



Laurentian University Université Laurentienne

**Annual Report – 2012-2013
for the
Laurentian University Research Ethics Board
Prepared by Susan James, Pauline Zanetti, Robin Craig
Chair/Coordinator/Administrator**

According to the Terms of Reference for the Research Ethics Board at Laurentian University, adopted by the University Board of Governors in April 2013, the Laurentian University Research Ethics Board is mandated to present an annual report to the Board of Governors. This report will be sent to Senate for information.

Background:

All Canadian Universities must comply with TCPS2 regulations for continuing eligibility to receive and administer research funds from 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), or “the Agencies.” (see TCPS 2 section “Introduction”)

The Tri-Council Policy requires that Universities develop an Ethical Review Policy and a process which involved a single university structure, with optional departmental committees to evaluate the research of undergraduate students. The University-level Research Ethics Board is to be responsible not only for review of cases, but also for education (community and themselves) and for the administration of the ethics review process at the University in accordance with the Tri-Council Policy.

In 2010, the Tri-Council revised their policy statement TCPS2 which now guides the Laurentian University’s REB. The revised TCPS2 required the REB to update its application and reviewer grid forms as well as develop a new Terms of Reference (TOR) to reflect our compliance with the TCPS2.

The mandate of the Laurentian University Research Ethics Board (LUREB) is to review the compliance of research involving humans in accordance with the TCPS2 policies and subsequent revisions and in keeping with the core principles as defined in TCPS2. The REB will review any proposed research project that will involve humans directly or indirectly. In doing so, the REB will establish a “proportionate approach” to the review process. (TCPS 2, Chapter 1, Ethics Framework, p. 11).

Fostering a strong and credible university research community and effective research collaborations requires expressed and tangible support at the most senior levels, for the work of reviewing and ensuring the ethical conduct of research.

Committee membership March 2012 - February 2013:

Laurentian University’s Research Ethics Board operates under the Tri-Council Policy of the three Federal Granting Councils (TCPS2, 2010). According to the TCPS2, at least two members of any REB should have the “relevant knowledge and expertise to understand the content area and methodology of the proposed or ongoing research, and to assess the risks and potential benefits that may be associated with the research.” (TCPS2 p. 71) Researchers at Laurentian conduct their studies in a wide variety of disciplines using a wide variety of methods; therefore, it is important for us to have broad representation on the REB.

Member	Department	Area of expertise
Susan James (Chair)	Midwifery	Ethics, Qualitative methodologies
Rosanna Langer (Vice Chair)	Law and Justice	Law and legal issues
Taima Moeke-Pickering	Native Human Services	Indigenous research methodologies
Maurice Grzeda	Commerce	Management; education
Michael Persinger	Psychology	General knowledge; validity of measurement
Nancy Lightfoot	School of Rural and Northern Health	Epidemiology Quantitative Methods Mixed Methods
Patricia Richards (Community Member)	Probation and parole officer District of Sudbury	Community safety issues
Souhila Benabadji (Graduate Student)	Human Studies	English language teaching theories; socio-cultural theories
Pauline Zanetti (Secretary)	Research, Development, and Creativity Office	Administrative support
Robin Craig (Administrator)	Research, Development, and Creativity Office	Administrative support
Jacques Abourbih (left REB in 2013)	Northern Ontario School of Medicine	
Daniel Leduc (left REB in 2012)	College Boréal	

1. Meetings:

The REB met regularly on the first Friday of each month in 2012-2013. In addition,

as result of the number of cases, the REB met twice on a few occasions (including a retreat). The total number of meetings held between March 1st 2012 and February 28th 2013 was 10. One sub-committee was formed to work on quality indicators. No meeting this year was cancelled as result of the adoption of a qualitative quorum policy.

2. Activity during 2012-2013 period:

*Full activities of LU's REB between March 1st 2012 and February 28th 2013

Month	Expedited	Full	Modifications- Extension- Exemption	Total/month
03-12	13	1	6	20
04-12	6	3	4	13
05-12	13	3	6	22
06-12	16	5	7	28
07-12	39	1	10	50
08-12	15	2	2	19
09-12	9	2	9	20
10-12	16	2	8	26
11-12	12	3	8	23
12-12	13	1	6	20
01-13	15	2	7	24
02-13	15	1	6	22
Total	182	26	79	Total : 287

*Percentage of all processes in 2012-2013

Expedited	Full	Modif/Exten/Exemp	Total
63.4%	9.1%	27.5%	100%

3. Description of activity during the 2012-2013 period:

In addition to the reviews outlined in the table above, the REB finalized a new Terms of Reference (TOR) which was approved by the Board of Governor's (April 19, 2013). Minor modifications were made to the application and reviewer grid forms to better reflect the TCPS2.

The unanticipated departure of the Research Ethics Officer in May 2012 necessitated a change in how the applications were managed with the REB Chair and Coordinator assuming responsibility for the role of the Research Ethics Officer. A new Research Ethics Officer was appointed in January 2013.

4. Time to Completion:

a) Improved review and approval times:

The time from submission to approval averages about two weeks if the time that the reviewer comments go out to the researcher until the researcher submits the recommended revisions is removed. Exceptions include times in the year when REB members may be occupied with grading or when there is some back and forth between researcher and reviewers for more complex projects. In the past year, rarely do REB members need reminders to submit reviews. Reminders are sent out to researchers when a month (or more) has gone by from the time their reviewer comments were sent.

Contributions to improved times: small but very experienced REB team, willingness of past REB members to take on reviews – especially during the vacation period, coordination of the REB application and reviewer grid, improved familiarity with the forms (both for researchers and REB members), familiarity with some programs of research where multiple applications are submitted.

b) Change in practice re invitations for applicants including students and supervisor to attend full REB meetings:

While in previous years, applicants could ask to attend the REB meeting when their application was being reviewed by the full committee, in spring 2012 the REB decided that a more efficient approach would be to invite all researchers to attend (in person or by phone) the meeting when the application was evaluated as needing a full review. Student applicants are encouraged to invite their supervisor or another supervisory committee member to the meeting.

The researcher is asked to provide a brief summary of the research, highlighting aspects that have ethics implications. REB members will then ask questions that have arisen through their review of the application. The researcher has an opportunity to further explain aspects of the research or to note revisions to be made. The researcher is then invited to ask questions of the REB. A summary letter of all recommended revisions is sent to the researcher within a week of the REB meeting.

Very few researchers decline the invitation to meet although we have had some students attend without faculty support. The REB has received quite positive feedback from researchers – particularly that coming to the meeting has demystified the process, has helped them to better understand TCPS2 guidelines and the recommendations from the REB. The vast majority of applications are approved within two weeks of the first meeting with the REB.

c) Consistent pattern for expedited reviews:

The proportion of applications undergoing expedited (as opposed to full) reviews has increased since 2008-09 and remained consistent over the last three years.

Year	Expedited
2007-08	63.8%
2008-09	46.6%
2009-10	44.5%
2010-11	66.5%
2011-12	61.1%
2012-13	63.4%

Contributions to higher proportion in expedited reviews: clarification of strategies for evaluating level of risk in the TCPS2, experienced REB, different approach to REB reviewer questions (in the past the research ethics officer would automatically refer any expedited application to full where the reviewer asked a question; now the REB Chair will engage in a discussion with the reviewer before determining a need for full review), clarification of terminology on the application form resulting in researchers more accurately communicating the degree of risk for each project.

The TCPS2 and subsequent clarifications have led to “best practice” of using the expedited approach for applications that have already been approved at another REB regardless of level of risk. It is possible that in future, Tri-Council will recommend that one approval is adequate for multi-institutional projects but currently recommends the expedited strategy. This still gives the institution the ability to request changes that may be determined by its context. For example, at Laurentian, the REB may attend more to issues of bilingualism or indigenous populations than an REB at a large urban university. This approach does reduce the number of full reviews needed when a higher risk project has been approved by another REB and our expedited reviewers do not recommend a full review based on context concerns.

5. Departmental REBs:

All UG REBs (under graduate research ethics boards) are considered as delegated REBS and work upon the designation given by the Central REB. Their obligations are managed through the policy that follows:

In conformity with the Tri-Council Policy Statement, the Laurentian University REB is ultimately responsible for the ethical review of research involving human subjects conducted by its personnel. The REB delegates this authority to Departmental Ethics REBs in the case of the review of undergraduate students' course-related activities. There are two exceptions to this delegation:

- 1) Research conducted by undergraduate students which is part of a faculty member's own research program must be reviewed by the University REB.
- 2) If a project is deemed GREATER THAN MINIMAL RISK by the departmental REB, it must be reviewed by the University REB.

If a Departmental REB is doubtful about the risk involved in a proposal, it will consult the Chair of the University's Central REB.

Officially, there are 12 UG REB (including l'Université d'Hearst and NOSM) at LU:

Human Kinetics; Psychology/Psychologie; School of Education /École des Sciences de l'Éducation ; Comité d'éthique de la recherche de l'Université de Sudbury ; Sociology/Sociologie ; Sociology (Barrie) ; Social Work / Service Social ; School of Commerce and Administration ; Université d'Hearst ; The School of Nursing; History/Histoire. Some schools/departments no longer have a research component in their undergraduate curriculum and therefore have no review activity to report this year.

6. Summary of reported cases of UGREBs

Department	Cases reported (as of June 2013)
Human Kinetics	24
Psychology/Psychologie	45
School of Education /École des Sciences de l'Éducation	No activity reported this year
Comité d'éthique de la recherche de l'Université de Sudbury	6
Sociology/Sociologie	10
Sociology (Barrie)	3
Social Work / Service Social	No activity reported this year
Commerce and Administration/Commerce et Administration	7
Université d'Hearst	12

The School of Nursing	No activity reported this year
History/Histoire	No activity reported this year
NOSM	34
Total:	141

7. Summary of Achievements:

- a) **TOR:** One of this year's most important achievements was the establishment of a Terms of Reference for the REB. The TOR is an update of the *Policy and Procedures for the Ethics of Human Research at Laurentian University* that date from May 31 2000 to bring the new TOR in line with the most recent updates to the TCPS2. The elaboration, completion and final approval of the TOR by BOG, was a long process. In the absence of the updated TOR, the LUREB could not recruit new members, nor appoint an official Chair and Vice Chair.

Outcome: REB now able to recruit new members and was able to appoint a Chair and a Vice Chair.

- b) **Board meetings with students and supervisors:** increase; more students attending REB board meeting (for full review) with their supervisors

Outcome: REB members help students work through complex ethical issues; students have the opportunity to explain and elucidate parts of their projects for the reviewers. Supervisors often gain insight into the ethical dimensions of human subject research. Overall a very positive experience for both the supervisor and student

- c) **Meetings with individual students and supervisors:** Meetings of researchers, students and supervisors with the research office or REB chair to discuss ethics questions and strategies increased.

Outcome: heightened awareness of TCPS2 requirements; improved applications; conflict resolution

- d) **Departmental presentations:** Human Kinetics, Social Work, School of Northern and Rural Health, Radiation Therapy, INORD

Outcome: heightened awareness of TCPS2 requirements; improved applications

8. Challenges:

- a) **Profile of the REB on campus: In the past, we have had negative feedback about the REB and TCPS2 including:** fear of unnecessary revisions and hold ups, dislike of the process and forms and resistance to add an ethics review to a research project even when it is quite evident that a review is necessary. Communication from researchers may

reflect a change in attitudes toward the REB.

Some messages:

Feb 13, 2013

Hi!

Thanks for the information! Here is the proper request for revision form. ... much simpler!!

Thanks

February 14, 2013

Thanks. I am impressed by the speed of response. Nice!

Will respond ASAP etc.

February 22, 2013

Thank you very much for a prompt reply, your work is much appreciated.

Strategy: continuing education; face-to-face meetings between REB, faculty, and students; raise awareness of TCPS2 requirements

b) Lack of web presence on the LU website: The new website does not have a means to access the REB materials other than via the intranet. Given the emphasis on collaborative research, investigators who do not have access to LUNET (principle investigators at other universities, students at other universities, researchers from the community) have no direct access to REB applications, policies and procedures, and dates of meetings. Even LU faculty and staff often find access to these materials via LUNET very frustrating. The volume of messages to the REB and research office staff requesting personal transmission of documents or directions to find the right place on LUNET are at an all-time high. There are also irregularities within LUNET for French access.

The REB community across Canada relies heavily on being able to review forms and documents, policies and procedures developed at similar institutions. For example, we have consulted other REB websites for university policies on Survey Monkey, use of incentives and rewards for participants and policies for multi-institution research. Without a means of access, other universities may assume that LU has no research or research ethics activity. We have been asking for this challenge to be rectified since the new website went live in fall 2012.

Strategy: Continued communication with LU IT regarding an appropriate strategy for Website access to ethics documents and information.

c) Incentives and remuneration of research participants: The LUREB has received many questions in the past two years regarding remuneration of expenses incurred for the purpose of incentives or remuneration with research participants. There is currently no policy at Laurentian for what the required steps are for researchers. The challenge has been finding a balance between the researchers' needs to protect the privacy of the research participants and the university to have acceptable accounting practices to reflect appropriate use of research funds. Laurentian researchers express concerns that policies developed in larger southern universities may not address issues such as multiple relationships within the university and associated research community, cultural practices in Indigenous communities, significant distances between researchers and their participants (making the collection of signatures impossible) and the use of research protocols where there are massive survey mailouts with no means of collecting the identities of those participants who received an incentive such as a gift card. Some researchers have been refused remuneration for purchases such as Tim Horton's gift cards by the finance office. To date, a broad review of policies and practices at other Canadian universities has been conducted, the Secretariat of the Interagency Advisory Panel on Research Ethics (PRE) has been consulted, and the Vice President has drafted a policy for Laurentian's use.

Strategy: a consultation/round table discussion involving the REB, the Research Office, a variety of LU researchers and the finance office has been encouraged prior to finalizing a new policy. Best practices will need to be developed so that researchers are aware of what information will need to be included in consent forms.

d) Human resources: the REB lost some members over the past 2 years but without an approved TOR was not able to recruit new members. One of the criticisms of the REB in the past was related to lack of transparency in the recruitment and appointment of new members. The process agreed upon for the new TOR should improve transparency and equity across all academic programs.

Strategy: leveraging TOR to begin new member recruitment. In accordance with chapter 6 of the TCPS2, the TOR sets out the following fair and impartial selection process for the appointment of new REB members.

There are three methods by which an LUREB member may be appointed:

- a. Open positions for the "required" expertise will be advertised within the university community. Interested individuals shall submit a letter of intent and a CV to the Research Manager. The LUREB will examine all candidates and select new members. At least 5 LUREB members will participate in the selection process.
- b. A list of LU schools and departments where human subject research is regularly conducted by faculty and students will be compiled. Each year the "next" unit will be invited to appoint a member to the LUREB using their usual processes for LU committee appointment (e.g. election, volunteer, appointment). If the

department/school at the top of the list is unable to identify an LUREB member, the next school on the list will be approached until a new member is found. 5 members total

- c. A list of community organizations, institutions and businesses that meet TCPS guidelines for suitable sources of community members shall be established by the LUREB each year when there is an opening for a community member; the “next” community group will be invited to appoint a member to the LUREB using their usual process for appointment to external committees. If the organization at the top of the list is unable to identify an LUREB member, the next organization on the list will be approached until a new member is found.

A list of all new members will be provided by the LUREB to the Research Ethics Board Liaison committee which will recommend the appointment to the Board of Governors for approval.

e) Undergraduate REBS: There are 12 registered undergraduate REBs. The UGREBs actively review applications from undergraduate students and refer appropriately to the REB for high risk or very complicated research projects. There have been a few irregularities with undergraduate research where students have not undergone an ethics review but have conducted human subject research. There are some undergraduate programs that have undergraduate research requirements but do not have the resources to form an undergraduate REB. Different strategies to improve the quality of applications from those departments have reduced the REB review workload significantly with few applicants needing to submit multiple revisions.

Strategy: Ongoing support to the undergraduate REBs including individual consultations, presentations to the REBs or to undergraduate students in research courses. Support for departments/schools that wish to establish an undergraduate REB. Ongoing audit of undergraduate REB activities to identify procedural challenges or learning needs.

11. Developments/work in progress/planning for 2013-2014:

- a) **On-line submission platform:** continue to work with Laurentian IT to develop an on-line submission process; ideally, applicants would be able to follow the progress of their application, from submission to review to approval.
- b) **REB email:** ethics@laurentian.ca has assisted in streamlining the review process and reducing the risk of “lost” applications.
- c) **General education for departments, graduate students, and new faculty:** Plans are in place for offering a series of presentations and workshops that can be linked to other activities such as new hiring orientation, graduate student

orientation, research courses, departmental retreats and other research events.

- d) CAREB membership and conference attendance:** All REB members were funded to join CAREB and three attended the May 2013 conference in Calgary.
- e) Budget for the REB:** The LU budget now has a dedicated line for the REB. Included in that budget are funds for continuing education for REB members. Plans for determining equitable distribution of funds are being developed.
- f) Recruitment of new REB members:** A process for the recruitment of new members is outlined in the TOR. The goal is to follow this process so that open positions are filled in the 2013-14 year and a succession plan is in place for future “retirements” from the REB.
- g) Orientation for new members:** Plans for mentoring new REB members are being developed. Terms for some current members have been extended to ensure that an effective mentoring process can be implemented.
- h) Quality Indicators:** Some work has begun on the development of instruments to measure quality indicators of REB performance. There is a national initiative via CAREB which we plan to integrate into an LUREB process.
- i) Form Sharing with other Universities:** We have had some requests re sharing of forms. This is another area where there is a national initiative which we anticipate will help LUREB as well as ethics boards at other universities to develop efficient form sharing policies and procedures.