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| Is it Research? Research Versus QA |

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| It can be difficult to distinguish between research and quality assurance (QA). Some projects may even have features of more than one or even all of these activities. While absolute distinction is elusive, each of these activities has a discrete group of characteristics. | | |
|  | RESEARCH | QUALITY ASSURANCE |
| Primary Purpose | To generate new knowledge that is generalizable to a wider population | To improve learning or internal processes or curriculum delivery in a particular setting |
| Locus | Distinct and separate from program delivery | Expected part of program delivery and general departmental operations |
| Audience | Almost always the external research community and external stakeholders | Primarily internal to the organization or local in nature |
| Participation | Almost always optional (a waiver of consent may be granted) | Frequently not optional; participating in the evaluation of QA can be optional |
| Risk/Burden to Participants | Can be significant and therefore rigorous mitigation strategies are required | Possible, but frequently minimal to moderate thus requiring less rigorous mitigation strategies |
| Design/Methods | Involves a research question that is testing or confirming a hypothesis or theory; often involves “finding out what the right thing is”  Conducted using a research design that will lead to scientifically valid findings  May involve a completely new concept or investigate an area where there is little or no knowledge  Design is tightly controlled to determine causality | Involves an improvement aim; often involves implementing or improving adherence to a best practice or  “how to do things right (or better)”  Uses QA methods which may be similar to research design, but not sufficient to support scientifically valid findings  Does not involve new or untested processes  Flexible design; changes based on real-time feedback (Plan-Do-Study-Act cycles) |
| Biases/Variables | Controlled or measured as much as possible | Acknowledged as they are part of real world implementation; stabilized from test to test as much as possible |
| Sharing Results | Part of generating new knowledge involves inviting critical appraisal from peers through presentation and/or publication | The primary goal is to improve local healthcare delivery; sharing learnings externally is secondary but important to assist others with their QA efforts |
| Accountability | Principle investigator with sign off from the appropriate Department Chairs/Deans | Project lead with sign off from the sponsoring Department Managers and/or Director/ VP |
| Ethics Approval | Research Ethic Board | None, but should be conducted ethically |