

**St. Thomas University  
Research Ethics Board  
Annual Report 2019-2020**

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# Research Ethics Board Annual Report 2019-2020

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## **Responsibilities of the Research Ethics Board**

Consistent with the responsibility requirements established in the Research Ethics Board Policy (approved by Senate, 2016), this report summarizes the responsibilities and activities of the REB from July 1, 2019 to Aug 30, 2020.

The responsibilities of the St. Thomas University Research Ethics Board (REB) are outlined in Article 1.2 of the St. Thomas University Research Ethics Board Policy (see Appendix A). It reads as follows:

“The St. Thomas University Research Ethics Board (REB) is responsible to the President through the Associate Vice-President (Research) of St. Thomas University for:

- developing policies regarding ethical issues relating to the use of human participants in research;
- reviewing all protocols requiring the participation of human participants for ethical approval;
- reviewing annually all policies regarding ethical issues relating to the use of human participants in research projects to ensure that policies remain current;
- dealing with matters concerned with human-based research referred to the REB by the President or their designate of STU;
- monitoring ongoing research and terminating any project that does not conform to ethical standards;
- responding to inquiries from external agencies with responsibility to monitor ethics review procedures at the University;
- preparing an annual report for submission to the President or their designate;
- participating in continuing education matters relating to ethics and the use of human participants;
- organizing educational outreach opportunities for members of the STU community in matters relating to research ethics.

The policies and practices adopted by the STU REB will be consistent with the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (current version).”

## Research Ethics Board Members, 2019-2020

| Member               | Representation               | Expiration of Appointment |
|----------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------|
| Mihailo Perunovic    | Psychology                   | June 30, 2021             |
| Martin Kutnowski     | Fine Arts                    | June 30, 2020             |
| Beth Lyons           | Community Rep                | June 30, 2020             |
| Donna Curtis Maillet | Part-time faculty            | September 30, 2021        |
| Stephen Pidwysocky   | Criminology/Criminal Justice | April 30, 2022            |
| Clive Baldwin, Chair | Social Work                  | June 30, 2021             |
| Nicholas Sehl        | Community Rep                | Sept 30, 2020             |
| Linda Caissie        | Gerontology                  | June 30, 2022             |
| Lisa Mitchell        | Education                    | June 30, 2022             |
| Renée Bourgoin       | Education                    | June 30, 2022             |

Martin Kutnowski finished his term on the Board as of 30<sup>th</sup> June 2020.

Beth Lyons resigned from the committee for personal reasons in March 2020.

*New Members as of July 2020:*

Jennifer Dickison joined the Board as of 1<sup>st</sup> July 2020 for a term of three years. Jennifer is Director of Research and Policy at the New Brunswick Women's Council.

Nicholas Sehl has been re-appointed on a two-year term as a community representative.

Two calls for members from the Arts and Humanities resulted in no response.

General information

The University endorses the ethical principles cited in the Tri-Council Policy Statement and has mandated its Research Ethics Board (REB) to ensure that all research investigations involving human participants are in compliance with the Statement.

### Scope of REB Review

The STU REB has jurisdiction over all STU Research involving human participants. As per the REB Policy (see Preamble), "STU Research" is that which is conducted:

- by members of the STU community (including faculty, students, and staff)
- by researchers in formal collaboration with STU members (e.g. co-investigator from another university or organization); or
- at STU or otherwise through the STU community (e.g. recruitment from STU community)

All STU Research which involves human participants must have ethical approval from the REB prior to commencement. In the case of undergraduate research that does not pose more than minimum risk to participants, ethics approval may be granted by a

research ethics committee at the departmental or program level, as per Section 2.7 of the REB Senate Policy (2016).

## **Activities of the REB: July 1, 2019 – June 30, 2020**

### ***1) Review of research ethics applications and management of active files***

A central activity of the REB is reviewing research ethics applications presented by STU researchers and those wishing to conduct research within the STU community. All such research involving human participants must be approved by the REB before it can commence. During the last year, the REB reviewed and approved 27 files, which is a slight increase on the number of files processed last year (23). 23 files have been approved, four are awaiting revisions. The Board also received 10 amendment applications, all of which were approved.

Researchers reported 12 studies concluded and had their files closed and 45 files were renewed for another year.

The REB had 60 active research files as of June 30, which includes the administrative work of renewing and closing existing files, as well as ongoing consultation with researchers involved in existing projects.

No adverse events were reported.

We have been seeing an increase in the number of enquiries about the need for REB approval. Several were about whether student projects required REB approval, several around classroom projects, and two about whether the project constituted research or project evaluation/development.

The Chair of the Board presented to the Sociology Honours students as part of their Honours workshop in preparation for their thesis research. This will be reprised in the Fall 2020.

Dr Baldwin, as Chair of the REB, attended the Chairs and Directors meeting in January 2020.

### ***2) The TCPS2 (2014): Professional Development***

As this document guides all activities, policies, and procedures of the REB, a number of measures are taken each year to ensure familiarity and compliance with the Policy Statement. These include:

#### *CORE Tutorial Certification*

Given how essential it is that all REB members become intimately familiar with the Tri-Council Policy Statement, all members of the STU REB are required to complete the TCPS2 CORE (Course on Research Ethics) tutorial and submit completion certificates to the Office of Research Services.

#### *Professional Development*

This year, plans have been disrupted by Covid-19. The annual CAREB conference, which two Board members in addition to the REB Co-ordinator were planning to attend, was cancelled.

Similarly, it has not been possible to arrange the proposed Board discussion with Prof Will van den Hoonaard re alternative ways of conducting ethical review. This will be scheduled once the current restrictions are lifted.

## **Plans for REB in 2020-2021**

### ***1) Review of research ethics applications and management of active files***

The REB will continue the work of reviewing research files and consulting with STU researchers. Dr Baldwin completes his three year-term as Chair of the REB as of 30<sup>th</sup> June 2021. Arrangements need to be made for either renewal of Dr Baldwin's term or finding a new Chair. Given the activity of the REB, it is highly recommended that this matter be addressed well in advance of the academic year 2021-22.

We will review the current Jotforms to iron out a number of wrinkles in the process. While the large majority of applications are completed and received without problem, there have been a few occasions when the Jotform system has not saved an applicant's work.

### ***2) Educational Activities & Professional Development***

It is still the practice to require Board members to complete the TCPS CORE training. Jennifer Dickison has done so.

If the annual CAREB conference is held in this coming year, the Research Co-ordinator and two members of the REB will attend.

#### **Presentation at 2020-2021 Chairs & Directors and AMC Meetings**

It has been regular practice for the REB Chair to present to the Departmental Chairs & Directors at one of their monthly meetings, as well as the administrative teams at an AMC meeting. Given the current situation with Covid-19, it is not known if this will happen this semester. It is strongly recommended to keep open this option for later in the year.

## **Response to Covid-19**

In a recent survey conducted by the Faculty Association, concern was expressed about the possible disruption to research and potential delays in the review process. In response, the Board circulated some initial guidance addressing some of the foreseeable amendments that faculty be required to make due to Covid-19. The Board has received only a handful of amendment requests due to restrictions imposed by Covid-19. All of these were dealt with promptly.

The Board has continued its work throughout the closure of the University and there have received no reports of delays or lack of timeliness in processing applications or dealing with enquiries. The Board has demonstrated further flexibility by reviewing applications made after the usual two-week deadline for meetings and has convened to review a time-sensitive application in the summer period.

