

Psychology Ethics Committee for Undergraduate Research

History. These procedures were approved unanimously at a meeting of the faculty in the Department of Psychology held on September 8, 1999. They were approved by the McMaster Research Ethics Board (MREB) on September 14, 1999. They become effective September 15, 1999. They apply to all psychology courses that begin after September 15, 1999, that is, all psychology courses beginning in or after January 2000.

Terms of Reference

Purpose. These procedures were constructed to conform with the Tri-Council Policy Statement “Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans” (1998), or TCPS. All quotations and references are from that document. The Tri-Council Policy is available on the web at: <http://ncehr-cnerh.org/English>

Adoption and Modification: These procedures, and any subsequent changes to them, must be approved by both a majority of the faculty members of the Department of Psychology and by the McMaster Research Ethics Board.

Scope. All research involving humans as research subjects must be reviewed by either the University or Departmental Research Ethics Board (TCPS, Article 1.1a). Research is defined as “a systematic investigation to establish facts, principles or generalizable knowledge” (TCPS, Article 1.1.a). This includes research conducted for a McMaster course that is supervised by an individual who is not affiliated with the University. Research requiring review includes not only experimental protocols, but also research involving naturalistic observation, questionnaires, interviews, or secondary use of data that are not in the public domain. It also extends to research involving human remains, tissues, biological fluids, or fetuses (TCPS, Article 1.1b, 1.1c, 2.3, 3.3).

The Departmental Committee shall review research conducted by undergraduate students when (1) it is conducted as part of an undergraduate course offered by the Department of Psychology, and (2) it is not part of a faculty member’s research programme already subject to review by any other Ethics Board (TCPS, Article 1.4). Undergraduate research for a Psychology course that is supervised by individuals outside the Department of Psychology shall be reviewed by the Departmental Committee unless it is subject to review by the University Research Ethics Board or by another Ethics Board in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy. Research conducted by graduate students and faculty members in the Department of Psychology must be reviewed by the McMaster Research Ethics Board (and, when relevant, the Ethics Board of the institution where the research will be conducted).

Departmental Committee: The Department shall form a Committee for the Review of Undergraduate Research constituted of 3 faculty members and 2 undergraduate students. The membership shall encompass expertise in various methodologies used in psychology

research and in ethical issues that arise in such research. The Committee is encouraged to consult relevant experts within and outside the Department of Psychology, as necessary.

Selection of Members: Members (and any necessary replacements) shall be appointed by the Chair of the Department. Faculty members shall serve for staggered 2-year terms; undergraduates, for 1-year terms. Terms are renewable. The Chair of the Committee shall be selected by the Chair of the Department. Membership shall be reported to the McMaster Research Ethics Board.

Information to be Supplied: Applications may be made for an individual undergraduate project or for a generic project to be conducted by several members of a class. Although we encourage the undergraduate researcher to be involved in constructing the application, the final application must come from the supervisor or course instructor, and be signed by him/her. The research may not begin until the Departmental or University Research Ethics Board (if the application has been referred there) has given its approval. In each case, the application must include:

- The purpose of the project
- How subjects will be recruited
- Method – What will happen from the subject’s perspective, including a description of any written instruments to be used
- The process of obtaining the initial consent and monitoring for ongoing consent, including a copy of any proposed consent form
- Possible benefits
- Possible harms
- How possible harms will be minimized
- How the subject will be debriefed
- Confidentiality of the data – What subjects will be told and how that degree of confidentiality will be assured
- Steps to be taken to educate the undergraduate student(s) about ethical issues relevant to the proposed research
- Whether it is part of a supervisor’s research subject to review by another ethics committee, and if so, which one
- Signature of the supervisor and of the student who will carry out the research

Forms for each academic year will be available from the Department of Psychology. Applications may be made by E-mail attachment or by submitting 5 hard copies.

Process and Procedure. Applications should be sent to the Chair of the Departmental Committee well in advance of the date at which the research is to be started. In reaching its decisions, the Committee will be guided by the principles outlined in the Tri-Council Policy, especially the ethical framework described in its introductory section, Sections 2 on Free and Informed Consent, and Section 3 on Privacy and Confidentiality.

Applications will be approved only for the academic year in which they are made. If the project will continue in a subsequent year without any change, the applicant should request renewal of the approval.

Whenever possible, the committee shall make decisions in face-to-face meetings (TCPS, Articles 1.7, 1.9). However proposals that fit the Tri Council's definition of minimal risk-*without the least doubt*-may be reviewed and approved by E-mail or mail circulation. Approval requires at least three approving votes. However, it is anticipated that the committee will normally reach a consensus and, if necessary, will work with the applicant to improve the initial proposal.

If the Committee is reviewing an application in which a Committee member has a personal interest, that member shall not be involved in the decision (TCPS, Article 1.12).

The Chair of the Department shall supply clerical support for the Committee. Applications, records of decisions, and minutes of the Committee meetings shall be kept for 5 years (TCPS, Article 1.8). The Committee's Chair shall prepare and annual report for the University Committee about the proposals reviewed and approved.

Referral to University Research Ethics Board (MREB): The Departmental Committee may refer an application to the University Research Ethics Board. Examples of situations in which referral would be appropriate are research that the Departmental Committee thinks may be of more than minimal risk, research involving ethical or legal issues for which it does not have adequate expertise, and cases for which conflicts of interest reduce its size to fewer than three members.

Appeals: Every attempt shall be made to work with the applicant to reach agreement through discussion, revision, and reconsideration. When agreement cannot be reached, decisions of the Departmental Ethics Board may be appealed to the University Research Ethics Board, whose decision shall be final.

Other Responsibilities: The Departmental Committee shall also consider any other ethical issues that arise which concern Psychology undergraduates and research with human subjects, such as subject pools and undergraduate education about ethics.

Reconsideration of these procedures: These procedures shall be reviewed not later than June 2001.