Institutional Review Board (IRB)

The answer to your first question is “yes!,” you must gain IRB approval for all research studies conducted while at the University of Memphis, and this certainly includes your residency project and your dissertation. It’s Federal Law, and you can be prosecuted if a human subject is harmed during your study or your data will be excluded if you do not have approval to conduct research prior to collecting data. It’s that important.

1. Your first step is to go through CITI training ([http://www.memphis.edu/irb/education.php](http://www.memphis.edu/irb/education.php))
   a. Take the training for Social and Behavioral Sciences.
   b. You need to pass the exam questions at a certain percentage to be certified, so don’t take the tests lightly.
   c. I’d recommend breaking down the CITI training into two or three days of three or four hours each day. Don’t get tired; you’ll make more mistakes.
   d. Keep a record of your CITI ID# and the date you passed the training; you will need it for your IRB application.

2. Be sure to confer with your advisor or chair of the dissertation committee as you design your research. Poorly designed research tends to be rejected by the IRB, since badly designed research puts human subjects at more risk than is acceptable or it raises too many questions in reviewers’ minds.

3. Complete the full IRB application, or Initial Review Request Form (IRR) to be found on [http://www.memphis.edu/irb/forms.php](http://www.memphis.edu/irb/forms.php). Print off the Initial Review Guidelines first; these help you complete the form correctly and define terms that you may not be familiar with. Follow the Guidelines; this is not a creative writing exercise.

4. If you are gathering data from human subjects, you will need a consent form. Use the one on the website: [http://www.memphis.edu/irb/forms.php](http://www.memphis.edu/irb/forms.php) This is not a time to be creative; every element in that consent form is required by law. (NOTE: I gather data online a lot, so I have an abbreviated form of the consent document that is then loaded into SurveyMonkey; this process has been approved in the past if the subjects are adults.)

5. Send the IRB application to your advisor or chair for review. He or she will likely have plenty of questions or areas of concern. We have all been through the IRB multiple times so can usually identify common errors. (We also get surprised sometimes.)
6. Revise as directed and resubmit to your advisor/chair.

7. Your advisor/chair must submit the IRB application on your behalf. Applications that go to the IRB without advisor/chair approval will be sent back.

8. The IRB administrator determines if your project is exempt, expedited, or requires full board approval. Exempt and expedited can be done by a trained Board member selected by the IRB administrator; applications that require full board review will likely be assigned to the next full board meeting. (However, if you submit within the two-week window BEFORE a board meeting, there won’t be time for the application to be readied or reviewed.)

9. When you hear back from the IRB, you will see one of five decisions:
   a. Approved (yippee!) – Be sure to include your IRB number and approval memo in your dissertation.
   b. Minor contingencies – Revise your IRB application to address the questions in the memo from the IRB administrator; minor means that the administrator or a single IRB member can review the revision and approve it; this still takes some time to do.
   c. Major contingencies – This usually means that there are major problems with the application or the research; you will need to revise the application for another round of Board review.
   d. Deferral – This usually happens when the application is substantially incomplete; it is returned for revision and resubmission to the Board.
   e. Disapproved – This can happen if there is a flaw in the research design and the research represents more than minimal risk to the subjects; there is no chance of revising the application in this instance.

10. Timing:
   a. The IRB board meets every month (currently, around mid-month), so plan ahead. The average time for most IRB applications is around a month plus one or two weeks, so again, you need to work ahead of your deadlines.
   b. CITI training lasts for two years; if you delay a long time between the residency and the dissertation, you will need to “refresh” your CITI training. And without current CITI certification, your application cannot be reviewed by the IRB.
   c. The IRB administrator has many duties on this campus and the university community generates over 200 IRB applications per year. Be cognizant of this and deal professionally with staff.
11. Precision

a. IRB applications need to provide precise information about your research
design and the steps in collecting data; any sense that you don’t know
precisely what you are doing leads to questions on the part of the Board.
b. Follow the guidelines; dropping an item or not dealing with required
information only means that you will have to revise and resubmit to the
Board.
c. This is not an exercise in creative writing; precise technical writing is
required. It is not too dissimilar from the writing you will need to perfect for
the residency project and the dissertation.
d. While you will not be rejected for grammar or writing errors in the
application, these tend to make reviewers wonder how careful you will be of
subjects’ rights. As such, your IRB application is a representation of the
quality of your work and your professionalism in research.