



2007

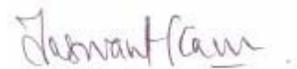
Annual Report of the Research Ethics Board

George Brown College
Research Ethics Board
June 2008



A Message from the Chair of the Research Ethics Board

I am pleased to introduce the first annual report of the Research Ethics Board at George Brown College. This report reflects the activities of the Board and the consolidation of the review process from the Board's inception in February 2007 to its first anniversary in February 2008. The culture of ethical reflection on research involving human participants progressively permeates through the College community. Through the collective education of the Board, we have gained experience through our monthly meetings, received feedback from the College community and pursued professional development opportunities. The Board expresses its appreciation to the Office of the Applied Research and Innovation for the excellent, attentive support it has received.



Jaswant Kaur, PhD
Chair, Research Ethics Board

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About this Report

The Research Ethics Board (REB) at George Brown College (GBC) publishes annual reports to inform the College community about its role, achievements and future plans. Far more than a recap of the REB's activities, this first report documents how various departments and divisions at GBC are working together to strengthen the vibrant research ethics culture within the College. This report will provide a brief summary of the role and activities of the REB, as well as outlining proposed activities for 2008-2009.

Overview of Research Ethics at George Brown College

GBC is committed to the highest ethical and academic excellence for its students, faculty and staff. GBC respects the academic freedom of all research conducted with its support, as well as ensuring that this research meets the highest academic standards. The College requires research conducted on its employees, students and/or equipment and facilities to be carried out using ethical and moral research practices. The conscious commitment of GBC to upholding modern standards of research ethics has led to a policy obliging all research projects conducted under the auspices of the College, irrespective of the source of financial support or location of research, to undergo a research ethics review.

The REB is a vital part of research at the College. The primary purpose of the REB is to ensure that ethical principles are applied to research. The REB endorses and uses the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS)* as a guide. In the event of a problem or discrepancy with a research protocol, researchers and the REB consult the TCPS.

George Brown College's Research Ethics Policy

GBC's research ethics policy, *Ethics Guidelines & Review Process for Research Involving Human Subject*, applies to all faculty, staff and students regardless of where their research is conducted. The policy states that all research involving humans, even when conducted by researchers who are not affiliated with the College but who may access its resources (either equipment or personnel), falls within the jurisdiction of the REB. The policy clearly states that no research on human participants shall be undertaken without the prior approval of the REB.

The REB ensures that the highest ethical standards are met and maintained from the time the research proposal is submitted, throughout the data collection stage, to the dissemination of results. The Board is accountable to ensure that all research involving human subjects conforms to the ethical standards outlined in the College policy. In reviewing each research protocol the Board ensures compliance by articulation of TCPS guidelines; measures for adherence to those principles; anticipation of consequences; respect for individual and collective human rights; identification and reporting of code violations; and broad dissemination of a code. The core guiding principles outlined in the Tri-Council Policy Statement include:

- Respect for human dignity,
- Respect for free and informed consent,
- Respect for vulnerable persons,
- Respect for privacy and confidentiality,
- Respect for justice and inclusiveness,
- Balancing harms and benefits,
- Minimizing harm,
- Maximizing benefit.

The Research Ethics Board

The REB functions with the commitment and hard work of its faculty, legal and community members. All members of the Board have experience with the due diligence involved in human research. It has been an exciting year to apply this expertise to overseeing ethical conduct of research. During the first year of its operation, the Board has shown commitment to meet the challenges and ensure consistent conformity to the TCPS ethical guidelines. Meetings allowed our members to learn from one another through discussion and deliberation. We also had excellent learning opportunities to enhance our skills and develop collective knowledge as a Board.

REB Members

Jaswant Kaur, Ph.D.

Chair, Center for Preparatory and Liberal Studies

P. Christopher Timusk, M.Sc.F.

Center for Construction and Engineering Technologies

Mariana Ionescu, Ph.D.

Centre for Business Arts and Design

Sarah Evans

Centre for Community and Health Sciences

Alternate Members

Rose-Marie Nigli

Student Affairs

Paula Johnson Tew, M.B.A., Ph.D.

Centre for Hospitality and Culinary Arts

Ethics Review Processes and Statistics

A. Total Research Ethics Submissions

Table 2 displays the total number of new research applications, annual renewal applications and study completion reports received by the REB from February '07 to February '08. On average the REB reviewed 3.75 new REB protocol applications per month. This far exceeded the REB's expectations and reflects GBC's growing culture of research.

Table 2. Total number of REB applications, renewals and study completion reports from February '07 to February '08.

| | New Research Protocols | Annual Renewals | Study Completion Reports |
|--------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------------|---|
| Total | 45 | 2 | 5 |

Ethics Review Processes and Statistics

B. Type of Research Ethics Submission

Ninety percent of ethics protocols from February 2007 to February 2008 were reviewed by the expedited process. An expedited review is conducted by one member of the REB and the Chair. Risk is the primary criterion used to determine if a protocol may be reviewed through the expedited process. The Tri-Council Policy Statement states that: “if potential subjects can reasonably be expected to regard the probability and magnitude of possible harms implied by participation in the research to be no greater than those encountered by the subject in those aspects of his or her everyday life that relate to the research, then the research can be regarded as within the range of minimal risk.”

Reviews may also be expedited if:

- The review is an annual renewal of a project previously approved by the REB, and the “open file” is up to date.
- The research involves only review of patient records by hospital personnel.
- The Principal Researcher submits a letter of affirmation confirming that conditions laid down by the REB have already been approved by another institution or funding agency.

Ethics Review Processes and Statistics

C. Institutional Origin of Research Submissions

Nearly half of all proposals reviewed by the REB this year were submitted by GBC faculty with no other institutional collaboration (Figure 1). The next-highest number of submissions came from projects led by GBC researchers with collaboration from researchers based at other institutions, then from researchers based at other institutions conducting research at GBC, while fewest submissions came from researchers based at other institutions with collaboration from GBC researchers.

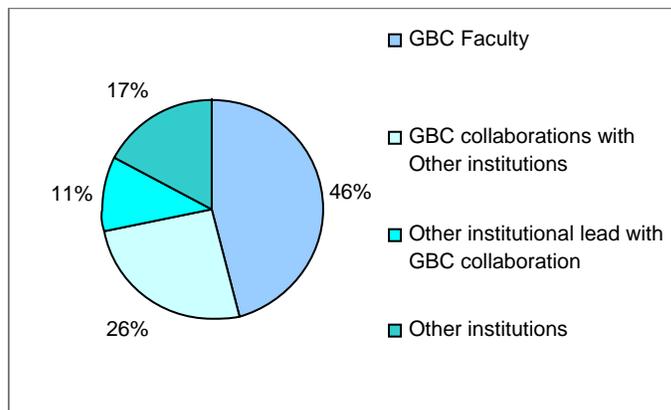


Figure 1. Institutional origin of REB applications from February '07 to February '08 in percent.

Ethics Review Processes and Statistics

D. Breakdown of REB Submissions by GBC Centre

Although most of the GBC centres were active in research this year, more applications came from the Community Services and Health Sciences centre than any other (Figure 2).

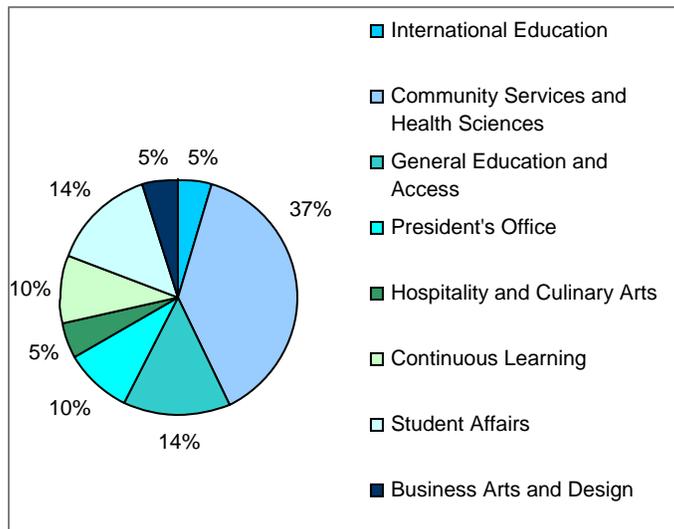


Figure 2. Breakdown of REB submission by GBC centre from February '08 to February '08 in percent.

Ethics Review Processes and Statistics

E. Turn-Around Time

Turn-around time is the duration between receiving an ethics protocol submission and the final approval of that protocol. Table 1 describes the average turn-around time for full and expedited reviews from February 2007 to February 2008.

Table 1. Average turn around time for REB protocols from February 2007 to February 2008.

| Type of Research Protocol | Average Turn-Around Time |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| Full Review | 25 days |
| Expedited Review | 17.5 days |

Some of the common setbacks faced by the Board that added to turn-around time and required additional rounds of revisions and review include:

- Incomplete or poorly written protocols,
- Inconsistencies within the application,
- Inaccessible language of the consent form and information letter,
- Inconsistencies with the TCPS guidelines.

In the case of an incomplete or incorrectly filled form, the protocol may be sent back with the request for resubmission once the protocol has been amended. In order to minimize the processing time, the REB recommends that researchers read through the Tri- Council Policy Statement before preparing a protocol submission. The Board would appreciate researcher responses to reviewer comments in order to make any clarifications that might help the protocol to be processed for approval.

Professional Development

As members of a Research Ethics Board, it is important that our representatives continue to be informed and educated on the emerging issues in research ethics and ethics review. Therefore, members are encouraged to attend and participate in workshops, conferences, lectures and courses. Over the past year, the REB members have attended in the following professional development activities:

- **Training in Research Ethics Social Science and Behavioral Sciences and Humanities**, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, National Council on Ethics in Human Research, January 2008
- **Vulnerabilities: The Importance of Context in Ethical Research and Human Participant Protection**, National Conference (NCEHR), February 2008
- **Classic principles, Modern Perspectives**, CAREB AGM Meeting, Toronto, May 2008

Professional Associations

- **Member of the Canadian Association of Research Ethics Board**

Goals for 2008-2009

In the coming year the REB will focus on new initiatives to streamline the review process and develop a research ethics review system that will make the process more efficient.

Our goals for the coming year are to:

- Develop a sustainable REB system by addressing issues of recruitment, retention and recognition of REB members and chair. This will require working with deans and departmental chairs to find new and innovative ways of supporting our members.
- Work to further optimize the ethics review processes through implementation of standard operating procedures and the acquisition of an electronic data management system to streamline the review process.
- Work with other institutions within the GTA to develop policies and procedures to reduce duplication and inconsistencies of multi-centered ethics review.
- Update the ethics review submission form to help better serve the researchers and REB members.
- Improve communication throughout the research ethics process by updating the REB information provided on the Office of Applied Research and Innovation website.

Conclusion

Overall, the Board members provided extremely positive feedback about their experiences as members of the REB. We hope that the proposed improvements of 2008-2009 will help to standardize the role of the REB in GBC research. As more researchers become familiar with our process, we are certain that the significance of the REB will be recognized in the College research community. As we move forward, we will renew and strengthen our commitment to ethical standards for research involving human subjects.