OIR Policies on Survey Research

While the Office of Institutional Research will assist with data analysis, we will retain all raw data files for the following reasons:

**Confidentiality**

OIR’s policy is to restrict the distribution of data files that contain identifying variables and control access to OIR raw data files. According to the Confidentiality and Data Access Committee of the Federal Committee on Statistical Methodology (2002), restricted data refers to the restrictions placed on data content and restricted access refers to the restrictions placed on data access (who has access, at what locations, for what purposes).

All surveys conducted by OIR are accompanied by a pledge of confidentiality. Federal regulations (Title 45 CFR 46 and the Belmont Report) and Georgia State’s IRB regulations mandate that confidentiality procedures and limits to confidentiality must be made clear to participants. We agree to protect the confidentiality of survey respondents, not only assuring them that they will not be identified, but that they will not be individually associated with any data element released by OIR. We retain sole custody of the raw data files because we cannot make such guarantees for other individuals or groups outside of OIR who may have access to the data files. Furthermore, University Information Security policies have established software, hardware, and access requirements for computers that store confidential information. Anyone who is responsible for providing data will also be responsible for ensuring that recipients of that data adhere to those requirements. OIR cannot assume responsibility for policing the computing resources used by recipients of OIR-supplied data files, as well as their business practices as they relate to data access.

Although obvious identifiers (e.g., names and ID numbers) can be removed, it is possible that remaining variables (e.g., ethnicity, class level, faculty rank, age, and gender) can be linked to other data sources and lead to the re-identification of research participants. And, while it is possible to remove additional demographic data, the suppressed information may diminish the value of the data set. Further, it is not possible to do data swapping, multiple imputations, or the addition of random noise to reduce the possibility of inferential disclosure since OIR data sets are too small for such procedures.

**Restrictions on Data Access**

OIR takes very seriously the responsibilities associated with being a custodian of data. Data files are firewall and password protected. Computers with retrievable data are housed in secure offices. Interview notes and tapes are kept in locked file cabinets in secured offices. Paper copies of surveys are kept in locked file cabinets as well. While OIR can regulate access to data sets in its control, we cannot regulate security and accessibility to data sets that have been distributed to third parties. Consequently, our inability to vouch for the integrity of the procedures used by third parties to address confidentiality and privacy concerns is a liability and should be disclosed, according to IRB requirements, to research
participants. Ethical data management requires that one balance the need to disseminate information with the need to protect research participant confidentiality.

The Office of Institutional Research abides by the ethics policy of our national organization, the Association for Institutional Research. The policy can be accessed at:


**Guidelines on Matters of Authorship, Attribution, and Acknowledgement**

The Office of Institutional Research welcomes opportunities for collaborative research. And while we recognize that defining what is a “significant contribution” to a particular project may be open to discussion, we believe that it is important to have guidelines that speak to expectations on co-PI status and authorship at the outset of a project.

Because collaborative research is, by its nature, an interactive process, we suggest the following positions as starting points for discussion on co-PI and authorship status:

1. If OIR personnel have contributed to the idea of a project, whether originating in OIR or being elaborated on by OIR, and/or has contributed significantly to the hands-on work of the project, then co-PI and authorship status is justified. This is particularly important in that each author should have enough familiarity with not only the research topic, but also the research methodology, data collection process, and analytical procedures and interpretations of the data in order to defend the work in a public forum. Collaborators share responsibility and accountability for the results.

2. While customary to assign lead authorship to the member who has contributed most to a project, this is open to discussion since it can vary by discipline. It may be that whoever writes the initial draft of a paper assumes first author.

3. Clerical or mechanical contributions to research do not constitute co-PI or authorship status, but should be acknowledged in publications.

These guidelines are based on authorship policies set forth by organizations such as the American Psychological Association, American Sociological Association, American Educational Research Association, and the National Institute of Health.