

Research Ethics Board Annual Report to the BCIT Board of Governors (2020)

Introduction

BCIT's Research Ethics Board (REB) operates under BCIT Policy 6500.^(1,2) All research projects involving human participants or human biological materials undertaken by members of the BCIT community fall within the jurisdiction of the BCIT REB. Projects conducted by researchers from outside the BCIT community who access Institute resources (equipment, facilities, personnel, or participants) also fall within the jurisdiction of the BCIT REB when those projects involve human participants or human biological materials. The REB reports directly to the Board of Governors and is administratively responsible to the Vice President, Academic.

In carrying out its responsibility to review and approve research projects, the REB ensures that research involving human participants under the auspices of BCIT is done with due regard for ethical principles. BCIT's REB adheres to the principles set out in the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2)⁽⁴⁾ which sets the national standards that are followed across Canada. REB members are aware that research done under the auspices of BCIT carries an implied liability, and must therefore meet the highest ethical standards.

Besides protecting the interests of human participants, REB review enables BCIT researchers to maintain their eligibility for national and international research funding. In addition, the REB contributes to education in research ethics for faculty, staff and students.

Reviewing Applications

In 2020, The BCIT REB reviewed 41 applications. This represented a 141% increase over our historical (2005-2015) average of 17 applications. Applicants seeking ethics approval completed a comprehensive application form⁽³⁾ and submitted all relevant supporting documentation.

The review process involved first determining whether the project was "minimal risk." To be deemed minimal risk the project exposed the participants to no greater harm than they would normally encounter in their daily lives. Projects that exceeded minimal risk were reviewed by the full REB, whereas minimal risk projects were reviewed by a delegated review panel of two REB members. Forty applications reviewed were deemed to be of minimal risk by the Chair in consultation with the board and other REBs. One was reviewed as above-minimal risk because it involved in-person interactions during COVID-19 restrictions. Student projects (26) were circulated to the full REB for feedback.

Following REB review, applicants were informed of any revisions required, once revisions were made, projects were approved for a period of one year. In total 37/41 (90%) studies were approved. Of the four remaining studies that were not approved, two were delayed to 2021 and two were revised to be exempt from review (no human participants).

34/41 (83%) of the applicants were from BCIT. BCIT applicants were members of faculty conducting research, students, faculty and staff working towards postgraduate degrees at other institutions, and researchers in Applied Research conducting contract research projects for external clients. The remaining seven outside applications came from researchers completing graduate work at other institutions and others conducting research involving students or faculty as participants.

Faculty and student collaborative research in 2020 included nine studies (22%) submitted through the *Research Ethics BC* platform hosted by UBC (RISe/PREP). Applicants completed one online application, which was reviewed in parallel by the participating REBs—simplifying approval for REBs and researchers.

The increase in applications this year came primarily from student projects with faculty/staff submitting 15 studies (37%) and students 26 (63%). The three student groups submitting studies this year were Environmental Health (18 studies; 69% of student research), Forensics (6 studies; 23%), who both have student projects every year, and Prosthetics and Orthotics (2 studies; 8%).

Other business

Approximately 21 additional requests were received for information on REB application, including meetings with prospective applicants. 23 studies from the current year or previous years were renewed or amended. Research Ethics BC began regular group meetings every two weeks with member REBs to coordinate response to COVID-19-related research and the impact of the pandemic on research studies.

Reviewing REB Policy and Procedures

The BCIT REB website was updated to BCIT's new WordPress platform in collaboration with Joe Boyd, in Applied Research.⁽³⁾

Continuing education

To keep the board's knowledge of privacy and research ethics current, one or more board members are given the opportunity to attend national or regional ethics meetings and report back to the board. This year, one member planned to attend the national Canadian Association of Research Ethics Boards (CAREB) meeting but it was cancelled due to COVID-19. Two members attended a virtual meeting of regional ethics boards (REB West), organized jointly by UBC and SFU.

REB Membership

The members of the REB at the close of 2020 were: Meena Amlani (Faculty, Medical Radiography Technology), Francine Anselmo (Faculty, Medical Radiography Technology), Michael Bourke (*Member knowledgeable in ethics*; Program Head, Liberal Studies), Vasco Castela (*Member knowledgeable in ethics*; Faculty, Liberal Studies Department), Ron Correll (*Member knowledgeable in law*; Instructor, Department of Business Administration), Roger Gale (Instructor, Computer Information Systems Administration), Yvette Jones (Project Leader, Applied Research MAKE+), Allison Kirschenmann

(Instructor, Basic Health Sciences), Jacob McPhail (*Student member*, Software Developer, Computer Systems), Borna Nouredin (Faculty, Computer Systems & Network Fundamentals), Glynda Rees (Instructor, Bachelor of Science Nursing Program), Hal Weinberg, OBC (*Community member*). The board is supported by Jenna Clews, ARLO-Administrative Assistant Liaison Office/REB administrator and Joe Boyd, Research Liaison, Applied Research Liaison Office, who updates our website on the Applied Research pages.

The REB meets regularly every second month. Minutes of the meetings are kept.

Signed

Allison Kirschenmann
BCIT REB Chair

References

- (1) <http://www.bcit.ca/files/pdf/policies/6500.pdf>
- (2) https://www.bcit.ca/files/pdf/policies/6500_pr1.pdf
- (3) <https://www.bcit.ca/applied-research/research-support/research-ethics/>
- (4) <http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/eng/policy-politique/initiatives/tcps2-eptc2/Default/>