Human Research Ethics Requirements Checklist for Graduate Students

Please read carefully over this document to determine whether your proposal for either a capstone essay or a thesis/dissertation study requires institutional research ethics review.

Simon Fraser University is governed by SFU Policy R20.01 and the Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS2): Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans. Any SFU graduate student conducting research with human participants (as defined in the TCPS2) is required to do two things:

1) Complete the TCPS2 tutorial ‘CORE’ (http://tcps2core.ca/welcome). This is an online tutorial that takes approximately 3 hours to complete.
2) Obtain institutional ethics approval from the SFU Research Ethics Board (REB) PRIOR to conducting their research. Please note that the REB does not issue retroactive approvals. For this reason it is important that you determine whether your project requires ethics approval prior to starting your research. Ethics approval from SFU is required even if you have obtained ethics approval from another institution to conduct the research.

The TCPS2 defines research as: “an undertaking intended to extend knowledge through a disciplined inquiry or systematic investigation”. Theses, by definition, are seen to constitute pieces of original research. According to the TCPS2, a human participant is defined as: “those individuals whose data, or responses to interventions, stimuli or questions by the researcher, are relevant to answering the research question”.

Does your research involve any of the following?

☐ Interviews (even if you are interviewing an expert or public figure about their work)
☐ Focus groups
☐ Administration of a questionnaire or survey (even if you don’t collect personal information)
☐ Administration of psychological or educational tests
☐ Naturalistic observation in real or virtual settings
☐ Participant observation/ethnographic fieldwork
☐ Secondary use of existing data including data that has previously received REB approval (e.g., medical records, research data, survey data, or program evaluation data)
☐ Behavioural or psychological experiments
☐ Analysis of laboratory, physiological, kinesiological or biological data
☐ Linking data from existing databases
☐ Administration or testing of drugs, medical devices, medical imaging or diagnostic techniques
☐ Analysis of blood or other biological specimens

If you checked any of these items, your study almost certainly requires institutional ethical review at SFU (even if it has also been reviewed at another university). If your study involves any
other type of interaction with a human participant not included above, please check with Office of Research Ethics (ORE) before assuming that it does not require review.

Research exempt from institutional ethics review
The TCPS2 recognizes four exceptions to the general requirements for institutional ethics review. If you think your research meets one of these exemptions please ensure that you read the relevant article of the TCPS2, including the application section.

1. If you are obtaining information about policies, practices or procedures from an official representative of an organization who is appointed to provide this information as part of his or her regular duties (e.g. a communications officer) and no personal opinions are solicited, these individuals are not seen to fit the definition of a human research participant under the TCPS2 (see Application section, Article 2.1) and interviews conducted in this context do not require institutional ethics review. (see TCPS2, Article 2.1, application section: http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/eng/policy-politique/initiatives/tcps2-uptc2/chapter2-chapitre2/#toc02-1a).

2. If the information you are drawing on in your study is publicly available – i.e., legally accessible to the public, appropriately protected by law and there is no reasonable expectation of privacy (e.g., Stats Canada data, information on the internet that is accessible to all users and doesn’t require a password to access, etc.) (see TCPS2, Article 2.2: http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/eng/policy-politique/initiatives/tcps2-uptc2/chapter2-chapitre2/#ch2_en_a2.2)

3. If you are observing people in public places and you are not staging any intervention, the individuals targeted have no reasonable expectation of privacy, and your dissemination of results does not allow for identification of individuals. (See TCPS2, Article 2.3: http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/eng/policy-politique/initiatives/tcps2-uptc2/chapter2-chapitre2/#ch2_en_a2.2)

4. If you are relying exclusively on secondary use of anonymous data or biological materials (“anonymous” here means the information/materials never had identifiers attached to them). This exemption does not cover anonymized data (“anonymized” means data that originally had identifiers that have now been irrevocably removed). (See TCPS2, Article 2.4: http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/eng/policy-politique/initiatives/tcps2-uptc2/chapter2-chapitre2/#ch2_en_a2.2). Please be aware that genetic material is never considered anonymous unless a REB determines otherwise.

5. If your project exclusively involves quality assurance and quality improvement, program evaluation activities, and performance reviews, or testing within normal educational requirements when used exclusively for assessment, management or improvement purposes, these do not constitute research. Typically, these projects involve assessments of the performance of an organization or its employees or students, within the mandate of the organization, or according to the terms and conditions of employment or training. (See TCPS2, Article 2.5: http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/eng/policy-politique/initiatives/tcps2-uptc2/chapter2-chapitre2/#ch2_en_a2.2).
6. If your project may be deemed creative practice, then it may be exempt from research ethics review. Creative practice refers to a process through which an artist makes or interprets a work or works of art. It may also include a study of the process of how a work of art is generated. The activity should be conducted exclusively for creative practice and the end result is nothing more than the work of art itself. This applies even if research-like activities are employed to inform the works, this activity would fall outside the scope of TCPS2 definition of research. (See TCPS2, Article 2.6: http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/eng/policy-politique/initiatives/tcps2-eptc2/chapter2-chapitre2/#ch2_en_a2.6)

In addition, SFU Policy R20.01 recognizes the following exemptions applicable to graduate students when conducting research outside the auspices of SFU:

1. If your research involves human participants and meets the below criteria it may be excluded from the requirement of ethics review:
   a. If it is research conducted by a student, and the research data are not collected by asserting connection or affiliation with Simon Fraser University, and the results are not disseminated in the public domain indicating association with Simon Fraser University, and the research is not conducted at Simon Fraser University or using Simon Fraser University resources;
   b. If it is research undertaken by students outside the auspices of Simon Fraser University and/or its academic programs (e.g., students on co-op or work terms outside the University) that does not require Simon Fraser University resources and is not directly supervised by Simon Fraser University faculty;

Note: The above exemption does not apply when conducting a SFU Capstone, Thesis or any SFU research project because as a SFU graduate student you are conducting these studies under the auspices of SFU for the purposes of obtaining a SFU degree.

If an exemption is thought to be applicable, you must contact the ORE prior to beginning the project to ascertain whether an ‘Exemption Letter’ is required. Refer to the Library Ethics Statement: http://www.lib.sfu.ca/help/publish/thesis.

If you are in any doubt as to whether your study requires institutional ethics review please contact appropriate staff in the SFU Office of Research Ethics. Contacting staff will ensure that misinterpretations of the requirements are not made.

For more information contact Sarah Bennett or Dina Shafey.