimes generate plausible-sounding but fabricated citations. Before including any reference in your literature review, verify that:

- The source actually exists
- The author, title, journal, and date are accurate
- The content of the source matches how you have described it

Before You Continue

Applications with inaccurate or missing citations may be returned for correction, which delays IRB consideration, and applications with serious citation problems may be denied. Citation errors can also be treated as student conduct violation, in which case the IRB may refer the matter to the Student Conduct Board for review under university policy.

Using AI as Part of Your Research Methods

If AI tools play a role in how you collect or analyze data, this must be disclosed and justified in your IRB application. HHS advisory guidance on AI in research notes that AI's capacity to process large amounts of data, infer new information, and generate outputs about individuals creates distinct ethical considerations beyond those in traditional research methods.

AI-Assisted Data Analysis

If you plan to use AI or machine learning tools to help analyze your data (for example, using a transcription AI, a sentiment analysis tool, or a coding assistant), you must describe this in Section G (Research Design) of your application. Specifically, address:

- What AI tool(s) you will use and their purpose
- Whether participant data will be uploaded to or processed by a third-party AI platform
- How you will protect participant privacy if data is processed outside your own secure storage
- Whether the AI tool's outputs will be reviewed and verified by you before being used in your findings

Privacy Consideration from HHS

HHS advisory guidance notes that AI tools can infer sensitive or private information about individuals even from data that appears non-identifying. If your analysis involves an AI tool processing participant responses, consider whether that tool might generate inferences about participants that go beyond what they consented to share. Describe your safeguards in your data protection plan.

AI-Assisted Data Collection

If participants in your study will interact with an AI tool as part of the research (for example, chatting with a bot, responding to AI-generated prompts, or having their image or voice processed by an AI system), this must be clearly disclosed. Your IRB application must explain:

- The purpose of the AI interaction in your research design
- What data is captured by the AI tool and where it is stored
- Whether the AI platform's own data practices pose any additional risk to participants
- How participants will be informed about AI involvement in your consent form

Disclosure Requirement

Participants have a right to know when they are interacting with or being assessed by an AI system. Your consent form must clearly state if AI tools will process, observe, or respond to participant data or behavior. Vague language such as “computerized analysis” is not sufficient if an external AI platform is involved.

Research That Studies AI Itself

If your research question involves studying an AI system (for example, studying how people respond to AI-generated health advice, or evaluating the accuracy of an AI tool used in your field), you must address the human subjects’ considerations for your participants, not just for the AI. Your application should address:

- Whether participants understand they are interacting with an AI, or whether deception is involved (and if so, whether a deception protocol and debriefing plan are in place)
- Risks that may arise from participants receiving AI-generated information that could be inaccurate or harmful
- How you will protect participant data that is processed by the AI system under study

Data Privacy and AI: Key Considerations

One of the most significant concerns raised by HHS advisory guidance is the challenge AI poses to traditional concepts of data privacy and de-identification. Understanding these concerns will help you build a stronger data protection plan in your application.

De-Identified Data Is Not Necessarily Anonymous

Traditional de-identification, removing names and obvious identifiers from a dataset, no longer guarantees that individuals cannot be re-identified. AI tools can combine information from multiple sources to reconstruct identifying information, even from data that appears anonymous. This is especially relevant if you are:

- Using publicly available data scraped from social media or other online sources
- Combining data from more than one source in your analysis
- Working with data that includes location information, timestamps, or other contextual details

In your data storage and usage section, describe not just how you will remove direct identifiers, but how you will prevent the combination of data points from enabling re-identification.

Uploading Participant Data to AI Platforms

Many AI tools process the text or files you upload through their servers. Before uploading any

participant data to an AI tool (for example, to help transcribe interviews or summarize survey responses), consider:

- Does your consent form authorize this use of participant data?
- What are the privacy practices of the AI platform? Will your data be used to train their models?
- Is the data protected by HIPAA, FERPA, or another regulatory framework that limits third-party processing?

Best Practice

If you plan to use an AI tool to process participant data, use only tools with clear data privacy policies that prohibit use of uploaded content for training. Do not upload personally identifiable information to consumer AI tools without verifying the platform's data handling practices. Describe your verification process in your application.

Bias in AI Tools

HHS advisory guidance specifically notes that AI tools may reflect biases present in the data used to train them, performing less accurately for certain demographic groups. If you are using an AI tool to analyze your data, consider whether the tool's outputs may be systematically less accurate or fair for some of your participants, and describe how you will check for this in your analysis plan.

AI - Frequently Asked Questions

Can I use ChatGPT or another AI tool to write my consent form?

Yes, you may use AI to help draft your consent form, but you must carefully revise the output to match your specific study. Generic or inaccurate consent language is one of the most common IRB submission errors. Use the AMU/APU consent form template as your base and modify it to reflect your actual procedures, not AI-generated defaults.

Do I need to tell the IRB that I used AI to help write my application?

You are not required to disclose general use of AI writing tools (such as grammar assistance or draft generation) in your application itself. However, if AI plays a methodological role in your research, in how you collect, process, or analyze data, that must be disclosed and described as part of your research design.

Can I use an AI transcription service (like Otter.ai or Whisper) to transcribe my interviews?

Yes, but you must disclose this in your data storage plan and your consent form. Participants should know their recorded voice or words will be processed by a third-party AI service. Verify the platform's privacy policy and describe your safeguards. Make sure your consent form authorizes this type of processing.

Can I upload my interview transcripts to an AI tool to help with coding or thematic analysis?

You may use AI-assisted qualitative analysis tools, but exercise caution about uploading identifiable participant data to consumer AI platforms. Remove or replace all identifying information before uploading. Describe this process in your data analysis and data storage sections and verify that the platform you use does not retain or train on uploaded content.

I am studying how people respond to AI-generated content. Is that human subjects research?

Yes. If your study involves living individuals who interact with AI-generated content and you are collecting data about their responses, this is human subjects research and requires IRB review. Your participants are the humans, not the AI, and they are entitled to all standard protections including informed consent, risk minimization, and data confidentiality.

RECRUITMENT EMAIL EXAMPLES

Survey Recruitment Email

Hello [first name],

I am contacting you today to see if you're interested in taking a survey about [topic] for my study about [research question/topic]. I am a master's student at [American Public University/American Military University], and this survey is part of my capstone research for my master's in [subject area]. Your contribution to this study would be greatly appreciated.

[add in information about the value of the study]

Participation should only take [x number of minutes] and is completely voluntary. In the survey there is a consent form that details how your data is protected. If you have any questions about the study, please feel free to contact me here [provide your email address or a means for a participant to contact you].

Kind regards,

[your name]

Interview Recruitment Email

Hello [first name],

I am contacting you today to see if you're interested in participating in an interview about [topic] for my study about [research question/topic]. I am a master's student at American Public University/American Military University, and this interview is part of my capstone research for my master's in [subject area]. Your contribution/insight in this topic would be greatly appreciated.

[add in information about the value of the study]

Participation should only take [x amount of time] and is completely voluntary.

CONSENT FORM TEMPLATE

Instructions

This is a template. Rewrite or delete replace the bracketed blue text as needed with unbracketed black text to tailor this document to your research project. Once you are finished, change all text to black and do not include this instruction box.

CONSENT FORM

Title of Your Research (*optional*)

I, [Principal Investigator Name], am a [note your affiliation with AMU/APU; i.e., student, staff, faculty member] at [American Public/Military] University, Part of American Public University System and [If you are a student, please add: with the guidance of my instructor, Professor name], I have been approved by the AMU/APU Institutional Review Board to conduct research on [brief description of research]. [Provide a description of how the research will be used (for capstone, a manual, etc.)] No deception is involved, and the study involves no more than minimal risk to participants (i.e., the level of risk encountered in daily life).

You are invited to participate in this research project because you are [describe inclusion criteria for participants].

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. If you decide not to participate, you will not be penalized. However, if you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without adverse consequences. You may choose to skip any questions you do not wish to answer.

Participation in the study typically takes [XX minutes/hours] and is [select one: anonymous (you do not know the participant's identity) OR confidential (you will not release the participant's identity)]. Participants will [description of what participants will do, e.g., complete an online survey, answer a series of interview questions, participate in a focus group]. When data is reported, responses from individual participants [will/will not] be identified. Data will be reported [describe reporting of results, e.g., in aggregate, using pseudonyms of participants, by indicating trends].

All data is stored in a password protected [electronic, paper] format. [If you are a student, please add: The data may be shared with my instructor, Professor Name].

Data will be stored in the above stated manner for a period of five years as per AMU/APU's rules and regulations. You have the right to request your data be deleted, unless anonymous, at any time during this period.

This research has been reviewed according to American Public University System IRB procedures for research involving human subjects. If you have any questions about the research study, please contact: the IRB Chair at American Public University System, apus-irb@apus.edu.

Note

The items in bracketed red below may be removed if they are not relevant to your study. The items in black are mandatory to include. Once you are finished, change all bracketed text to black, remove any remaining brackets, and do not include this instruction box.

- ☐ I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason, and without any adverse consequences
- ☐ I understand that research data collected during the study may be looked at by designated individuals from American Public University System where it is relevant to my taking part in this study.
- ☐ I understand that this project has been reviewed by and received approval from AMU/APU's Institutional Review Board.
- ☐ I understand who will have access to personal data provided, how the data will be stored, and what will happen to the data at the end of the project.
- ☐ I understand that the results of this study may be used for academic degree requirements, publications, or for presentation at conferences.
- ☐ [I consent to being audio recorded.]
- ☐ [I consent to being video recorded.]
- ☐ [I consent to having my photograph taken.]
- ☐ [I understand how audio recordings / videos / photos will be used to aid in data analysis.]

Note

Please select from the two consent options listed below and include the option appropriate for in-person or electronic consent. Once you are finished, change all text to black and do not include this instruction box.

Option 1: Signature of Participant (In-Person Consent)

By signing below you consent that:

- You have read and understand the information above regarding this study.
- You are voluntarily agreeing to participate in this study and understand that you can opt out at any time without adverse consequences; and
- You are at least 18 years of age.

Signature _____

Date _____

Option 2: Electronic Consent (Online Survey)

By selecting DISAGREE, you do not wish to participate in the research study and may exit your browser.

By selecting AGREE, you consent that:

- You have read and understand the information above regarding this study.
- You are voluntarily agreeing to participate in this study and understand that you can opt out at any time without adverse consequences; and
- You are at least 18 years of age.

Please select your choice below:

- AGREE
- DISAGREE

Thank you for your time and participation.

ORGANIZATIONAL PERMISSION TEMPLATE

Instructions

This is a template. When requesting permission from an external organization to conduct human subject research within said organization, you must secure permission to demonstrate you are able to conduct your study as part of your IRB application. Once you are finished, change all text to black and do not include this instruction box.



COMPANY LOGO/LETTERHEAD

[Date: Month Day, Year]

American [Public/Military] University
Part of American Public University System
Institutional Review Board, IRB Chair
111 W. Congress Street
Charles Town, WV 25414

Dear AMU/APU IRB Chair:

[Organization Name/Representative] grants permission for [Principal Investigator Name] to conduct human subject research at [Organization Name] by [brief description of data collection, e.g., sending out surveys, interviewing employees, using company servers to contact employees, participation in a focus group] at our organization. Further, [Organization Name] acknowledges that the results of this research will be used to fulfill the requirements for the master's [thesis/capstone] at American [Public/Military] University.

Sincerely,

[Representative Signature]

[Representative Name]
[Organization Name]
[Address]
[Phone Number]
[Email]

Accessing IRB Manager

Important: Log Out First

Before logging into IRB Manager, please log out of all AMU/APU pages and close them or you will receive an error.

Open a new window in your browser, preferably Firefox. Clear out your history, cache, and cookies. And log into IRB Manager by going to the following link:

<https://apus.my.irbmanager.com>



Login using your AMU/APU credentials as you would when logging into your student ecampus.

A screenshot of the IRB Manager login form. The form has a 'Login' title. It contains two input fields: 'Username' and 'Password'. Below the 'Username' field, there is a note: 'If you applied prior to January 15, 2022, your Student ID is your Username.' Below the 'Password' field, there is a link 'Forgot Username or Password?'. At the bottom of the form is a large blue button labeled 'Log in'.

Upon logging in, your homepage (i.e. dashboard) will appear. To begin a new IRB application, select the first link listed on the left under **Actions**.

The screenshot shows the IRBManager dashboard. On the left sidebar, under the 'Actions' section, the first link 'Click here for a new IRB application' is circled in red. The main content area displays 'My Studies' with 1 active study and 1 total study. It also shows 'xForms' (1 active) and 'Events' (2 open). A 'Notices' section on the right provides links for IRB form templates: Consent Form, Letter of Permission, and Conflict of Interest Form.

If you are uncertain if your study requires an IRB application, please submit the Human Subjects Research Determination Form. The IRB will review it and let you know if an IRB application is required.

This screenshot is similar to the one above, but with a red arrow pointing to the first link in the 'Actions' menu: 'Click here for a new IRB application'. The main content area shows the same 'My Studies' summary, but the table below lists the active study: '2023-092-APUS' at the 'APUS' site, titled 'Hoteling, Kelsey Enhancing Institutional Resources for Faculty in Facilitating IRB Applications', with an expiration date of 11/13/2028 and an 'Open' status.

Beginning a New IRB Application

The next step is to simply follow the application instructions as you complete the form. There are several sections and by using the dropdown menu at the top of the page, you can maneuver through the application by selecting a section. Or, you can use the “next” button in the bottom right. If you have any missing information, you won’t be able to move forward if you use the “next” button.

The screenshot displays the 'IRB Application -- Application Header' page. At the top, there is a navigation bar with the American Public University System logo, 'Collaborators', and a dropdown menu currently set to 'Application Header'. A red arrow points to this dropdown menu. To the right of the dropdown, it says 'Page 1 of 14' and a 'Next' button. The main content area is divided into several sections: 'Submitter' (with fields for Name and Email), 'Principal Investigator (Required)' (with a text field), 'PI Status (Required)' (with checkboxes for Undergraduate Student, Doctoral Student, Staff, Master's Student, Faculty Member, and Other), and three sections for adding contacts (co-investigators and research assistants). Each section has an 'Add Note' and 'View Audit' link. At the bottom, there is a 'Check & Submit Form' button.

If you are not able to complete the entire application in one sitting, use the **Save for Later** option at the bottom of each section page. You may return to complete your application at a later time.

Next **Save for Later** More ▾

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2024.2.7560.0/Release/44d766e | GCWAWS1 | 2024-03-05 21:49:54Z | 0.1648
Powered By IRBManager

Some places in the application ask for an attachment, such as your consent form. There are templates embedded in the application for the most common forms. You may use the template provided in this toolkit, or download the template in your IRB application. Be sure to carefully read it and modify it to fit your study.

The screenshot shows the 'Consent Form (Required)' section. It has a text field labeled 'Add Attachment' and a link that says 'Click consent form template to download the APUS consent form template.' There are also 'Add Note' and 'View Audit' links at the top right of the section.

Questions about the application? Email us at apus-irb@apus.edu.

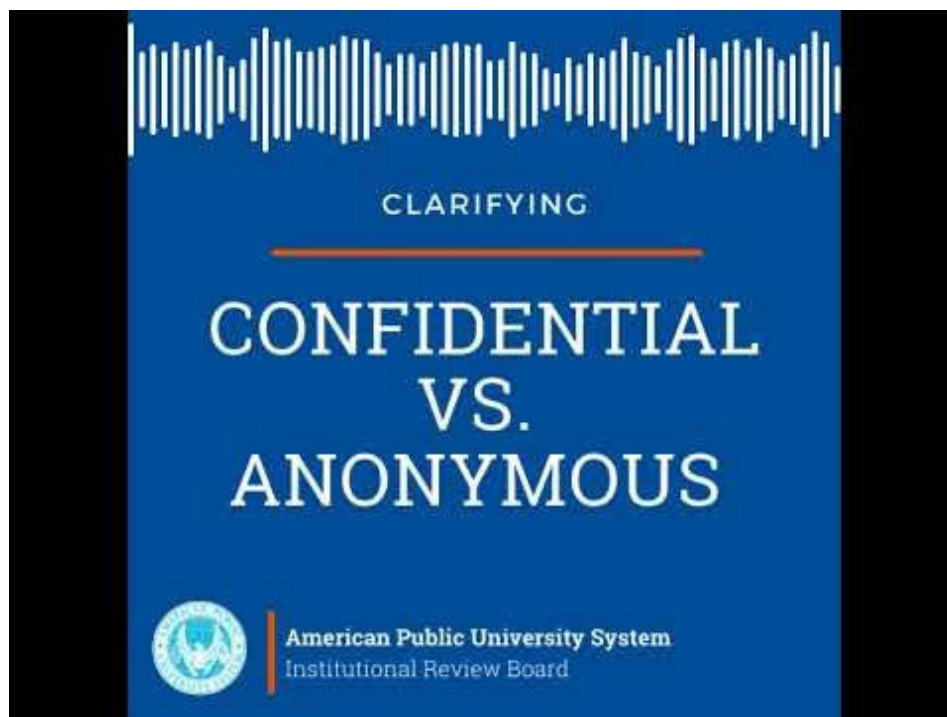
Sample IRB application

The following pages contain a copy of a real IRB application that was approved as expedited. You can use this application as a reference point, though key details of your project should be different. Recruitment activities, data collection steps, data analysis, and if you need organizational permission will all be unique to your own study.

Pay particular attention to the way the student thoroughly discusses the research activities, their own position as researcher, and how they're protecting their participant's information throughout the application. Missing from the application are attachments, which needed to be removed from the application to protect participant and study information.

If you have any questions, please contact your instructor or our office at apus-irb@apus.edu.

Below is a playlist that you can reference regarding questions about confidentiality vs. anonymity, collecting data from a workplace, recruiting participants, and etc.



View xForm - IRB Application

IRB Application

IRB Application Data Entry

Application Header

Submitter

Hotaling, Kelsey

Email: KHotaling@apus.edu

Phone:

Principal Investigator

This is an example of a real student IRB application, provided with permission of the submitter. Personal identifiers have been removed to protect their project and their confidentiality.

03/02/2024 • Hotaling, Kelsey • Internal

Hotaling, Kelsey

Email: KHotaling@apus.edu **Phone:**

Please enter the Principal Investigator's email address. If the Principal Investigator is also submitting this form, then the email will be the same as the Submitter.

PI Status

Master's Student

Please choose all applicable statuses

Please choose the principal investigator's department.

Public Administration

Instructor

Add in your instructor's email here. If their email doesn't appear, they may need to log into the IRB Manager site to have their email registered. You may use the drop down at the top of the page to continue to work on the application while they register their contact information.

03/02/2024 • Hotaling, Kelsey • Internal

Hotaling, Kelsey

Email: KHotaling@apus.edu **Phone:**

Please enter your Instructor's mycampus email address

Please click Add Contact and add each co-investigator for your study.

co-investigators are individuals with whom you are collecting and analyzing data in a team. Most students do not have a co-investigator.

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No answer provided.

Please click Add Contact to add any research assistants for this study.

Research assistants are individuals who support data collection and analysis. Most students do not have research assistants.

03/02/2024 • Hotaling, Kelsey • Internal

No answer provided.

Please attach the PI's CITI completion report for the Social and Behavioral Research Investigator training. See the IRB website for instructions on accessing the CITI portal.

No answer provided.

Please attach the CITI completion reports for research team members, including yourself, the Principal Investigator, co-Investigators, and Research Assistants. Instructors will submit their CITI certification separately. See the IRB website for more information on accessing the CITI portal.

No answer provided.

Section B Study Introduction

Title

Exploring the Efficacy of the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) in Military to-Civilian Transitions: A Comprehensive Research Project within the Military Family & Readiness Center (MFRC)

Please provide a brief (350-500 word) summary of your research project, including background and rationale for your study. Be sure to include in your description what kinds of data you are planning to collect as part of your research (e.g., surveys, interviews, observations, etc.).

The most valuable elements of the summary is identifying the background, justification for the study, and including what types of data you intend to collect.

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This research project embarks on an in-depth exploration of an in-depth exploration of the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) within the Military Family & Readiness Center (MFRC), concentrating on scrutinizing its objectives, effectiveness, and alignment with transition theories. The primary motivation for this study lies in addressing the distinctive challenges encountered by military members during their transition from service to civilian life and assessing the impact of pivotal support programs.

Transitioning from military service to civilian life poses unique challenges, demanding tailored and effective support mechanisms. The MFRC, as a cornerstone institution in this context, plays a pivotal role in offering services like TAP, design to facilitate a seamless and successful transition for military personnel. This project extends beyond the confines of existing literature, assimilating insights from diverse sources, including the Department of Veterans Affairs, Department of Labor, and Department of Defense. The aim is to provide a comprehensive examination of TAP efficacy within the MFRC, considering a holistic perspective derived from varied military support programs.

In adoptive a qualitative approach, this research employs semi-structured interviews with veterans who have separated or retired from the military and utilized TAP alongside the Department of Defense's SkillBridge program. The qualitative methodology is selected deliberately for its ability to capture nuanced information that transcends mere numerical data. The interview process is exclusive to veterans who have retired or separated from an active-duty military branch, ensuring a targeted and relevant participant group.

To uphold ethical standards, all participants will be presented with informed consent forms outlining the purpose of the study, the nature of their involvement, and assurances of confidentiality. Given the inherent transient nature of military life, interviews may be conducted via telephone or video conference, with face-to-face interviews being considered on a case by case basis.

This project contributes significantly to the existing body of knowledge surrounding the challenges faced by military members during their transition, coupled with an assessment of the effectiveness of support programs. The insights derived from this research endeavor not only enrich academic discourse but also furnish practical recommendations for policymakers and program administrators, thereby bridging the gap between

theory and actionable outcomes. The research remains steadfast in its commitment to upholding the highest ethical standards throughout the phases of data collection and analysis.

In summary, this focused and comprehensive study seeks to unravel critical insights within a nuanced framework, delving into the core aspects of TAP within the MFRC. By extending beyond theoretical foundations, this research endeavors to contribute substantively to the broader discourse on military to-civilian transitions, offering a thoughtful and thorough exploration of support program efficacy.

Section C Review Type

Please choose the appropriate risk determination.

Minimal

Minimal risk means that the probability and magnitude of harm or discomfort anticipated in the research are not greater in and of themselves than those ordinarily encountered in daily life or during the performance of routine physical or psychological examinations or tests. If you are working with vulnerable populations or ask questions that may expose criminal activities or abuse, please choose Full Committee Review. Any applications with more than minimal risk will require Full Committee Review.

Which level of review do you believe best matches your research (Exempt, Expedited, or Full Board)?

Please collect as little identifying information as possible given the purpose and scope of your research study. Only ask for demographic information that is crucial to your analysis and avoid information that could identify participants.

The IRB office makes the final determination on the level of review.

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Exempt

For more information, view the categories on the [APUS IRB Website](#).

Section D Study Funding

*If the study is dependent on grant funding, please submit the protocol after you have received a fundable score or notice of grant award **unless** the granting agency requires IRB review (or approval) at the time of submission. Check with your funding agency on their requirements.*

Are you applying for or have you received research funding for this study?

No

Section E Project Purpose

In non-technical language, please describe the topic and scope of the study.

This project delves into the experiences of military members as they transition from active-duty service to civilian life. Specifically, we are closely examining the effectiveness of the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) provided by the Military Family & Readiness Center (MFRC) in facilitating this transition. My goal is to understand the challenges faced by veterans during this pivotal phase and assess how programs like TAP and SkillBridge contribute to a smoother reintegration into civilian society.

The project involves engaging with veterans who have separated or retired from the military and have availed themselves of TAP services at the MFRC. I'll be conducting qualitative interviews to gather firsthand perspectives and insights. These interviews will explore various aspects, including the perceived helpfulness of TAP, the challenges encountered during the transition, and the overall impact on the participants' civilian life.

By focusing on a specific military support center and program, this project aims to provide a detailed and contextual understanding of the experiences of transitioning military members. Additionally, I'd like to consider the broader implications of the findings for enhancing the support mechanisms provided by the MFRC and similar organizations.

In essence, the project's scope encompasses a thorough exploration of TAP's role in military-to-civilian transitions within the MFRC. The insights gained will contribute not only to academic knowledge but also offer practical recommendations for refining support services for veterans making this significant life transition.

In non-technical language, please describe your research questions or hypotheses.

Research Questions:

1. How effective is the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) at the Military Family & Readiness Center (MFRC) in supporting military members during their transition to civilian life? I want to understand the extent to which TAP, a support program at the MFRC, assists military members in navigating the challenges of transitioning from active-duty service to civilian employment.
2. What are the specific challenges faced by veterans during their transition, and how do they perceive the support provided by TAP? This question aims to identify and explore the obstacles that veterans encounter during their transition process. I am particularly interested in understanding how these challenges are perceived in the context of the support received through TAP.
3. To what extent does the Department of Defense's SkillBridge program enhance the overall transition experience for military members utilizing TAP? We are interested in evaluating the impact of the SkillBridge program on military-to-civilian transitions. This question seeks to explore the additional benefits and challenges posed by SkillBridge in conjunction with TAP.

In non-technical language, please describe how your study contributes to knowledge in the field.

This project serves as a valuable contribution to the fields of public administration and military-to-civilian transitions. By focusing on the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) and the Department of Defense SkillBridge Program taught within the Military Family & Readiness Center (MFRC), I aim to deepen my understanding of how public administration principles intersect with the challenges military members face during their transition from active-duty service to civilian life.

Through qualitative interviews with veterans, I seek to uncover insights into the effectiveness of TAP and SkillBridge, the challenges encountered during the transition, and the impact of the Department of Defense's TAP and SkillBridge programs. By examining these aspects through the lens of public administration, I aspire to contribute not only to the practical knowledge of military support services but also to the broader understanding of how public administration principles can enhance the delivery of services to transitioning military members.

This project aligns with my broader goals in public administration by providing evidence-based insights that can inform policy development and program administration within military support organizations like the MFRC. My project aims to bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, offering recommendations that are not only relevant to military transitions but also resonate with broader public administration practices.

Please include a concise literature review pertaining to the proposed research study. Please provide a list of references for all sources cited in this review.

This research review is concise. It identifies the major sources of literature and theories that inform the research methods of the study.

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Department of Labor (DoL): The Department of Labor's (DoL) involvement in veteran employment initiatives contributes significant data and strategies for successful workforce integration. Examining reports and publications from the Department of Labor allows for an exploration of broader employment trends, highlighting the specific challenges veterans encounter and the national initiatives designed to mitigate these challenges (DoL, 2023).

Department of Defense (DoD): Direct insights from the Department of Defense's (DoD) Transition Assistance Program website provide an in-depth understanding of the goals, structure, and resources offered by TAP (DoD, 2023). This first-hand information is crucial for evaluating the program's objectives, effectiveness, and potential areas for improvement.

Government Accountability Office (GAO): The Government Accountability Office (GAO) contributes a critical perspective to the literature, offering independent analyses and recommendations to the U.S. Congress. GAO reports on military and veteran affairs can provide additional insights into the challenges and effectiveness of programs like TAP (GAO, 2020).

SkillBridge Program: The SkillBridge program, outlined on its official website, plays a significant role in facilitating the transition of military members to civilian employment (SkillBridge, 2023). By reviewing the program's goals, success stories, and challenges directly from the SkillBridge website, we aim to enrich our understanding of its impact on enhancing the overall transition experience.

Transition Theories: Contemporary scholarship has extensively explored the difficulties veterans confront during their transition from military to civilian life (Ward, 2020). This section aims to thoroughly investigate these challenges by utilizing Schlossberg's Transition Theory as a theoretical framework. By employing this framework, we aim to gain deeper insights into the intricate complexities faced by transitioning military members.

Public Administration and Performance Measurement: One key resource for effective public service delivery is examining how managing and measuring performances in public and nonprofit organizations work (Poister, 2014). Poister's research contributes theoretical frameworks for assessing the effectiveness of public programs, offering valuable insights that can be applied to the evaluation of TAP within the MFRC.

Applied Research Methods in Public and Nonprofit Organizations: Brown and Hale's (2014) book on applied research methods provides valuable guidance for structuring our research design. The methodologies discussed can aid in crafting a rigorous approach to gather, analyze, and interpret data regarding

TAP's outcomes.

References:

Brown, Mitchell., & Hale, Kathleen. (2014). Applied Research Methods in Public and Nonprofit[cd1] Organizations. Wiley.

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Department of Labor. (2023) Employment Situation of Veterans – 2022. Retrieved from <https://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/vet.pdf>

Government Accountability Office. (2020) Military and Veteran Support: Performance Goals Could Strengthen Programs that Help Servicemembers Obtain Civilian Employment. <https://www.gao.gov/assets/d20416.pdf>

Government Accountability Office. (2022) Servicemembers Transitioning to Civilian Life: DOD Can Better Leverage Performance Information to Improve Participation in Counseling Pathways. <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-23/104538.pdf>

Government Accountability Office. (2022) Military and Veteran Support: DOD Has Taken Steps to Help Servicemembers Transfer Skills to Civilian Employment but Has Limited Evidence to Determine Program Effectiveness. <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-22-105261.pdf>

Military Transition Assistance Program (TAP): An overview. (2017, March 15). Congressional Research Service. Retrieved from <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/IF10347.pdf>

Poister, T. H., Aristigueta, M. P., & Hall, J. L. (2014). Managing and Measuring Performance in Public and Nonprofit Organizations: An Integrated Approach (Second edition.). Wiley.

Ward, B. K. (2020). MAJOR BARRIERS FACING VETERAN TRANSITION FROM MILITARY TO CIVILIAN WORKFORCE: SUGGESTED STRATEGIES. International Journal of Business and Public Administration, 17(2), 60

Section F Participants

In non-technical language, address the following:

Who will the participants be? How many participants?

Staff members of the MFRC

10-20 veterans who transitioned out of the military through [redacted location] MRFC

What is your inclusion criteria for screening participants?

1. Military affiliation: Participants must have a documented history of being a member of an active-duty military branch. Veterans who have separated or retired from the military are eligible
1. Utilization of the Transition Assistance Program (TAP): Participants who have actively participated in TAP provided by the MFRC at [redacted].
1. Separation or retirement status: Participants should have completed the process of separating or retiring from the military

What is your exclusion criteria for screening participants?

1. Non-military affiliation: individuals who have never been a member of an active-duty military branch are excluded.
2. Non-utilization of TAP: individuals who have not actively participated in the transition assistance program (TAP provided by Military Family & Readiness Center (MFRC) are excluded.
3. Active-duty military status: individuals currently serving in an active-duty military branch are excluded.
4. Incomplete separation or retirement process: individuals who have not completed the process of separating or retired from the military are excluded.
5. Participants who lack the capacity to provide informed consent independently.

Where will participants be recruited?

1. Military Family & Readiness Center (MFRC): The primary recruitment source is the MFRC itself. Military members who have utilized the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) and the SkillBridge program are likely to have their contact information within the [redacted] MFRC. Recruitment will happen through collaboration with MFRC staff to identify eligible participants.
2. SkillBridge Program: Identify participants through the Department of Defense SkillBridge program. Since SkillBridge is recommended as part of the transition process, individuals who completed this program may be interested in participating.
3. Word of mouth: Leverage word of mouth within the military community. Ask the MFRC staff, military leaders, and program participants to spread the word about the research opportunity.

Please describe the recruitment process.

1. Initial contact:

Initiate contact with the MFRC staff to seek their support and collaboration in the recruitment process. Obtain necessary approvals and permissions.

2. Information dissemination:

Create informational materials explaining the purpose, objectives, and significance of the project. Clearly outline the inclusion and exclusion criteria, as well as the voluntary nature of participation.

3. Collaborate with the MFRC:

Work closely with the MFRC to distribute recruitment flyers. The flyer is generated on Microsoft PowerPoint and will be distributed through the [redacted] MFRC website, social media, and email.

4. Online platforms:

Utilize online platforms, including the MFRC's website and social media channels, to share information about the research project.

5. Consent process:

Clearly communicate the informed consent process, ensuring potential participants understand the purpose of the study, their rights, and the confidentiality measures in place.

6. Contact information collection:

Establish a secure and confidential method for interested participants to provide their contact information to participate. A designated email for the project will be created.

7. Follow-up communication:

Follow up with interested individuals to provide additional details about the research project, address any questions or concerns, and confirm their eligibility.

8. Scheduling interviews:

For eligible participants, schedule semi-structured interviews based on their availability. Clearly communicate the format (phone, video conference, or face-to-face) and duration of the interviews.

Which members of the Research Team will be directly involved in the recruitment process?

Myself, [name].

Please choose all appropriate participant types.

Healthy adults

Recruitment Materials

Student attached their email template and recruitment flyer that was referenced earlier in the application recruitment materials. All examples of recruitment must be included for your application to be accepted.

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No answer provided.

Recruitment materials could be an email, phone script, flyer, or other means of recruiting participants. Please be sure to include your affiliation with APUS in these materials.

Section G Research Design

State the study activities in chronological order. Describe both the activities conducted by members of the research team and the activities of research participants. (e.g., screening, survey, taking a test, answering questions in an interview, completing a specific task, tasks on a computer, running on a treadmill, debriefing, etc.) If videotaping, photographs, or audio-taping will take place, explain how and why recording will occur.

Recruitment:

1. Researcher Activities:

Development of recruitment materials, collaboration with Military Family & Readiness Center (MFRC) staff for distribution.

Participant Activities: Review of recruitment materials and expression of interest.

Be sure to include all the steps in the research process, such as your methods of recruiting participants, getting informed consent, collecting data, organizing data (e.g., downloading or transcribing), and analyzing data.

Informed consent:

1. Researcher activities:

preparation of informed consent forms which include the explanation of the study, risks, and benefits.

2. Participant activities:

review and sign consent forms.

Screening:

1. Researcher activities:

initial screening based on inclusion and exclusion criteria.

2. Participant activities:

completion of eligibility questionnaire.

Scheduling:

1. Researcher activities:

coordination with eligible participants for interview scheduling.

2. Participant activities:

confirmation of availability and scheduling.

Semi-structured interviews:

1. Researcher activities:

conduct interviews to gather qualitative data

2. Participant activities:
share experiences related to TAP and SkillBridge

Data collection:

1. Researcher activities:
thorough documentation of participant responses during interviews.

2. Participant activities:
engage in interview.

Debriefing:

1. Researcher activities:
provide participants with a summary of the study purpose and thank them for their contribution.

2. Participant activities:
opportunity to seek additional information or ask questions.

Follow-up:

1. Researcher activities:
optional follow-up for any clarifications or additional insights

2. Participant activities:
voluntary engagement in follow-up discussions.

Data analysis:

1. Researcher activities:
thematic analysis of interview data

2. Participant activities: no direct involvement in this stage

Reporting:

1. Researcher activities:
compilation of research findings and preparation of the final report

2. Participant activities: no involvement at this stage

Note on recording:

Audio recordings of interview may occur for accuracy in data analysis. Recordings will be securely stored, and participant identities will remain confidential. The purpose of recording is to ensure accurate representation of participant responses.

Which members of the research team will be involved in collecting data from participants?

Myself, [name]

Explain how the data will be analyzed or studied; that is, indicate the quantitative or qualitative data analysis methods you will use.

This research project will employ a qualitative data analysis approach. The collected data from semi-structured interviews will undergo thematic analysis to identify patterns, trends, and key insights related to the effectiveness of the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) and the impact of the SkillBridge program within the Military Family & Readiness Center (MFRC).

Qualitative Data Analysis:

Transcription: Recorded interviews will be transcribed verbatim to create a textual dataset.

Coding: The researcher will employ open coding to identify initial themes and patterns in the dataset.

Theme Development: Codes will be organized into broader themes, capturing the essence of participants' experiences and perspectives.

Constant Comparison: Themes will be continually compared and refined throughout the analysis process.

Member Checking: Preliminary findings may be shared with participants for validation, ensuring the accuracy and authenticity of the interpretation.

By employing qualitative data analysis methods, this study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of the challenges and successes faced by military members during their transition to civilian life. The thematic analysis will contribute to the development of comprehensive insights and recommendations for enhancing support programs within the MFRC.

Explain how the data will be reported in order to maintain the confidentiality or anonymity of participants (i.e. aggregated, anonymously, names used with consent, participants only identified by professional role, etc.).

Confidentiality is when you, the researcher, know private identifiable information of the participant. This includes seeing their face, knowing their name, and personal identifiers like an email address.

Anonymous information is when you, the researcher, don't know the individual participating in the study. This is often the case if you're conducting a survey online via large platforms like social media.

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Confidentiality will be of paramount consideration throughout the data reporting process to safeguard the privacy of research participants. While individual responses will be linked with participants' identities for the purpose of conducting thorough and accurate qualitative data analysis, steps will be taken to ensure that any publicly shared or reported information maintains confidentiality.

Note that confidentiality and anonymity are not the same. See the IRB FAQs to review the difference between the two.

Key measures to ensure confidentiality:

Participant identification: Participants will be assigned unique identifiers during data collection, replacing personally identifiable information.

A secure, password-protected database will be used to store participants' contact details and corresponding identifiers.

Data aggregation: reporting of findings will involve the aggregation of data at a thematic level, ensuring that individuals responses are not disclosed in public presentations or publications.

Quotes or examples used in the final report will be carefully anonymized,

with identifiers removed to prevent the identification of specific participants.

Member checking:

If member checking is conducted (sharing preliminary findings with participants for validation), individual feedback will be collected privately and securely.

Data security:

All digital and physical data will be stored securely, with restricted access limited to the researcher.

Any hard copies of data will be stored in a locked and secure location.

By prioritizing confidentiality in the reporting process, the research project aims to uphold the trust and privacy of participants. The final report and any public presentations will present aggregated insights, ensuring that individuals responses cannot be traced back to specific participants.

This approach strikes a balance between maintaining the integrity of the research and respecting the privacy and confidentiality of the participants involved in the study.

Please attach your research instrument, such as the survey or interview questions you will use to collect data.

To protect researcher and study information, interview questions are not provided in this example.

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No answer provided.

Section H Data Collection

Choose the appropriate type(s) of data collection for your study.

Audio-recording of Participants
In-person Interviews
Phone or Video Interview

Please choose your main data collection site.

Phone Call

Please choose any additional sites.

Due to the research being conducted on a military base and involving access to information that is not publicly available, this researcher was required to secure organizational permission to conduct this study on a military base.

We have an organizational permission template that may be used to secure a signature from an appropriate supervisor which demonstrates the researcher has been given permission to conduct the study at the organization. This is generally required when conducting research studies within or about a workplace.

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MB - Military Base
PC - Phone Call

Section I Data Storage and Usage

The following people will have *access* to this data. NOTE: If you are a graduate student, include both yours and your Instructors name as he/she should also have access to the data.

[student name]
[instructor name]

The data will only be *used* by the following people: NOTE: If you are a graduate student, *do not* include your instructors name in this section.

[student name]

The data will be stored and safeguarded using the following measures:

- At minimum, the data must be password-protected or physically locked in a secure location.
- If you have created a key that links participants' identities with their data, the key must **not** be stored in the same physical or virtual location as the data itself. In other words, please store any key with participants' identities in a separate location from the data.
- It is highly recommended that data be stored in an encrypted format whenever possible.

The data collected for this research project will be stored and safeguarded with utmost consideration for privacy and confidentiality. All electronic files, including Microsoft Office Word and Excel documents, will be password protected to restrict unauthorized access. Additionally, the data files will be physically stored in a secure location, ensuring that only authorized personnel have access.

To further enhance security, any key linking participants' identities with their data will be stored separately from the actual data, adhering to the recommended practice. This separation ensures an added layer of protection for participant confidentiality. Moreover, all data files, including recorded conversations, will be stored in an encrypted format whenever possible, reinforcing the commitment to maintaining the highest standards of privacy and data security.

The data will be used for the following purpose:

- Please indicate if you will use the data for academic projects (i.e., capstones or dissertations), presentations at conferences, and/or publications.

The data will be used for my academic capstone project. Additionally, as the report reaches its final stages, the final product will be submitted to the Department of Defense, specifically the [redacted location] Military and Family Readiness Center. This delivery aims to furnish policymakers, program administrators, and relevant stakeholders within the DoD with a substantive resource. The overarching goal is to underscore the importance of continuous refinement and innovation in the MFRC support programs, emphasizing their vital role in fostering the successful reintegration of military members into civilian life.

I will destroy the data in the following manner after the agreed upon timeframe of 5 years. Please include destruction plans for all forms of data collected.

- For paper copies, data should be shredded using a cross shredder.
- For electronic data, data should be erased using a file erasure service to ensure that backups and cloud copies are also deleted.

I hereby agree to responsibly destroy all data collected for the research project after the agreed-upon timeframe of 5 years in the methods outlined above.

Data Agreement

Agree

I agree to keep the collected data as part of my research for a period of 5 years. (Please make sure this timeframe is consistent throughout your research design plan.)

I agree to limit the data usage to the purposes indicated on the application. If, after the one year IRB approval has expired, I intend to use the data again, I agree to seek additional IRB approval.

Further, if my future use of the data departs significantly from the purposes indicated on my IRB approved application, I agree to seek new consent from participants.

If you have further questions or concerns about your rights as a participant in this study, contact the IRB Chair at: apus-IRB@apus.edu.

By selecting agree below I verify that I agree to the conditions listed above.

Section J Informed Consent

How will consent be obtained (e.g., signing a consent form in person, online consent form as front page for online survey, etc.)?

The consent form will be online as the front page to the online list of interview questions asked. All participants will need to digitally sign and reply to the recruitment email. Or physically sign, scan, and reply back to the recruitment email with the scanned signed copy attached.

Which members of the research team are responsible for obtaining consent from participants?

Myself [student name]

What procedures are in place to reduce coercion? (e.g., co-workers who might feel compelled to participate)

In order to mitigate coercion and ensure voluntary participation in the research project, the following procedures will be implemented:

Informed Consent Process: Participants will be provided with detailed information about the research project, its objectives, and the voluntary nature of participation during the informed consent process. This will allow individuals to make an informed decision without feeling obligated.

Clear Communication: Communication about the research will emphasize the voluntary nature of participation. Participants will be explicitly informed that their decision to participate or not will not impact their relationships or status within the military community.

Confidentiality Assurance: Emphasis will be placed on the confidentiality of participants. Reassuring participants that their responses will be treated with the utmost privacy helps alleviate concerns about potential repercussions, reducing the likelihood of coercion.

Accessibility of Information: Information about the research project will be easily accessible, allowing potential participants to review details at their convenience. This transparency ensures that individuals can make a voluntary decision without feeling rushed or pressured.

Alternative Participation Options: Providing alternative options for participation, such as opting out at any point without consequences, further reinforces the voluntary nature of involvement. Participants will be made aware of their right to withdraw without facing any adverse outcomes.

These procedures collectively aim to create an environment that promotes voluntary participation and minimizes any potential for coercion. I am committed to upholding ethical standards and ensuring the well-being of all participants throughout the study.

If participants are vulnerable populations, explain how you will follow research ethics guidelines for obtaining consent.

Particular care will be taken to follow research guidelines for obtaining consent. The following procedures will be implemented to ensure the ethical treatment of vulnerable participants:

For example, if you are working with children, you will need to obtain informed consent from a parent or legal guardian and assent from the child.

Informed consent: The informed consent process will be conducted in a thorough and responsible manner. Providing participants with clear and detailed information about the research, its objectives, and potential risks and benefits.

Voluntary participation: emphasis is placed on the voluntary nature of participation. It is made clear that individuals are free to decide whether or not to take part in the study. Participants will be informed their decision will not affect their access to any services or benefits they currently receive.

Continuous monitoring: continuous monitoring will be maintained to ensure the ongoing well-being of vulnerable participants. Any signs of distress or discomfort will be addressed promptly, and participants will be given the opportunity to withdraw from the study at any point.

Counseling support: if emotional issues reach a crisis point, the researcher has contact information for qualified responders and will provide this to the veteran: dial 988 then press 1, chat at VeteransCrisisLine.net/chat or text (838255).

Are you requesting a waiver of consent and/or a waiver of documentation of consent?

No Waivers Requested

Can you adequately state the true purpose of the study in the informed consent, or will you employ deception or incomplete disclosure?

True Purpose of Study Explained

Deception is not revealing the true purpose of the study, but rather describing it as having a different purpose.

Incomplete disclosure is not revealing the complete purpose of the study, but rather withholding information selectively.

Consent Form

The researcher downloaded and edited the consent form to match their study information, then attached it here.

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No answer provided.

Click consent form template to download the APUS consent form template.

Section K Risks to Subjects

IRBs must evaluate the risk-benefit ratio of proposed human subject research. In approving a protocol, IRBs must determine that the benefits outweigh the risks and that risks to subjects are minimized. Research risk is the probability of harm occurring as a result of participation in research.

In non-technical language, address the following:

The types of risks (e.g., physical, psychological, social, economic, legal, etc.) the subject may *reasonably* encounter. Include any likelihood that questions may be sensitive or stressful to the participants.

When conducting interviews, there are some potential risks that participants might encounter. These risks can be grouped into various categories:

Psychological Risks: Discussing experiences related to military service and transition may evoke emotional responses. Participants might feel stress, sadness, or discomfort while sharing their personal stories.

Social Risks: Participants may worry about how their responses could be perceived by others, including potential employers, family members, or peers. Confidentiality measures will be taken to minimize this risk.

Legal Risks: There is a slight legal risk associated with discussing military experiences, especially if participants share sensitive or classified information. However, steps will be taken to ensure that participants avoid disclosing any classified details.

Economic Risks: Participants may have concerns about how their responses could impact their future employment opportunities. Efforts will be made to safeguard participant confidentiality and anonymity.

Physical Risks: There are no physical risks associated with participating in the interviews. All interactions will be conducted remotely, ensuring participants' safety.

Sensitive Questions: Some questions may be sensitive, such as those related to challenges during the transition process or experiences in the military. Participants are encouraged to skip any questions they find uncomfortable, and they can terminate the interview at any time without facing consequences.

Efforts will be made to create a supportive and respectful environment during the interviews, and participants will be reminded of their right to skip questions or withdraw from the study if they feel distressed. The goal is to ensure a positive and informative experience for all participants.

Estimate the frequency/likelihood and magnitude of the risks you identified (cite relevant literature, if available).

The risks identified in the study are generally low, and steps will be taken to minimize any potential negative impact on participants.

Remember that "minimal risk" is equivalent to everyday activities, and any other forms of risk should be described.

Sharing personal experiences can evoke various emotions, but the semi-structured interview format allows participants to control the depths of their responses.

Given the confidentiality measures, social risks are unlikely in this project due to participant identity being protected. Additionally, participants will be reminded not to disclose any classified information.

Participants have the autonomy to skip questions they find uncomfortable, reducing the likelihood and magnitude of potential distress.

Describe how data will be safeguarded to minimize risk to participants (e.g., anonymous data, pseudonyms used, reported aggregately).

All data will be kept confidential. Participant identities will not be linked to their responses in data analysis and reporting. Any personal identifiers will be removed and replaced with pseudonyms when reporting direct quotes. Findings will be reported in aggregate, presenting summarized results.

Remember that anonymous data cannot be traced to the individual, as in an online survey of a random population sampling or a de-identified dataset from another source.

Confidential data means that the identities of the subjects are typically known to the researchers but are kept private as part of minimizing risk, as in many interview or small survey populations.

How will subjects be explicitly informed if data will NOT be anonymous?

Participants will be explicitly informed through their consent form that data is not anonymous. The statement in their consent form ensures that participants are fully aware of the conditions under which their data will be handled and allows them to make an informed decision about participating in the study.

For example, if you are planning to assign pseudonyms to participants, inform them of this process.

What actions would you take if a participant becomes distressed, upset, or uncomfortable during the research process?

If a participant becomes distressed, upset, or uncomfortable during the research process, the following actions will be taken:

For instance, you can offer to discontinue the subject's participation or offer support resources.

Immediate support: the researcher will pause the interview or interaction to address the participant's concerns. The well-being and comfort of the participant are of primary importance.

Offer assistance: if appropriate, the researcher may offer resources or support services available, such as counseling services provided by the MFRC or other relevant support organizations.

Flexibility in participation: participants will be reminded of their voluntary participation, and they will have the option to withdraw from the study at any time without consequence.

Section M Benefits

Describe any direct benefits participants could potentially receive (excluding compensation for participation). If there are no direct benefits, explain what other potential benefits are gained from the research (benefits to society, to the discipline).

Participants in this research project are contributing their knowledge and experiences to better understand the effectiveness of the TAP and SkillBridge program. This contribution will enhance the knowledge base surrounding military-to-civilian transition support. Participants may not receive direct compensation, their involvement contributes to the broader goals of improving support services for military members and enhancing the public's awareness of the challenges associated with military to civilian transitions.

Keep in mind that the IRB needs to weigh potential risks of the study against benefits to participants.

Section N Incentives or Compensation

Does this study involve incentives or compensation to the subjects? For example cash, class extra credit, gift cards, or items.

No

Section O Research Collaboration

Does this study involve collaboration with a researcher who is not affiliated with APUS?

No

PI Conflict of Interest

Do you, the PI, have any conflict of interest related to this study (e.g., potential financial gain linked to the research and/or subject recruitment)?

No

PI Assurances Self-Submission

PI Assurances

As a PI, I certify the following:

- *I have reviewed this protocol submission and acknowledge my responsibilities as Principal Investigator.*
- *The information in this submission accurately reflects the proposed research.*
- *I will not initiate this study until I receive written approval from the IRB.*
- *I will promptly report to the IRB any unanticipated problems and adverse events, as well as any findings during the course of the study that may affect the risks and benefits to the subjects.*
- *I will obtain prior written approval for modifications (amendments) to this protocol including, but not limited to, changes in procedures and/or changes in personnel.*
- *I have completed the CITI Social and Behavioral Investigator Training Module and have read the Belmont Report.*
- *All research personnel involved in the study have been appropriately trained in human subjects' protection. I accept responsibility for assuring adherence to applicable Federal and State research regulations and APUS policies relative to the protection of the rights and welfare of the subjects enrolled in this study.*
- *I have obtained, or will obtain, all necessary permissions from study sites.*
- *Unless given Exempt Status, I understand that this study is subject to continuing review and approval by the IRB which will occur at least yearly.*

By submitting this form, I am agreeing to the assurances above and attesting to the accuracy of the information within.