



ORE News

Vol. 1 No. 1

Simon Fraser University, Burnaby, B.C., V5A 1S6

The Office of Research Ethics (ORE) is responsible for providing support to the Research Ethics Board (REB) through the Office of the Vice President, Research (VPR). The Director of the Office of Research Ethics (DORE) is appointed by the VPR.

*Web address for electronic
submissions of ethics applications*

www.sfu.ca/~dore/

Who's Who in the Office of Research Ethics

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Membership of the Research Ethics Board

The **Chair** (non-voting) who is a Faculty member elected annually by the REB

Faculty members elected by respective Faculties as follows:

One from Applied Sciences

Two from Arts

One from Business Administration

One from Education

One from Science

Three members elected by Senate, from the university community at large (these may include faculty and staff)

One Student elected by Senate

Two persons from the outside community elected by Senate

The **Director** of the Office of Research Ethics, *ex-officio* (non-voting)

Faculty Members:

Dr. Bruce Whittlesea (Chair), Department of Psychology

Dr. Charles Krieger, M.D., School of Kinesiology

Dr. Daniel Cohn, Department of Political Science

Dr. Rick Iverson, Faculty of Business Administration

Dr. David Zandvliet, Faculty of Education

Dr. Bruce Brandhorst, Molecular Biology and Biochemistry

University Community at Large:

Dr. Adrienne Drobnies, Faculty of Science

Dr. John Lowman, School of Criminology

Dr. Maureen Hoskyn, Faculty of Education

Student Member:

Ms. Krista Muis, Education

Members from Outside the University

Community:

Ms. Lynne Kennedy

Mr. William (Bill) Melville

Procedures for Submission and Review of Applications

1. The applicant contacts the Office of Research Ethics by email: dore@sfu.ca requesting a code and access to the electronic forms. Each applicant must have an SFU email address.

2. The Ethics Officer assigns a code and web address by email for access to the forms.

3. The applicant completes Forms 1 through 7. It is important to complete all items in Form 7, the final checklist.

4. If the applicant is a student, access to the forms is given to the student's supervisor for approval of the application.

5. The application is reviewed by the Director and classified as minimal risk or non-minimal risk. If the application is minimal risk the Director has the authority to approve the application. The applicant may begin the study after approval by the DORE, however the REB must ratify the approval at their monthly meetings and may have additional requirements.

6. If the application is non-minimal risk, the study must have received peer review and the REB must approve the protocol.

7. Applications that are denied by the DORE are appealed to the REB and applications denied by the REB may be appealed according to the procedures in policy R 20.01.

Academic Freedom and Responsibilities

Academic freedom includes freedom of inquiry and the right to disseminate the results thereof, freedom to challenge conventional thought, freedom from institutional censorship, and the privilege of conducting research on human subjects with public monies, trust and support. However, researchers and institutions also recognize that with freedom comes responsibility, including the responsibility to ensure that research involving human subjects meets high scientific and ethical standards.

Informed Consent

The consent forms on the ORE site are the standard SFU consent forms that can be used for most studies.

However, if there are modifications of informed consent that are necessary for a study the applicant can produce a hard copy and send it by email as an attachment, by regular mail or by fax. It is necessary to use the check list to answer whether Form 2 or 3 (standard consent forms) will be used, and to answer the questions related to informed consent on Form #1. If a standard consent form is not used, the applicant must forward the modified consent form as hard copy.

Retention of Consent Records

A recent policy of the REB for non-minimal risk applications specifies:

- (a) That when written or other forms of documented consent are acquired as part of the research protocol, it is the responsibility of the researcher to maintain those records for a period of one year after the research has been completed, and
- (b) That when the application is from a student, it is the responsibility of the supervisor to retain those records, mentioned in (a) above.

Age of Consent

The age of consent in British Columbia is 19. The previous policy of SFU was to require all researchers who used participants that were younger than 19 to get consent from parents or guardians. However, an exception was made for SFU students who were considered adults regardless of their age. In some circumstances this meant that students at UBC, or another university were minors and students at SFU of the same age were adults. In addition, it was clear that some persons younger than 19 could understand the risks and protocols of a project and were capable of giving their own informed consent. There were also circumstances when it would be impossible for participants to receive parental consent. An example was homeless persons who are separated from their families. Therefore, the REB approved a policy whereby, for minimal risk applications only, the age of consent would be 14.

For non-minimal risk applications the question of age of consent would be decided on a case-by case basis. The resolution by the REB is: *“For minimal risk protocols only, persons greater than or equal to 14 years of age and less than 19 years of age may in some circumstances consent to participate as a research subject in the absence of parental consent, subject to specific approval by the REB in that instance. Persons under the age of 14 may not participate as research subjects, in either minimal or non-minimal risk protocols, without parental consent. Persons greater than or equal to 19 years of age are considered adults and may consent to participate as research subjects in both non-minimal and minimal risk protocols.”*

From the Tri-Council Policy

Balancing Harms and Benefits: The analysis, balance and distribution of harms and benefits are critical to the ethics of human research. Modern research ethics, for instance, require a favourable harms-benefit balance — that is, that the foreseeable harms should not outweigh anticipated benefits. Harms-benefits analysis thus affects the welfare and rights of research subjects, the informed assumption of harms and benefits, and the ethical justifications for competing research paths. Because research involves advancing the frontiers of knowledge, its undertaking often involves uncertainty about the precise magnitude and kind of benefits or harms that attend proposed research. These realities and the principle of respect for human dignity impose ethical obligations on the prerequisites, scientific validity, design and conduct of research.

A principle directly related to harms-benefits analysis is non-maleficence, or the duty to avoid, prevent or minimize harms to others.

What happens if projects proceed without Ethics Approval?

This is a very serious matter. In the case of Faculty, funding for grants could be suspended and according to SFU policy R 60.01 (Integrity in Research and Misconduct in Research):

“The University holds all researchers responsible for conducting their research in strict observance of ethical standards, including seeking and obtaining approval by the University Research Ethics Board before engaging in any research involving human subjects and then complying fully with the approved research protocols in the performance of the research. Sanctions will depend on the severity of the offense and may include (but are not limited to): reprimand, suspension and dismissal (employees) or expulsion (students).”

The Tri-Council

The Tri-Council consists of the three Canadian funding agencies Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC), Social Sciences & Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) and the Canadian Institute for Health Research (CIHR). The Tri-Council policy promotes ethical research, combined with the evolving needs of the research community.

Ethics Approved Courses

If human research is being conducted by students as part of a course, the protocols for that research must be approved. Thereafter, application for ethics approval is not required as long as the protocols or risk associated with the research do not change. It is very helpful if attention is paid to consent forms or procedures that are to be utilised in the course, and the information sheet or information about the context of the studies that will be given to participants to ensure that consent is informed consent. The application should also identify the ways in which discussion of ethics is included in the course. Applications for ethics approval of a course must be made by the Chair of the Department or the Director of the School. The application forms for this type of approval can be obtained by contacting Barb Ralph, Ethics Officer.

Deadlines For Course Applications:

- April 1 for courses offered in Summer Semester
- August 1 for courses offered in Fall Semester
- December 1 for courses offered in Spring Semester

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