Research Ethics Training in Romania

Many of us have personal experience with the extensive laws in the United States that govern research involving human participants. In part because of some ethically controversial studies that were conducted or came to light in the 1960’s and 1970’s, the Belmont Report was commissioned, and subsequently systems were legislated to implement the recommendations of the report. As a result, researchers in the U.S. typically are expected to submit research proposals for approval by an Institutional Review Board before the research can be conducted. Some researchers may not realize that even when conducting human subjects research outside of the U.S., their work is covered by this legislation as long as they are doing this work as part of their affiliation with their home university or other institutions covered by the law. This means that U.S. researchers should get prior IRB approval for human subjects research in other countries, and that any collaborators in these countries should also successfully complete some kind of research ethics training, just as a researcher in the U.S. would.

There are two challenges to fulfilling this expectation in Romania. One is that Romanian has some limited legislation governing medical research ethics, and essentially none governing research in fields like education, social sciences, and humanities. This means that there is no comparable ethics training available to Romanian researchers. The second is that this training is not available in the U.S. in the Romanian language. Romanian collaborators may be able to complete an online ethics training program in English, if their English proficiency is adequate. Otherwise, there is no clear alternative for research ethics training.

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American Student Researchers in Romania

American students in the fields of education and social sciences have arrived every spring for three years in Cluj-Napoca, no doubt fuzzy-headed from 20 hours of traveling and up to a 10 hour time change. They are taking part in an annual program based at the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR) in collaboration with colleagues at Universitatea Babes-Bolyai (UBB). The program also benefits from established relationships with the Romanian-American Fulbright Commission, and the Peace Corps. For four weeks, these students, earn graduate credit in research methods while learning about, and applying, research methods in the field. Coursework is structured to address both qualitative and quantitative approaches in the context of mixed methods designs.

Some of the research projects are generated by the students themselves. These projects have generated data for dissertations, theses, and applied projects. One of those dissertations addresses nonverbal creativity in a cross-section of Romanian students and adults. Another student project investigates the English spelling development of students learning English as a foreign language. Other student projects investigate classroom behavior as it relates to gender, methods of algebra instruction. Students also participate in research projects that are developed by professors. Topics for these projects have included investigating attitudes about the environmental impact of science and technology, standardization of a cognitive abilities battery in Romanian, and exploring the evolution of civic education in Romanian textbooks over the last 30 years. Methods cover the range from quantitative testing and statistical analysis, to oral histories and text analysis. Many, but not all, of these projects draw on the integrative potential of mixed methods research.

Prior to the four weeks in Romania, students meet several times in face-to-face and online classes. During the four weeks in Romania, weekdays are typically filled with fieldwork, and those evenings are filled with see Student Researchers, page 3

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An alternative may soon be available. Administrators of the CITI program at the University of Miami are working with researchers in Romania to translate their social and behavioral research ethics training modules into Romania. To preserve the rigor and integrity of the course, the translation will involve several stages. The first stage is to develop a glossary of key technical terms, especially those that appear across multiple modules. These terms will be translated into Romanian and provided to scholars who are working on individual modules, with the goal of ensuring that these key terms are translated the same way across the entire set of modules. Next, the modules will be translated from English into Romanian by Romanians who are experienced researchers that have strong English language skills. These researchers include, for example, former Fulbright scholars who have worked in the U.S. As a third step, these first Romanian translations will be back-translated into English by similarly qualified translators. At this point, the original English versions and the back-translated English versions will be compared. The purpose of this comparison is insure that all of the substantive content of the modules is preserved. Revisions to the Romanian translations will be made based on these comparisons. The eventually goal is to make these modules available as an online research ethics training course in Romanian. This course could then be used to qualify Romanian researchers collaborating with U.S. researchers, and could also be used as an instructional tool for Romanian university students taking research methods courses.

For more information about this project, contact Dr. Bob Ives <rives@unr.edu>.
Standardization of a Cognitive Assessment Battery in Romanian

The Romanian special education system has experienced dramatic reform efforts since 1989, and these efforts continue with the countries membership in the European Union. One area of concern for the European Union is the process of determining which students are eligible for special education services. During the 1990’s, the proportion of children in Central and Eastern European countries who eligible for special education services more than doubled, although these rates continue to be lower than rates in western countries. At the same time, identification rates in Romania have lagged behind those of most of its neighbors.

The eligibility process has been described as superficial, for a variety of reasons. One of these is that eligibility criteria tend to be easily manipulated and not well-defined. A second reason for problems with special education eligibility in Romania is a lack of standardized instruments for assessment. For example, in western countries a variety of instruments targeting cognitive abilities is used as one part of the assessment process, particularly for children who may have learning disabilities or mental retardation.

The Woodcock-Munoz Foundation (WMF) has previously supported four projects to translate and standardized an International Edition of the Woodcock-Johnson Cognitive Battery (WJIE) in Eastern European languages. Currently the WMF is supporting a collaboration with education faculty at the University of Nevada, Reno and psychology faculty at Universitatea Babes-Bolyai, in Cluj-Napoca to translate and standardize the WJIE in Romanian. As of this writing, a preliminary translation of the instrument has been completed. A group of nine Romanian school psychologists has been trained to administer the instrument. They have collected preliminary data from more than 300 participants, ranging in age from 5 to 22. These data are currently being analyzed to evaluate the quality of the translation, items, instructions, and training. This analysis will lead to revisions in the Romanian version of the WJIE. At the same time, a stratified random sampling scheme is being developed based on Romanian census information. After the revisions are made, and the sampling scheme is developed, a larger number of school psychologists from across the country will be trained. These school psychologists will use the sampling scheme to collect data on a larger nationally representative sample. These data will then be analyzed to create current norms for the Romanian population.

Through the generosity of the WMF, all of the school psychologists and collaborators who participate in the development and standardization of the WJIE in Romania will receive a complete set of the final battery for use in their own practice.

For more information about this project, contact Dr. Bob Ives <rives@unr.edu>.

more conventional coursework. During the weekends students have the opportunity to visit different parts of the country. Weekend trips have included visits to Maramures, Huneadoara, Brasov, and Bucuresti. Upon their return to the U.S. are encouraged to continue scholarly and other activities related to Romania. Students from past years have co-authored articles in peer-reviewed journals, designed and constructed web sites, and initiated fund-raising activities related to their work in Romania. In addition, several students have participated in the program for more than one year.

The program is open to graduate students, and also to undergraduate students who are eligible to earn graduate credit, from any universities that will accept the course credits. For more information, contact Dr. Bob Ives <rives@unr.edu>, or Dr. Kathryn Obenchain <kmo@unr.edu>.
The westernization of Romania, since 1989, accelerated by European Union membership, presents a variety of opportunities and challenges for Romanian scholars. One of these is adjusting to Western expectations for empirical research and peer-reviewed journal publication. Differences in research and publication traditions, institutional structures, and language contribute to the challenge.

This semester scholars from the U.S. are sharing their own experience and experiences with research and publication through a series of workshops at several universities in Romania, including Babes-Bolyai in Cluj, the University of Bucharest and the Academy of Economic Studies, in Bucharest, the University of Transylvania in Brasov, and Ovidius in Constanta. Some of these workshops are presented as part of pre-existing undergraduate and graduate programs. For example, a semester-long series of weekly graduate level workshops being conducted at Babes-Bolyai spans much of the range of social sciences empirical research methods. Topics include research designs for causal inferences, mixed methods research, meta-analysis, single subject methods, ethnography, teacher research, interviewing, and cognitive assessment. Others workshops were developed in response to specific requests. Representative topics for these workshops include program evaluation, the use of effect size measures in significance testing, research ethics, and peer-review and publication.

If you are at a Romanian university that would be interested in hosting these kinds of workshops, or if you are an experienced researcher who is headed to Romania and interested in offering similar workshops, let us know and we will try to facilitate some productive connections. <researchinromania@gmail.com>