
QRSS100 - QUALITATIVE RESEARCH METHODS FOR SOCIAL SCIENCE

Section 12: Research Ethics Board

Policy:

1) Preamble and General Principles:

- a) RCC Institute of Technology endorses the principles set out in the Tri-Council Policy Statement “Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans” (TCPS)¹. This document describes how the Tri-Council Policy will be applied at RCC Institute of Technology.
- b) RCC Institute of Technology is primarily a teaching institute whose students and faculty engage in research, some of which involves studying human participants. Conducting research involving human beings creates ethical responsibilities for the investigators. It is the duty of the Institute to promote ethical research and to help researchers understand and meet their ethical responsibilities.
- c) This policy is intended to ensure that the highest ethical standards in the conduct of research involving human participants are maintained at RCC Institute of Technology. The value underlying the Tri-Council Policy Statement (TCPS) is respect for human dignity. Article 1.1 of the TCPS states: “The guidelines in this Policy are based on the following three core principles: Respect for Persons, Concern for Welfare, Justice.”
 - i) Respect for persons imposes moral obligations for researchers to respect the autonomy of participants in research and to protect individuals with developing, impaired, or diminished autonomy. Practical implications of these moral obligations include deference to the judgement and respect for freedom of choice of participants in research projects. Such deference and respect require the researcher to seek free, informed, and ongoing consent from participants and to ensure that participants understand the purposes of research and any risks associated with their participation in the research. Special care is needed in the design and administration of research when participants are not able to give free and ongoing consent or understand the purpose of the research and the risks involved.
 - ii) Concern for the welfare of persons imposes the moral obligation to protect, and in some circumstances promote, the welfare of participants in view of foreseeable risks associated with the research. This implies that participants must be given enough information to assess risk and not be exposed to unnecessary risk. Researchers are ethically obliged to minimize risks associated with research and to carefully weigh the

¹ Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, and Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical*

Conduct for Research Involving Humans, December 2010. (<http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/eng/policy-politique/initiatives/tcps2-eptc2/Default/>)

benefits derived from the research against the potential risks associated with the research.

iii) Justice imposes an ethical duty to ensure that the burdens and benefits of research are distributed equitably. This implies that special consideration be given to people or groups who are vulnerable or marginalized. It also implies awareness of the power imbalance between the researcher and participants.

2) Scope of Policy: As defined in Article 2.1 of the TCPS (2010), this policy applies to all research involving living human participants conducted by faculty members or students as part of the educational mission of the Institute or supported materially by RCC Institute of Technology.² The policy does not apply to:

- a) Research that relies exclusively on publicly available information;
- b) Research about a living individual involved in the public arena, or about an artist, based exclusively on publicly available information, documents, records, works, performances, archival materials or third-party interviews, is not required to undergo ethics review. Such research only requires ethics review if the subject is approached directly for interviews or for access to private papers, and then only to ensure that such approaches are conducted according to professional protocols.
- c) Research involving the observation of people in public places where:
 - i) it does not involve any intervention staged by the researcher, or direct interaction with the individuals or groups;
 - ii) individuals or groups targeted for observation have no reasonable expectation of privacy; and
 - iii) any dissemination of research results does not allow identification of specific individuals;
- d) Research that relies exclusively on secondary use of anonymous information;
- e) Quality assurance and quality improvement studies, program evaluation activities, and performance reviews, or testing within normal educational requirements when used exclusively for assessment, management, or improvement purposes.

3) Research Ethics Board (REB): RCC Institute of Technology shall establish a Research Ethics Board to discharge its duty to promote ethical research and to help researchers understand and meet their ethical responsibilities.

- a) Composition: The Research Ethics Board shall comprise no fewer than five members and shall include:
 - i) the Vice President, Academic;
 - ii) at least one senior member of an academic support unit;
 - iii) at least one faculty member from each Faculty of the Institute;
 - (1) at least one faculty member shall be drawn from the Faculty in which the applicant teaches or studies;

² For full explanations of the scope of this policy see TCPS (2010), Chapter 2.

b) The Vice President, Academic, shall be Chair of the Research Ethics Board.

c) A quorum shall be 60% of the members, provided that at least two faculty members are in attendance.

d) Mandate: The Research Ethics Board shall

- i) Develop guidelines, procedures, and forms needed to apply the TCPS (2010) to RCC Institute of Technology, including but not limited to:

- (1) Guidance for faculty members and instructional design experts who are developing new courses or reviewing existing courses that include assignments requiring students to conduct research involving living human participants;

- (2) Guidance for students conducting research involving living human participants;
 - (3) Guidance for faculty members;
 - (4) Procedures and forms for full review of proposed research;
 - (5) Procedures for expedited review of proposed research.
- ii) Develop or recommend educational and support material for students and faculty members to help them understand and meet their ethical responsibilities;
 - iii) Conduct full or expedited reviews of proposed research involving living human participants and issue certificates attesting that the research meets the requirements and expectations of the TCPS (2010);
 - iv) Conduct full or expedited reviews of course syllabi and / or assignments within courses when the course requires students to conduct research involving living human participants and issue certificates attesting that the course and assignments meet the requirements and expectations of the TCPS (2010);
 - v) Maintain records of decisions and report annually to Academic Council on the activities of the Board;
 - vi) Review this policy from time to time and recommend revisions as appropriate.
- e) Conflicts of interest: If the REB is reviewing research in which a member of the REB has a personal interest, conflict of interest principles require that the member not be present when the REB is discussing or making its decision. The Chair shall ensure that quorum is maintained should one or more members be absent as a result of this conflict of interest guideline.
- f) Procedures:
- i) Principle of proportionate review: The REB will use a proportionate approach based on the general principle that the more invasive the research, the greater should be the care in assessing the research.
 - ii) Principle of continuing review: Ongoing research shall be subject to continuing ethics review.
 - (1) Researchers must monitor their research projects to ensure that no new ethical problems or issues arise and to provide participants with a complaints process.
 - (2) Letters or certificates of review will be issued by the REB with an expiry date after which the researcher(s) must apply for renewed review and approval.
 - iii) Normal or full review process:
 - (1) The REB will normally meet in full meeting (face-to-face and/or by video- or tele-conference);
 - (2) Researchers will submit proposals for research involving living human participants to the REB in a format and according to a schedule to be established by the REB;
 - (3) In their proposals, researchers will identify the ethical problems or issues presented by their research and propose how they intend to resolve these problems or issues;
 - (4) The REB may, at its discretion, invite the researcher(s) to attend the meeting;
 - (5) The REB shall keep minutes of its meetings, including reasons for decisions;

(6) If the REB agrees that the ethical problems and issues posed by the research have been appropriately addressed by the researcher, it shall issue a letter or certificate verifying that, in the opinion of the REB, the research complies with the requirements and expectations of the TCPS (2010);

(7) The letter or certificate shall include an expiry date after which ethics review must be renewed;

(8) If the REB concludes that the ethical problems and issues posed by the research have not been satisfactorily addressed, it may:

(a) Suggest improvements and approve the research conditional upon implementation of the improvements;

(b) Request significant revision of the research proposal and resubmission for further consideration;

(c) Reject the research proposal.

(9) The Vice President, Academic shall maintain in a secure place, files for each application for review, including the letter or certificate containing the opinion of the REB.

iv) Expedited review process:

(1) Researchers or faculty members developing a course that requires students to conduct research involving living human participants may request an expedited review process if either of the following apply:

(a) The research obviously involves no more than minimal risk (as defined in the Tri-Council Policy Statement (2010), page 23: “research in which the probability and magnitude of possible harms implied by participation in the research is no greater than those encountered by participants in those aspects of their everyday life that relate to the research.”

(b) The research project has already received approval by the REB and has complied fully with any requirements and the applicant is simply renewing the ethical approval letter or certificate without significant changes to the ongoing research process.

(2) Expedited reviews will be conducted by the Chair of the REB and two other members of the REB, at least one of whom is familiar with the researcher’s discipline.

(3) Researchers must apply to the Chair of the REB for expedited review following procedures to be established by the REB. The Chair may reject the request for an expedited review and schedule the proposal for a full review.

(4) If the expedited review concludes that the proposal involves ethical problems or issues requiring review by the full REB, the Chair shall schedule the proposal for a full review.

(5) If the expedited review concludes that the ethical problems or issues associated with the research have been appropriately handled, the Chair shall issue the required letter or certificate.

v) Delegation of review of student research projects:

- (1) Academic units of RCC Institute of Technology may apply to the Research Ethics Board for authority to conduct reviews of student research that is, essentially, an exercise in teaching and learning.
- (2) The following conditions must be met by the academic unit:
 - (a) There must be a review process and committee that complies with the TCPS (2010);
 - (b) The research proposed must entail no more than minimal risk for the living human participants.
 - (c) The review process will normally be similar to that used by the REB for expedited reviews.
 - (d) Outcomes of the review process must be reported to the REB annually.
- (3) The academic unit's review committee will provide educational and support material to students to help them understand and meet their ethical obligations as researchers.
- (4) Student proposals that are rejected by the academic unit's committee may be appealed on procedural grounds to the REB.
- (5) Letters or certificates verifying ethical review will be filed by the academic unit and a copy forwarded to the Vice President, Academic.

4) Appeals:

- a) In the event that the REB rejects a proposal, the applicant may appeal in writing to the President of RCC Institute of Technology.
- b) The grounds for appealing a decision of the REB shall be:
 - i) Procedures were not properly followed by the REB;
 - ii) There is a significant disagreement about the interpretation of the TCPS (2010).
- c) The President or the Vice President, Academic, of RCC Institute of Technology will enter into an agreement with another institution to use that institution's Research Ethics Board as the RCC Institute of Technology appeal board.
- d) The normal expectations of natural justice shall apply to appeals procedures.
- e) The decision of the appeal board is final.

5) Administrative support: The Vice President, Academic, provides administrative support for implementation of this policy, including:

- a) Distribution of forms and materials necessary for submission of research proposals to the REB;
- b) Collection of submissions and distribution of submissions to REB members;
- c) Keeping minutes of REB meetings;
- d) Storing submissions and related materials in a secure location;
- e) Supporting the REB in its educational activities;
- f) Other duties related to the support of the REB in carrying out its mandate.

6) Sanctions:

- a) No research involving living human subjects will be materially supported by RCC Institute of Technology (with money, facilities, or staff time) unless that research complies with this policy and, by extension, the TCPS (2010).

b) No course that includes student research involving living human subjects shall be approved unless that research complies with this policy and, by extension, the TCPS (2010).