New policy and procedure for ethics review of research involving human subjects

By Bruce P. Clayman, Vice-President, Research

In July, 2001 the SFU Senate and Board of Governors approved a revision to SFU Policy R20.01 “Policy and Procedures for Ethics Review of Research Involving Human Subjects.” The purposes of the revisions were two-fold:

■ To bring the Policy into conformity with modern principles and practices of ethical research involving human subjects - the previous version of the Policy dates from the early 1980’s and has a number of deficiencies related to informed consent, procedural options and administrative independence, among other issues; and

■ To bring SFU Policy into compliance with the federal Tri-Council Policy Statement, Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (“the TCPS”), by the already extended deadline of September 2001.

The revised version meets both these objectives admirably and, at the same time, minimizes the degree to which its implementation will impede SFU faculty and student researchers in carrying out their research. Tri-Council approval of the Policy and its Procedures as compliant with the TCPS came on the eve of Senate consideration and removed the threat of the suspension of federal funding until compliance is attained.

Key features of the revised Policy are:

■ Explication of the need to balance academic freedom of the researchers with ethical

continued on p. 2

Technology goes to new depths: Drs. John Bird (centre) and Paul Kraeutner (right), School of Engineering Science, have developed a new technology for underwater 3D acoustic imaging and mapping of the sea floor. “The UILO invested prototype development funding and facilitated a Market Assessment of Research and Technology (MART),” reports UILO Technology Manager Teri Lydiard (left). The MART program is jointly funded by B.C.’s Ministry of Competition, Science and Enterprise, and the National Research Council of Canada. A U.S. patent for “Imaging Methods and Apparatus Using Model-Based Array Signal Processing” issued in October of 2000. “The technology was licensed to Benthos Inc., of Massachusetts for use in the field of swath bathymetry. An SFU spin-off company, PING Digital Signal Processing Inc., has been incorporated to commercialize the technology for other fields of use,” says Ms. Lydiard. “The UILO has obtained an equity position in the company on behalf of the University and continues to offer assistance in numerous areas for the future success of the company.” Photo: Greg Ehlers, SFU IMC
Message from the Vice President, Research

SFU’s new faculty members

Dr. Bruce P. Clayman

Recruitment of new, highly qualified SFU faculty members is critical to the continued and enhanced success of our research enterprise. Present plans call for about fifty new appointments each year for the next three years. These are largely to replace expected retirements and resignations, but planned expansion in areas such as information technology and health also drives the recruitment and hiring processes. The federal program of Canada Research Chairs is providing an estimated 38 new faculty positions over the next four years, as well. Other programs, such as the proposed BC Leadership Chairs and career awards from other granting agencies, provide additional avenues for funding new faculty positions.

SFU is well situated to attract excellent candidates. When it gets down to the final decision by a prospective new recruit, it is the strong, vibrant research environment at SFU that often plays a crucial role. The vigor, talents, and receptiveness of their future departmental colleagues are cited as main drivers of this positive environment.

Research support is also very important. It is hoped that the President’s Research Grant Fund can be augmented to provide start-up grants of $10,000 to all new appointees this year. This amount is adequate in some disciplines. In other disciplines, especially the experimental sciences, much more substantial start-up funding for research is required; fortunately, SFU has been able to put together attractive packages of support, using Canada Foundation for Innovation funds and the BC Knowledge Development Fund to supplement our own resources.

The benefits to SFU of having these new researchers go far beyond simple replacement of the existing faculty complement. In addition to sharing the benefits of their drive and vitality, the combination of their education and experience in new modalities of research - especially collaborative team research - makes them well suited for addressing new research challenges that cross the boundaries of traditional fields. As such, it also prepares them for successes in competitions for external grants where application of these modalities is critical. The “track record” of their recent successes speaks for itself in this regard.

I would like to extend a warm welcome to my new faculty colleagues and wish them every success in their research careers at SFU. My office stands ready to assist in any way that it can.

---

continued from p. 1.

- Clear descriptions of the types of research that do and do not require approval
- Creation of the SFU Research Ethics Board (REB) as an elected committee of the SFU Senate and the Faculties representing the range of disciplines in which research involving humans occurs at SFU, and including members from outside the SFU community
- Requirement that informed consent of human subjects is obtained, after they have been provided with a clear understanding of the research procedures and potential harms and benefits that may result from participation
- Requirement for the more complex research, including research that involves humans from outside the SFU community
- A Research Ethics Appeal Panel, established by the University of Victoria Human Ethics Committee
- Provision for Senate review of procedures

Just as under the previous system, the ads for any project involving human subjects are reviewed by the Research Ethics Board before commencing the research.

What Happens Next?

The next steps in the implementation of this new policy are the elections of members to the Research Ethics Board and the appointment of the DORE. SFU Research Ethics Board

Simon Fraser University has launched a publicly accessible database of the research expertise of SFU faculty members.

The Office of the Vice-President, Research identified the need for a simple, one-stop place to access faculty research expertise on the Internet. Initial plans to provide a central database using the SFU CV Update System proved inadequate to this task. Over the last six months, an expertise database was developed with the assistance of Mr. Todd Holbrook of the SFU Library and Ms. Janet Price, a data management expert. It was initially “populated” using publicly available sources - the SFU calendar, departmental and personal web pages, and other publications in the public domain. To help ensure accuracy of the information, each faculty member was sent her/his entry for comment. Entries were linked to existing web-based materials and pages, wherever available. Review of these comments is continuing.

“Research expertise database” is the name of the database that identifies researchers who have the training, education, or other relevant background and experience that can be used to benefit existing and planned research programs. The database is intended to make it quick and easy for people such as research relations, funders, students, and companies searching for researchers, to access this information. Scholars looking to identify prospective collaborators, and researchers looking for new faculty members. It is also a valuable tool for identifying researchers who may be interested in applying for various research funding opportunities and help SFU make them known.

The Research Expertise Database (RED) is available to the SFU community at www.sfu.ca/vpresearch/red.
stipulates that the REB comprises the search committee for the DORE, the search and appointment must await the REB elections. The elections are expected to occur over the next few months, with the REB in place by the beginning of 2002. A national search for the best-qualified DORE will follow; an acting DORE may be required in the interim period.

The Office of the Vice-President, Research and the Office of Research Services will provide administrative support to REB and to the DORE and her/his staff. A preliminary allocation of funds and space is already in place, with the expectation that considerably more of each will be required once the revised Policy is operational. Fortunately, such costs have been recognized both federally and provincially as indirect costs of research, so that funding from one or both of those sources should be available to meet the increased need in the 2002/03 budget year.

All members of the SFU community realize that conclusion of this Policy has been a difficult process, with some members of the community having concerns that there are flaws in the Policy and its Procedures. However, approval by the Tri-Council after their consideration of those concerns, near-unanimous approval by Senate, and unanimous approval by the Board of Governors make it clear that the revised Policy strikes an appropriate balance between the rights and the responsibilities of SFU researchers, and that the Procedures are appropriate.

I trust that any previous objections, all members of the SFU research community will now assist in the smooth implementation of the revised Policy and Procedures, giving it a fair chance to show its value to SFU researchers and their research subjects.

New Research Grants Facilitator in the Faculty of Science

Dr. Adrienne Drobnies in her own words:

As the new research grants facilitator in the Faculty of Science, first and foremost my job is to assist all members of that Faculty to make the process of grant application easier and more successful. Along with my colleagues, who are facilitators in other faculties at SFU, I help researchers identify new funding opportunities and prepare research proposals. My goal is to bring researchers together in useful ways, especially to increase the success rate for complex multi-investigator applications such as group and infrastructure grants.

I received my Ph.D. in chemistry from the University of California at Berkeley and did a post-doc in biochemistry at the Hospital for Sick Children in Toronto. Since my Ph.D., I have worked in a number of different scientific environments – academic, industrial, clinical. For the past seven years I have been a researcher in the Dept. of Molecular Biology and Biochemistry at SFU with Professor Rosemary Cornell. My most recent research interests have been in the fields of lipid metabolism, the effect of oxidized lipids on the physical properties of biological membranes, and angio-tensin signal transduction.

I view my role as that of a consultant or intellectual counsellor to researchers – a midwife for new ideas. And… I love to write.
President’s Research Grants funding for new faculty members

These non-renewable grants are meant to help newly appointed faculty members initiate their research programs and to enhance the likelihood of attracting external funds. Newly appointed members of SFU faculty, at the rank of Assistant Professor or above, in positions that are tenured or lead to consideration for tenure, are eligible to apply. Applications may be submitted at any time prior to the end of the first semester of eligible appointment.

Award values will depend on the amount required for the research as described and justified by the applicant. The range of awards is established annually based on funds available and estimated demand. For fiscal 2001/02, new faculty members may apply for up to $10,000. Currently, awards will be made to a maximum of $5,000. Additional funding may become available later in the fiscal year. In the event that this occurs, the grantees will be contacted.

Application forms and guidelines for President’s Research Grants can be found on the Office of Research Services (ORS) web site, www.sfu.ca/ors by following the links under “Grants.”

For further information, contact Barb Ralph in the Office of the Vice-President, Research, telephone 604-291-4370 or email bralph@sfu.ca.

Fall grants competitions: ORS mailing deadlines

The ORS provides a mass mailing service for researchers whose applications have been signed, copied and made ready-to-go in a sealed envelope in time to meet the agency’s deadline. SSHRC requires only that applications be posted by a certain date. NSERC and CIHR, however, require that applications be received in Ottawa by a certain date. Therefore, extra time must be allowed to account for Canada Post schedules.

With this in mind, the ORS has established the following deadlines for placement of addressed envelopes into a drop-off box located in Room 2100 Strand Hall. Individual envelopes that are ready later than the ORS deadlines shown below may be posted in the normal outgoing ORS mail.

| Agency’s Mailing Deadline | ORS Drop-off box 4:30 p.m. deadline | Ottawa Receipt 4:30 p.m. deadline |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------
| none                      | Sept. 4/01                      | Sept. 15/01                     |
| Oct. 15/01                | Oct. 2/01                       | none                            |
| Oct. 19/01                | Oct. 2/01                       | Nov. 1/01                       |

Grant information for faculty members

Faculty members please note that mail list membership is the key to receiving timely information concerning grant opportunities. For further information and instructions on how to sign up for a mail list, see www.sfu.ca/ors/Listservers.html.

UILO: the year in review

The University/Industry Liaison Office (UILO) is a service organization for SFU faculty, staff and students, and for external agencies and firms that wish to collaborate with the University in research partnerships and technology transfer.

2000/01 was a very busy and rewarding year for the UILO. The flow of technology disclosures remained steady and efforts to protect intellectual property resulted in the filing of a record 18 new patent applications. Four new patents issued, bringing the total number of issued patents in good standing to 38. Commercialization successes included the assignment of two technologies to an SFU spin-off company and the negotiation of licensing agreements related to five other technologies.

Activity related to spin-off company creation and support remained a focus in 2000/01. Six new spin-off companies were formed, bringing the total number of spin-offs to 60, 41 of which are active. Six new equity positions were obtained on behalf of the University, increasing the total number of equity positions held to 26. The UILO staff directly helped spin-off companies attract investment of more than $8.9 million.

In April, Microsoft Corp. acquired SFU spin-off NCompass Labs Inc., developer of NCompass Resolution, the enterprise-strength Web content management system for the Microsoft platform.

Dr. Gerri Sinclair, the founder and Executive Director of SFU’s ExCITE Lab (now 7thFloor Media) launched NCompass Labs in 1996. At ExCITE, Dr. Sinclair and NCompass Labs Inc. co-founders Kerem Karatal and Kristof Roomp developed web-based technology that became the basis for the founding of the company. In 1996 the UILO negotiated an exclusive license which granted use of the technology to NCompass Labs in return for an equity position for SFU in the company.

Faculty members, students and staff requiring the assistance of a UILO Technology Manager can contact: Teri Lydiard, telephone 604-291-5844, email lydiard@sfu.ca; Matt Ferguson, telephone 604-291-3966, email matt_ferguson@sfu.ca; or Ziba Afshar, telephone 604-291-3014, email zafshar@sfu.ca.