

**St. Thomas University
Research Ethics Board
Annual Report 2024-2025**

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Research Ethics Board Annual Report 2024-2025

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1. Responsibilities of the Research Ethics Board

Consistent with the responsibility requirements established in the Research Ethics Board Policy (approved by Senate, 2022), this report summarizes the responsibilities and activities of the REB from July 1, 2023, to June 30, 2024.

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).”

2. Research Ethics Board Members, 2022-2023

<i>Member</i>	<i>Representation</i>	<i>Expiration of Appointment</i>
Nick Sehl	Community Rep	June 30, 2022/extended to June 30, 2025
Donna Curtis Maillet	Community Rep	Reappointed to June 30, 2025
Linda Caissie	Gerontology	December 31, 2022/Reappointed to December 31, 2025
Clive Baldwin, Chair	Social Work	Reappointed to June 30 th 2027

Sandra Thomson	Psychology	January 1, 2024-December 31, 2024
Karla O'Regan	Criminology and Criminal Justice	January , 2024 - December 31, 2025

Changes to membership

Clive Baldwin had his term renewed as Chair until June 30, 2027.

Donna Curtis Maillet was re-appointed to the Board as a community representative until June 30, 2024.

3 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).

4 Activities of the REB: July 1, 2024– June 30, 2025

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 28 files, 20 were approved, two did not respond to the Board’s comments. Researchers reported 13 studies concluded and had their files closed. 31 files were renewed for another year.

The REB had 75 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.

12 requests for amendments were submitted and approved.

There has been an uptick in the number of enquires to the REB regarding the necessity to submit student thesis proposals for REB review and from faculty about current and future research proposals. We have not, until now, made official note of such enquiries but will look to do so in the future. It is clear that student projects at minimum risk are to be reviewed at Departmental level.

There has also been an uptick in requests for advice regarding whether projects are exempt from REB review as they might be considered evaluation or improvement studies. The Chair has met with a number of faculty on this – though no formal note of such enquiries has been kept.

2. Delegated review.

STU has reciprocal arrangements with UNB regarding ethical approval of research proposals. This does not extend currently to other Universities. Following multiple requests for ethics approval from researchers from other Universities already with ethics approval from their home institution, the REB decided that such applications need only go to the REB meetings if the two delegated REB reviewers identified outstanding ethical issues that are STU-related.

3. Policies and procedures

The Board has flagged two policy developments for the coming year: the use of AI, and (re)appointments to the Board. These will be addressed as time allows. It is noted that there are others working on AI issues in the academy and the REB will take these into account.

4. The TCPS2 (2022): Professional Development

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

CORE Tutorial Certification

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. This has been updated to CORE2-2022, and all REB members have been encouraged to complete the new course.

The Board now require applicants to include CORE2-2022 certificates for their research assistants and encourage faculty to update their certificate when applying.

Following, the June 2016 changes to the REB Senate policy that require the closure of all REB files that have been active for five years or more, two researchers were contacted and asked to reapply with updated documentation.

4.2 Professional Development

The REB Coordinator attended CAREB 2024 virtually. Emphasis was on AI technology and what it means for the future, on Research Security and Research Ethics, Innovative designs for adaptive platform trials, as well as Equity Diversity and Inclusion with insights in Indigenous communities and peoples in research ethics.

5. Plans for REB in 2024-2025

5.1 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. The board will work on a Data Management Strategy.

5.2 Recruitment of a replacement member for the committee.

The Committee is currently dominated by the social sciences. Recruitment for the replacement member will thus focus on the arts and humanities. Further, due to the number and frequency of applications from the Department of Psychology, it would be helpful to retain a member of the Board from that Department. One member will complete her term in December 2024, with the two community members completing their terms in June 2025. The TCPS requires REBs to have at least one community member, so this will become an important issue in the Winter semester 2025.

5.3 TCPS2 (2022) Compliance

As part of the REB's annual efforts to ensure compliance with the TCPS2 (2022), a number of review and revision processes are planned for the 2024-2025 year. These include the ongoing development and maintenance of the REB website and online application form. Best practices continue to be recorded and developed alongside research ethics resources.

6 Educational Activities & Professional Development

The REB plans to continue to provide opportunities for ethics education through a variety of activities:

6.1 Preparation of Interpretation Documents

In response to frequently asked questions from STU researchers, the REB will continue its efforts to provide online resources for some of the more common terms and questions found concerning the TCPS2 (2014). Resources are posted on the ethics section of the STU website.

6.3 Training Seminar/Workshop

It has also been a regular practice over the past few years for the REB to organize educational seminars and workshops for the STU community. This year, the Chair of the Board has presented on research ethics to the Dept of Sociology honours student seminar, the Dept of Psychology honours student seminar, the School of Social Work students on social action placements.

6.4 CAREB and CARA Conferences Attendance

In keeping with past practice, participation at both the regional and national research ethics conferences will be encouraged for the REB Chair, REB Coordinator, and all REB members (funds permitting).

6.5 Modernization and Documentation of REB Processes

Work with Josh Leslie of Stewardly, has stopped and the program no longer exists. The REB Coordinator will review files and notify PI's as their files come due for renewal.

REB forms are now available as MS forms. Although there were some initial glitches in the system, most of these seem to have been resolved. The REB application will be reviewed and made more user-friendly.

7. Departmental Reviews

No Faculty members reported studies done within their departments which needed REB.