



**ATTENTION:** Board of Governors and Senate  
**FROM:** Kristie Westerlaken, PhD – Director, Research Ethics and Security  
**RE:** Research Ethics and Research Ethics board Annual Report (Sept 1, 2023-Dec 31, 2024)  
**DATE:** May 1, 2025

As per Policy R20.01 – Ethics Review of Research Involving Human Participants, Section 7.1 which states “the Director, will submit an annual report of the REB’s activities, which report has been approved by the REB Chair”, please find attached the REB Annual Report for the period September 1, 2023 to December 31, 2024.<sup>1</sup>

Sincerely,

Kristie Westerlaken, PhD  
Director, Research Ethics and Security  
Enclosure

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<sup>1</sup> Note: the reporting period has been extended to capture a change to reporting for the calendar year commencing January 2025 (i.e. next report will be from January 1, 2025 to December 31, 2025)

## **SFU Research Ethics Board Annual Report – 2023-2024**

### **Introduction**

This report covers activities undertaken by the REB during the period from September 1, 2023 to December 31, 2024. Appendix A to the report includes key definitions taken from the TCPS2 (2022) Glossary to assist with context.

The University has established and authorized the SFU REB to review research involving human participants conducted under the auspices of the University.

The REB's purpose is to protect the rights, welfare, and privacy of human participants in research. It reviews and oversees the research to ensure that it meets ethical principles and that it complies with all applicable regulations and guidelines pertaining to human participant protection. The guiding ethical principles are respect for persons; concern for welfare; and justice. Regulations and guidelines include, but are not limited to, the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans, and US Federal Regulations where applicable.

### **REB composition and administrative support**

During the reporting period, REB membership changed significantly due to the adoption of the REB Standard Operating Procedures which clearly defined the composition, duties, management and, specifically, terms of service for REB members. In 2024, Professor Mark Pickup (FASS – Political Science) assumed the role of Chair and Associate Professor Jeannie Kerr (Education) the role of Vice-Chair. In addition, the following members joined the REB:

David Freeman – FASS (Economics)  
Andy Hoffer – Faculty of Science (BPK)  
Eric Beauregard – FASS (Criminology)  
Bohdan Nosyk – Faculty of Health Sciences  
Elizabeth King (MD) – Faculty of Health Sciences  
Duncan Saunders (MD) – Faculty of Health Sciences  
Jennifer Warriner (Ethicist) – External  
Kirstie Russell (Ethicist) – External  
Jane Ingman Baker (Legal Representative) – External

The following were continuing members:

David MacAlister (Scientific member and Legal Representative) – FASS (Criminology)  
Dante Abbey (Community Member) – External  
Malcolm Steinberg (MD) – Faculty of Health Sciences  
Jean-Christophe Bélisle-Pipon (Ethicist) – Faculty of Health Sciences  
Tatiana Losev – Student member

Administrative support for the REB is provided by Research Ethics and Security 'RES' in the Vice-President Research and Innovation portfolio. Also in 2024, because of the amalgamation of Research Ethics with Research Security, the administration team was re-organized to create three new roles solely dedicated to supporting the daily operational functions of the REB: the REB Manager and two REB Coordinators. The RES Director and Coordinator provide support across both Research Ethics and Security.

### Education and outreach activities

REB members and administration continued participating in an initiative led by Professor Vicki Kelly (Faculty of Education) to build capacity in Indigenous research principles, practices, history, and culture. Members and administration participated in the Canadian Association of Research Ethics Boards 'CAREB' annual conference. Administration continues to be actively engaged in various initiatives with Research Ethics BC 'REBC', a model aimed at developing a provincial model to make ethics review timelier and more effective.

Finally, outreach and educational activities were provided to the research community as follows:

Activity	
Faculty/department presentations	29
Zoom helpline attendees	232
Additional meetings/calls	146

### Human participant review activities – volume and timelines

#### Volume

The table below sets out the total number of research activities submitted for review<sup>2</sup>. Activities include: new studies, projects exempt from REB review as per TCPS Articles, 2.2., 2.3, 2.4, 12.21 and/or 12.22; and, post-approval activities (PAAs) which encompass amendments, annual renewals, and close requests.

Submission Type	
New Study	517
Exemption	38
Post-Approval Activities	1488

Over 95% of studies were submitted as behavioral. In addition, there were 20 studies identified as Indigenous focused that were submitted during the reporting period. Most studies were reviewed via the delegated review pathway (i.e. deemed by the Chair to meet the criteria of minimal risk), and 4% reviewed by the Full Board.<sup>3</sup>

New study submissions originated predominantly from the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, with Education, Communication, Art and Technology, as well as Health Sciences contributing significantly to the numbers. At the department level, Psychology, Interactive Arts and Technology, and Criminology were significant submitters.

<sup>2</sup> Volume appears comparable to previous years (22/23 – 509; 21/22 – 621; 20/21-563; 19/20-434; 18/19-532). However, it is important to note that data has been retrieved from 2 systems over all reporting periods and data collection parameters have varied considerably due to system and process changes.

<sup>3</sup> Note: the default is for the Full Board to review all studies. However, those studies that are deemed to be minimal risk can be diverted to the delegated pathway for review. The REB Chair makes the determination on the review pathway and they can also determine that studies that meet the criteria for minimal risk should still be reviewed by the Full REB.

The table below shows the total number of Post Approval Activities submitted by type.

Amendment	476
Renewal	808
Close Request	204

### Multi-Jurisdictional Research

The SFU REB also reviews projects that involve collaborators from other BC academic institutions and/or Health Authorities (i.e. multi-jurisdictional projects). These proceed via the BC harmonized ethics review model and are managed through the UBC RISE system. During the reporting period, SFU was board of record 'BoR' for 37 new study submissions and involved as a partner institution on 70 submissions. The new studies for which SFU was BoR were predominantly behavioral (32).

The UBC Behavioural Research Ethics Board 'BREB' was SFU's most frequent collaborator on new study submissions, followed by Fraser Health 'FH' and Providence Health Care 'PHC'. In addition, SFU collaborated on reviews with many Health Authorities in the province, including First Nations Health Authority 'FNHA', Interior Health Authority 'IHA', Northern Health Authority, and Vancouver Island Health Authority 'VIHA'. SFU was involved most often as a partner board for studies reviewed by the BREB, followed by BC Cancer 'BCC', and the UBC Clinical Research Ethics Board 'CREB'.

### Timelines <sup>4</sup>

Review timelines are affected by the volume of submissions in the system at any given time, the quality of submissions, staff resources, and reviewer availability. For Full Board studies, timelines are impacted by submission deadlines (2.5 weeks prior to the REB meeting) as well as the frequency of REB meetings which can be impacted due to the availability of members which, in turn, impact quorum requirements.

A Certificate of Approval is typically issued within 26 days for delegated reviews and 70 days for Full Board reviews.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, changes to the REB membership and administrative team that occurred over the reporting period (Sept 1, 2023-Dec 31, 2024) have now set the foundation for future focus on reviewing, revising, and developing resources, systems, process, and education and training to better support the research community.

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<sup>4</sup> Direct comparison amongst Canadian REBs is inexact due to lack of reporting (reporting is not mandatory), as well as significant variations in operational processes and procedures, scope of work, and staff and member resources.

2025-05-01

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Mark Pickup  
SFU REB Chair

Approved by: Signed by: Mark Pickup

Professor Mark Pickup

SFU REB Chair

## Appendix A - Definitions - as per TCPS2 (2022) Glossary

**Core principles** – The three core principles of the Policy that together express the overarching value of respect for human dignity: Respect for Persons; Concern for Welfare; and Justice. See "Respect for Persons," "Concern for Welfare" and "Justice."

**Respect for Persons** – A core principle of this Policy that recognizes the intrinsic value of human beings and the respect and consideration that they are due. It incorporates the dual moral obligations to respect autonomy and to protect those with developing, impaired, or diminished autonomy.

**Concern for Welfare** – A core principle of this Policy that requires researchers and research ethics boards to aim to protect the welfare of participants, and, in some circumstances, to promote that welfare in view of any foreseeable risks associated with the research. See "Risk" and "Welfare."

**Justice** – A core principle of this Policy that refers to the obligation to treat people fairly and equitably. Fairness entails treating all people with equal respect and concern. Equity requires distributing the benefits and burdens of research participation in such a way that no segment of the population is unduly burdened by the harms of research or denied the benefits of the knowledge generated from it.

**Delegated research ethics board (REB) review** – The level of REB review assigned to minimal risk research projects. Delegated reviewers are selected from among the REB membership, with the exception of the ethics review of minimal risk student course-based research activities, which can be reviewed by delegates from the student's department, faculty, or an equivalent level. Delegated reviewers who are non-members or non-voting members of the REB must have experience, expertise and knowledge comparable to what is expected of an REB member.

**Full research ethics board (REB) review** – The level of REB review assigned to above minimal risk research projects. Conducted by the full membership of the research ethics board, it is the default requirement for the ethics review of research involving humans.

**Minimal risk research** – Research in which the probability and magnitude of possible harms implied by participation in the research are no greater than those encountered by participants in those aspects of their everyday life that relate to the research.

**Multi-Jurisdictional research** – Research involving multiple institutions and/or multiple research ethics boards (REBs). It is not intended to apply to ethics review mechanisms for research involving multiple REBs within the jurisdiction or under the auspices of a single institution.

**Participant** – An individual whose data, biological materials, or responses to interventions, stimuli, or questions by a researcher are relevant to answering the research question(s). Also referred to as a "human participant," and in other policies/guidance as "subject" or "research subject."

**Proportionate approach to research ethics review** – The assessment of foreseeable risk to determine the level of scrutiny a research proposal will receive (i.e., delegated review for minimal risk research or full research ethics board [REB] review for research above minimal risk), as well as the consideration of the foreseeable risks, the potential benefits, and the ethical implications of the research in the context of initial and continuing review.

**Research** – An undertaking intended to extend knowledge through a disciplined inquiry and/or systematic investigation.

**Research ethics board (REB)** – A body of researchers, community members, and others with specific expertise (e.g., in ethics, in relevant research disciplines) established by an institution to review the ethical acceptability of all research involving humans conducted within the institution's jurisdiction or under its auspices.

**Risk** – The possibility of the occurrence of harm. The level of foreseeable risk posed to participants by their involvement in research is assessed by considering the magnitude or seriousness of the harm and the probability that it will occur, whether to participants or to third parties.

**Welfare** – The quality of a person's experience of life in all its aspects. Welfare consists of the impact on individuals and/or groups of factors such as their physical, mental, and spiritual health, as well as their physical, economic, and social circumstances.