

Vancouver Community College Research Ethics Board

Annual Report 2023-2024

Prepared by Alicia Copp, MLIS, PhD

Interim Chair, VCC Research Ethics Board

Introduction

The College's Research Ethics Board (REB) evaluates and monitors the quality and ethical standards of college research involving humans. The REB works to ensure that the safety, welfare, dignity and rights of research participants are protected. And the REB has the authority to terminate research activity at VCC that has not been approved or compliant.

Guiding Policies and Procedures

The most significant project the VCC REB undertook this past year, was the update of the College policies which guide our work. The VCC Applied Research policies came up for review last summer and were extensively re-written by a REB working group, led by the Interim Chair. The new policies now reflect updates to the TriCouncil Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans –TCPS 2 (2022). The policies were approved May 31, 2023 and make significant changes, shifting responsibility for REB to the Office of the Vice President, Research and Academic (VPAR).

Policy/Procedure F.1.1 Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans now outlines term-limits, an election process for Chair, requirements for reporting out, timelines for completing reviews, an appeal process, as well as a process for course-based ethical review, among other items. Policy/Procedure F.1.2 Ethics and Integrity in Research and Scholarly Activity now offers examples of research misconduct and details a process and timeline for handling allegations of research misconduct. These changes bring the VCC REB into alignment with other institutions and increase transparency and accountability.

A significant update to the policies includes drawing the updated Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2) Chapter 9: Research Involving Indigenous Peoples, which outlines key researcher responsibilities. Further, in view of VCC's commitment to decolonization, indigenization and reconciliation our updated policies have also reserved a seat for an Indigenous community member. Indigenous ways and knowledge offer tremendous value to our college, community, and environment. Indigenous representation and input into the ethical conduct of research, and we have been honored to offer this 3-year

renewable term to Elder Glida Morgan, of the Tla'amin Nation. She is a welcome addition to the board and brings a range of experiences, including work as an Elder with Vancouver Coast Health.

Membership Updates

Following Tri-Council Policies, our REB must “consist of at least five (5) members, including broad gender representation, of whom: a. at least two (2) possess broad expertise in the methods or in the areas of research that are covered by the REB; b. at least one (1) member is knowledgeable in ethics; c. for biomedical research, at least one (1) member is knowledgeable in the relevant law; and at least one (1) member has no affiliation with the College, recruited from the community served by the institution.”

Except for community members, all members of the REB must have current or recent experience conducting research with humans and/or research ethics expertise. Membership strives to represent the breadth of disciplines at VCC.

In September 2022, all REB members asked by David Wells, VPA, to re-apply in the autumn after the Interim Chair Alicia Copp, was appointed. Those who were interested in continuing to serve submitted their CV's, TCPS2 Certificates, and an expression of interest/expertise. Several members were re-appointed as ad hoc advisors, rather than voting members. The REB also issued a college-wide call-out and 6 new members were appointed for January 1, 2023. All members now serve a 3-year term which can be renewed once. At present the REB has the following members:

- Alicia Copp (Chair)
- Debbie Schacter (Ad Hoc Advisor, Langara)
- Helen Roberts (Ad Hoc Advisor, legal)
- Glida Morgan (Indigenous Community Member)
- Francesco Barillaro
- Emily Simpson
- Shaun Wong
- Jade MacDonald
- Andrea Korens
- Fionna Chong (new)
- Claire Hochfeld (new)
- Jennifer Kelly (new)
- Dawn Cunningham-Hall (new)
- Andrew Dunn (new)
- Teresa La Chimea (new)

Indigenous Community Member

Ensuring we have an Indigenous Community Member on the REB is an important step in VCC's journey towards decolonization and reconciliation. It opens opportunities for dialogue on ethics between Indigenous communities and participants and researchers. Much research on Indigenous peoples in Canada has been carried out by non-Indigenous researchers, and there have been many documented abuses concerning access and use of that data. However, there are now more Indigenous led research projects than ever. The research community is moving towards more meaningful collaboration and reciprocity with Indigenous participants and communities. We are beginning to consider what is Indigenous data? A survey that has a high number of Indigenous students responding, may be considered Indigenous data. Who benefits from the collection of that data? How does the research project give this data back to the community, and offer real outcomes that benefit all individuals involved?

As a traditional knowledge keeper, Elder Glida Morgan brings a new and welcome perspective on research. She is not serving just to review Indigenous research projects, but to review all projects as we work as a collective.

Approvals

The REB approved 12 new research projects this year. Most projects included an internal VCC employee as a Researcher, and in the majority, as the Lead Researcher. However, many projects involved other institutions and REB approval from those institutions as well. To give a sense of the collaborative nature of research endeavors and networks, affiliated institutions included: Simon Fraser University, University of British Columbia, Capilano University, Mowhawk College, University of Glasgow, University of Victoria, Thompson Rivers University, and Selkirk College.

Rejections

The REB rejected 1 new research project this year. This application led to important conversations within the REB about recruitment, sampling, and data retention, collection, and subsequent use. The REB collectively decided that it generally will not approve projects which utilize Institutional Research (IR) to recruit and administer surveys involving human participants which will be disseminated outside the institution. Institutional Research confirmed that such projects fall outside their mandate.

Amendments/Extensions

The REB received 4 amended project applications and 1 extension request. This does not include revisions to initial applications based on feedback. Amendments included changes to the research team, recruitment, research participant pools, data collection, etc. In all cases the amended applications went out to the original delegated reviewers to approve. This is a conscious choice on the behalf of the REB to build our knowledge and expertise collectively while working on files.

Working Groups

The REB formed two working groups this year, that met regularly to move larger projects forward. The Policy Revision working group has concluded it's work and included: Francesco Barillaro, Emily Simpson, Debbie Schacter (Langara) and the Chair.

The Course Based Review (CBR) Working Group is active and currently includes: Andrew Dunn, Andrea Korens, Jade MacDonald, and the Chair. The working group is tasked with the creation of documents outlining data storage/retention, detailing requirements for CBR and defining minimal risk. Besides creating our guidelines and forms the working group will need to increase awareness/and meet with departments when they are developing the curriculum for courses with a research component. This work has come about due to updates of Policy F.1.1, specifically:

The Chair of the REB or someone delegated by the Chair (including an REB member, or a non-REB member within the department/faculty with appropriate experience and expertise) shall have the authority to conduct an ethical review of course-based research involving humans conducted solely for pedagogical purposes. The REB Chair or delegate shall only approve course-based research involving humans that involves minimal risk to participants.

Professional Development

As an REB we are striving to learn more about Indigenous research data management as well. Three REB members this year completed an online course on this: OCAP, [The First Nations Principles of Ownership, Control, Access, and Possession](#). The purpose is to learn about, and support Indigenous rights to determining how data is collected and used. The course is currently being updated and has temporarily closed to registration, but the Office of the VPAR has committed to funding further REB members for this training.

This year REB Members have attended BC Campus Events, KT Connects Health Research Events (Kwantlen), UBC Humanities Hub Events, Research Ethics BC, Extended Learning UBC, and many area specific conferences.

Other Professional Development:

- Canadian Association of Research Ethics Board (CAREB) Conference (Alicia Copp & Dawn Cunningham-Hall, funded by the Office of the VPAR)
- REBC Harmonization Retreat – Hosted by the Michael Smith Foundation at the False Creek Community Centre (Alicia Copp)
- REBC Research Ethics Board Administrators (REBA) Meeting – the Chair attends this monthly meeting which brings together research ethics board administrators and some REB Chairs from across the province to network and participate in learning opportunities.

Speakers

Elder Sharon Jinkerson Brass, knowledge holder and elder from the Key First Nations, visited the REB to speak about Indigenous research: projects led by Indigenous researchers, Indigenous research methods, and working with Indigenous research participants, in particular marginalized women on the DTES. The REB read her recently published article: Jinkerson-Brass S. Creating Oneness-Ceremonial Research. The Journal of the Association of Nurses in AIDS Care : JANAC. 2022 Nov-Dec 01;33(6):646-656. DOI: 10.1097/jnc.0000000000000359. PMID: 36094468.

Shortly after visiting the REB, Jinkerson-Brass was awarded an Honorary Doctorate of Laws, from the University of Saskatchewan, and addressed the graduating class at the Spring 2023 convocation. Read more here: <https://news.usask.ca/articles/colleges/2023/leader-in-indigenizing-research-recognized-with-usask-honorary-degree.php>

Collaborations and Future Directions

- Memorandum of Agreement
VCC embarked on initiating a reciprocal agreement to handle REB appeals.
- Harmonization
VCC REB voted to join the harmonized system. Next fiscal REB members will undertake training. Once our REB completes training to join the RISE system via UBC, we will only review multi-jurisdictional projects if we are the “board of record” or the place where the research will primarily take place. This makes things so much easier for researchers and offers a great opportunity to ensure our practices align with other institutions.

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the ongoing administrative support provided to the REB, by Lucia Zabrieszach, Executive Assistant, Office of the Vice President, Academic & Research. I would also like to acknowledge the dedication of our Research Ethics Board members, who commit to attending meetings, undertaking training, and completing delegated reviews with little notice, despite their many other duties at the college.