MEMO

ATTENTION: Senate
FROM: Kristie Westerlaken, Director, Research Ethics
RE: Research Ethics and Research Ethics Board Annual Senate Report (consolidated for 2018-2022)
DATE: November 15, 2022

I am submitting, on behalf of Research Ethics and the Research Ethics Board, the Annual Report to Senate. As the last Annual Report was provided in 2018, this is a consolidated report spanning the time frame from September 1, 2018 to August 31, 2022.

Sincerely,

Kristie Westerlaken
Director, Research Ethics

Enclosure

RESEARCH ETHICS AND RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD ANNUAL REPORT TO SENATE[1]

Introduction

Research Ethics (RE) facilitates ethics governance for all research projects that use human materials and/or information and that are conducted under the auspices of or affiliations with Simon Fraser University (SFU). RE is also responsible for administration relating to the SFU Research Ethics Board (REB) and sub-committees. In addition, RE personnel are appointed as non-voting REB members and act as delegated reviewers for minimal risk projects pursuant to the authority granted to them by the REB, and as per the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2, 2018) which is the joint policy of Canada's three federal research agencies – the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR), the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada (NSERC), and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC).

This report will cover the period from September 1, 2018 to August 31, 2022, and includes a list of current people associated with RE and the REB, highlights of key activities, and future directions. Finally, various metrics are reported in Appendix 'A'.

People

Current RE personnel and REB members are listed below:

RE

Dr Kristie Westerlaken	Director
Dr Kim Lajoie	Research Ethics Officer
Samantha Roper	Research Ethics Officer
Candase Jensen	Research Ethics Officer

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[1] The last available annual report covered the 2017-2018 reporting period. This report provides a consolidated overview of activities from September 1, 2018 to August 31, 2022.

REB

Member (all listed are voting members)	Position	Faculty/School
Dr Wendy Loken Thornton	Chair	Arts and Social Sciences, Psychology
Dr Victoria Claydon	Deputy Chair	Science, Biomedical Physiology and Kinesiology
Dr Jeremy Snyder	Ethicist/ Scientific Member	Health Sciences
Dr Helene Love	Legal Representative/ Scientific Member	Arts and Social Sciences, Criminology
Wayne Marigold	Community Representative	n/a
Kristie Nicol	Community Representative	n/a
Dr Malcolm Steinberg	Medical Representative/ Scientific Member	Health Sciences
Dr Teresa Cheung	Scientific Member	Science, Engineering Science
Dr Geoffrey Poitras	Scientific Member	Beedie School of Business
Dr David Whitehurst	Scientific Member	Health Sciences
Dr Robert Williamson* *on leave	Scientific Member	Education
Dr Jean-Christophe Bélisle-Pipon	Alternate Ethicist/ Scientific Member	Health Science
Dr Alissa Antle* *on leave	Scientific Member	Communication, Art and Technology, School of Interactive Art and Technology
Dr Angela McIntyre	Indigenous Representative/ Scientific Member	Research Associate, Health Sciences
Vienna Lam	Postgraduate Student Member	Arts and Social Sciences, Criminology
Caitlin Courchesne	Postgraduate Student Member	Arts and Social Sciences, Psychology
Judit Nagy	Undergraduate Student Member	Arts and Social Sciences

Highlights of key activities

Two significant events impacted RE and REB during this reporting period – the implementation of a new online ethics application system (Kuali) and, of course, the COVID-19 pandemic. Other important activities include a shift to building research capacity and engagement with the broader research community, as well as more specifically, a focus on Indigenous Research Ethics.

On November 23, 2020, RE launched Kuali after having only 4 months to quickly pivot to the Kuali platform when unforeseen issues arose during the implementation of another system resulting in it being abandoned and alternate solutions sought. The project team for the Kuali implementation worked quickly and efficiently in order to ensure the platform launched with as little disruption as possible. All current members of RE – Candase Jensen, Samantha Roper and Dr. Kim Lajoie - were instrumental in working together as a team by contributing their knowledge and expertise to operationalizing the system, while also ensuring that daily operational activities continued effectively and efficiently.

Kuali has proved to be an effective tool at managing applications submitted for ethics review. The application forms are easy to use and dynamic which allows them to be designed and adapted as necessary. This assists in the process of ethics review as it allows flexibility in the development of questions and pathways for the flow of information that is required in order to undertake the ethical review of the project. Anecdotally, it appears the new system is reducing the number of revisions requested for each application, thereby reducing the administrative burden to researchers and RE. Additionally, study applications are now easier to access for research ethics reviewers. As there has now been a sufficient period of time for Kuali to become familiar within the community, RE is now planning to investigate the potential for improving functionality in the standard processes, but also available options to assist with data capture and reporting.

As was the case globally, the COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted the SFU research community and caused disruption and stoppage to hundreds of active studies. On March 23, 2020, the REB announced that all in-person research activities were suspended until further notice. If feasible, projects could be moved online upon submission of an amendment to the project. The monthly REB meetings were also moved to an online format.

On July 23, 2020, a return to in person research activities could occur if a Human Participant Research (HPR) Safety Plan was submitted for review and approval, along with the standard ethics application. On July 21, 2021, SFU moved to a university-wide Communicable Disease Plan and HPRs were no longer required for in person research activities. As at August 31, 2022, research activities are slowly starting to return to pre-Covid states with an increase noted in in person activities.

RE has implemented several initiatives to increase engagement with the research community. During the Kuali implementation period, RE travelled and attended Faculty/School department meetings to share updates and receive feedback. Education and training to graduate and undergraduate students via class presentations and workshops continues to grow each year. RE also started hosting a drop-in help session (conducted online via Zoom) which has been held 3-4 times a week since then. During these sessions, researchers have the opportunity to seek advice about their specific project or general questions. In the 2021-2022 academic year, 506 researchers accessed the help line, and there has been considerable positive feedback received in support of the initiative.

Finally, having regard to the reconciliation and decolonization work being done across SFU In recognition of the Truth and Reconciliation Council and SFU Aboriginal Reconciliation Council report, RE and the REB continue to re-evaluate how research ethics review is conducted at SFU when the research involves Indigenous peoples and communities, and are committed to improving research ethics practices. In the spring of 2022, with the support of the VPRI, RE and select members of the REB commenced a consultative series of Indigenous Dialogues with SFU Indigenous faculty members, and external collaborators and speakers. The intention of the

Indigenous Dialogues and Speaker Series is to support implementation of the University's commitments to Indigenous ethics, ethical reconciliation and Indigenous resurgence. Early stages have been met with significant positivity, but given the complexities involved, there is considerable work still to be done.

Future directions

RE and the REB will continue participating in the Indigenous Dialogues series with tentative dates already scheduled for late 2022 and 2023. Over the summer, RE engaged in various internal planning sessions with a view to developing a strategic plan, as well as vision and mission statements, and team values. In addition, a systematic review of responsibilities, policies, procedures and processed is under way with the primary aim to improve operational effectiveness and efficiencies. RE will also continue to emphasize engagement with the research community, including developing formal and informal training and educational opportunities for faculty and students, with a particular focus on Responsible Conduct of Research.

Appendix "A" – Metrics[2]

Research ethics applications are either deemed to be minimal risk or above minimal risk with the majority of projects being categorized as minimal risk. Minimal risk projects proceed through the delegated review pathway which means they are reviewed by the RE personnel by virtue of the REB Chair delegating them the authority to review these projects. There is no submission deadline – projects are reviewed in the order that they are submitted. Above minimal risk projects are reviewed via the 'full board' review pathway which means that they must be submitted by a certain date to be considered for placement on the Agenda for the next monthly REB meeting. There is a 2.5 week period between the submission date and the REB meeting which is included in the calculation of turnaround times.

In the past four years, the number of applications submitted for research ethics review has steadily increased except for the 2019-2020 academic year which included the initial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. The 2021-2022 academic year received the highest number of initial applications yet with 621 (Figure 1).

Figure 1: 2018 to 2022: Total minimal and above minimal risk new applications received during the academic year

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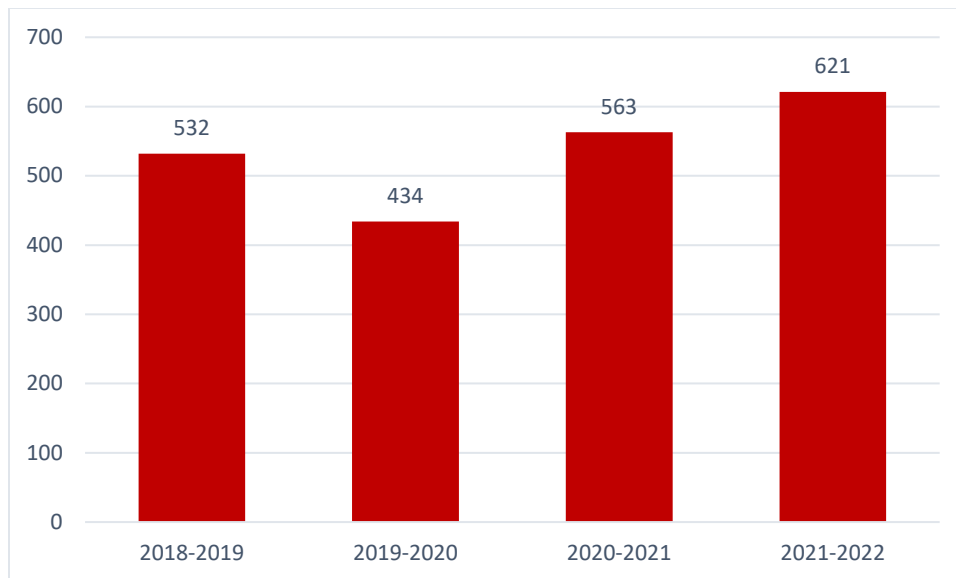
[2] Data is reported differently in the figures because it was retrieved from two systems over the reporting periods and data collection parameters differed.

Research ethics oversight continues throughout the lifecycle of the project and includes reviewing post approval activities such as amendments and annual renewals. Figures 2-4 below illustrate the number of initial applications and post approval activities reviewed for the academic years 2019-2020, 2020-2021, and 2021-2022.

Figure 2: 2019-2020 Initial and post approval activities for minimal and above minimal risk projects
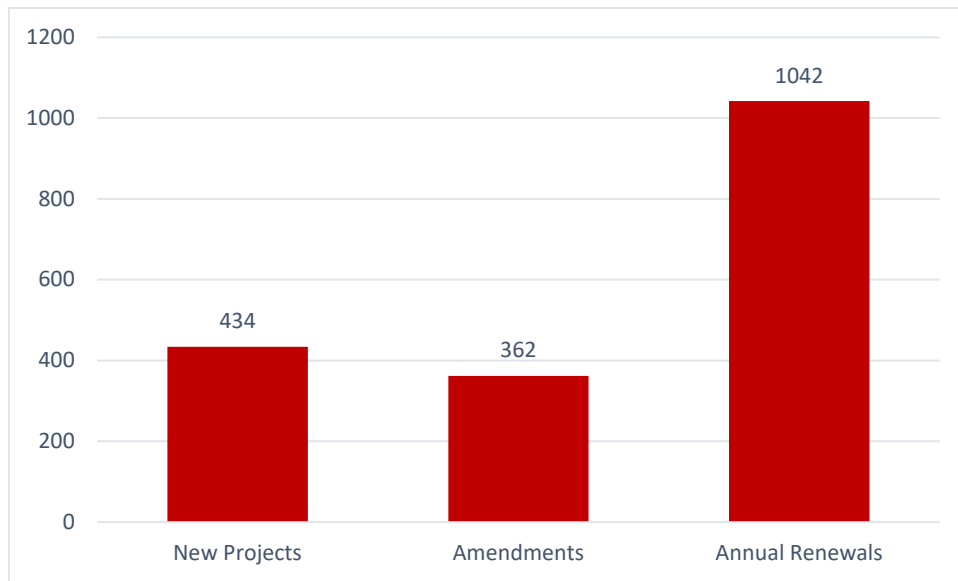

Figure 3: 2020-2021 Initial and post approval activities for minimal and above minimal risk projects
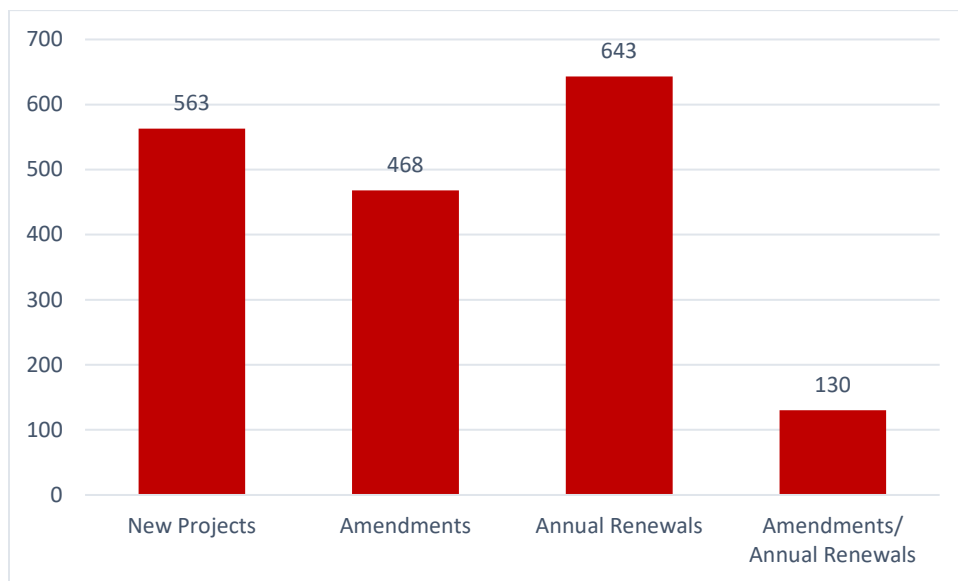
Figure 4: 2021-2022 Initial and post approval activities for minimal and above minimal risk projects
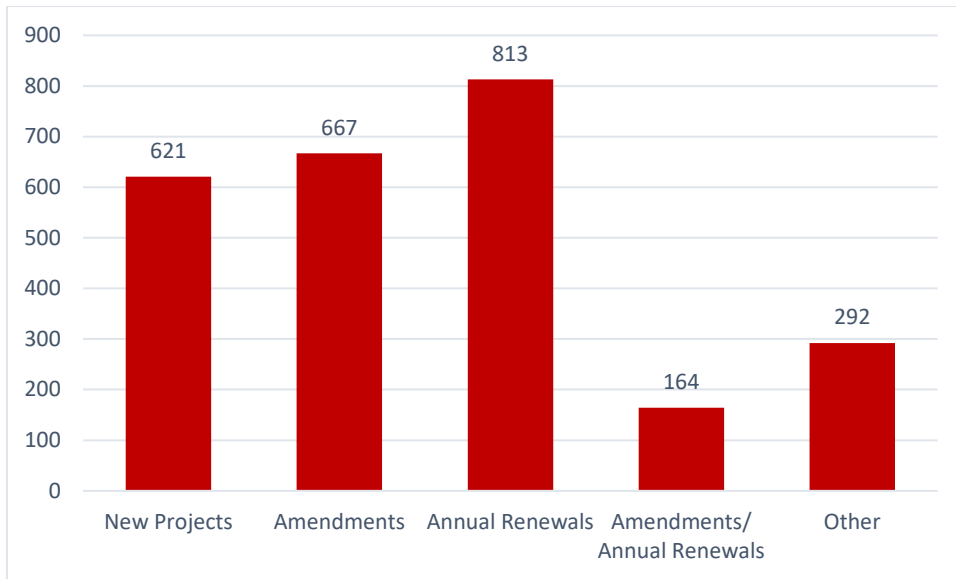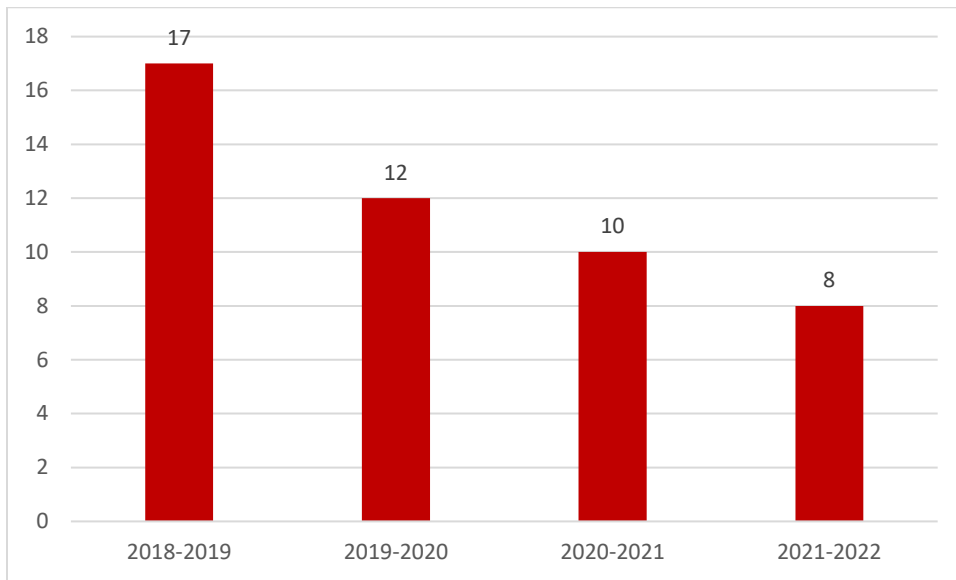

Figure 5: 2018 to 2022: Total above minimal risk new applications received during the academic year

The decrease in above minimal risk submissions may be attributed to lab closures and in person research, particularly with vulnerable groups, which was halted due to COVID-19.

Turnaround times

The figures below provide information relating to the time taken from initial submission to issuing of the Certificate of Approval for both minimal and above minimal risk projects.   It is important to note that multiple factors influence approval times, including: necessity to consult ad hoc groups (e.g., legal, privacy, other colleagues, etc.); the contextual complexities of the project; and, importantly, the quality of the application. Poor quality applications take substantially longer to review than do well written, carefully prepared applications. Turnaround times are not the sole responsibility of RE, but rather a shared responsibility amongst multiple stakeholders, including the researchers.

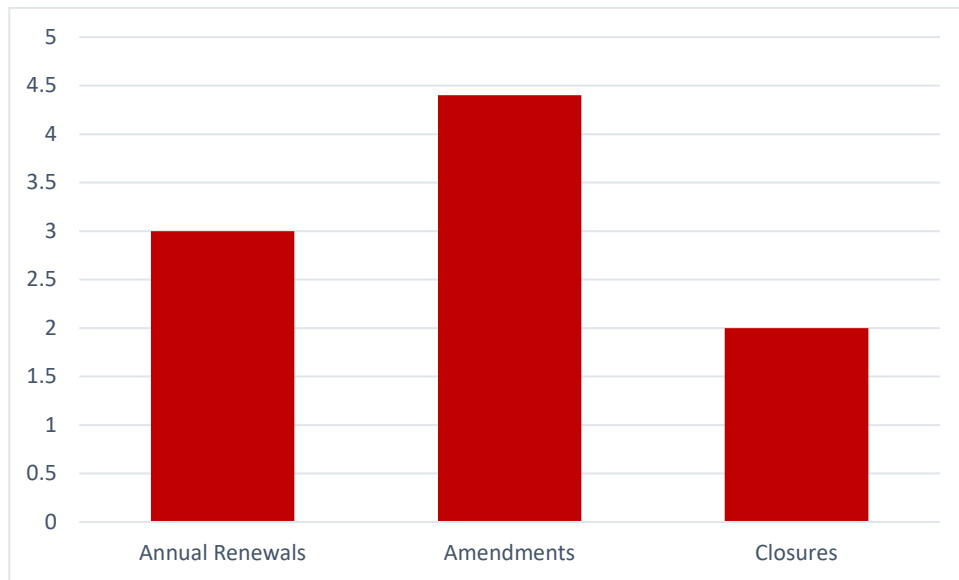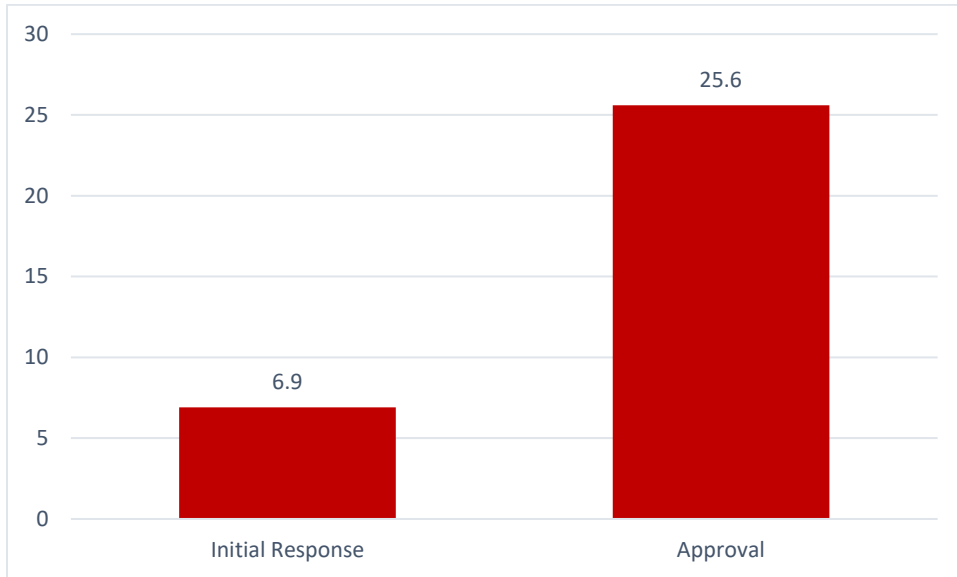**Figure 6: 2021-2022 Minimal risk post approval activities – average turnaround time in days**

Figure 7 – 2020-2021 Minimal risk post approval activities – average turnaround time in days

Figure 8: 2021-2022 Minimal risk post approval activities – average turnaround time in days