

The “REC-P” Process for Review

*Guidelines for Research Ethics for Behavioural Psychology*

*Thesis Projects*

Preamble

The SLC Research Ethics Board (REB) must review any research using human participants conducted within the St. Lawrence College community. In order to meet the demand and volume of the Behavioural Psychology 4<sup>th</sup> year thesis projects requiring ethics review, the Research Ethics Committee – Psychology (REC-P) is organized as a subcommittee of the SLC REB each fall. The REC-P consists of two members on each campus (Kingston and Cornwall): at least one member of the REC-P on each campus is a standing member of the SLC REB and at least one member is a faculty member from the Honours Bachelor of Behavioural Psychology Program (or a cognate college program). The REC-P Committees are supported by the Research Services Office: all applications, review decisions, revisions, approval letters and project termination forms are all submitted through the Research Services Office.

What does the Research Ethics Committee – Psychology (REC-P) do?

The REC-P reviews the proposed projects for any areas of ethical concern. Typically, the ethical review does not include a review of the methodology for the project. However, on occasion, ethical concerns may coincide with underlying methodological issues. The ethical review will evaluate:

- informed consent process and the completeness and clarity of the Informed Consent Form
- assessment of risk versus benefits for the participants

- mitigation of any risks for participants and researchers
- protection of vulnerable participants
- confidentiality & privacy issues
- conflict of interest
- assessment of risk to the student researcher

The REC-P Application Form, Informed Consent Form(s) and Thesis Proposal will be reviewed to ensure that:

1. There is a clear statement of the purpose of the research (i.e. what is the research question or hypothesis?).
2. There is a clear description of who the participants are and how they will be recruited to the research study.
3. The research method has been described in detail, including how the data will be collected and analyzed.
4. The level of risk to the participants has been identified clearly and the plans for how that risk will be mitigated/minimized, including plans to ensure data security and protection of participant privacy and confidentiality throughout the life cycle of data retention.
5. The Informed Consent Form is written in lay language, is clear, concise and complete.

## The REC-P Process

The reviews of the REC-P applications are completed in every fall over a 6-8 week period. During the one-week review cycles, students submit their applications to the Research Services office, the applications are distributed and reviewed, and decisions are rendered during a REC-P Committee meeting. After review a decision letter will then be sent to the student. Revisions requested by the REC-P Committee are processed through the Research Services Office via email. Once all of the revisions are complete, a final Letter of Approval is issued by the Chair of

the SLC-REB on behalf of the REC-P Committee. Research may only begin once the Letter of Approval is received. The specific steps in the review process are outlined below.

## 1. Submission to Research Services Office:

Once the college supervisor gives their approval, the application can be submitted. Students must include all of the following in their application package:

- (1) REC-P application
- (2) Thesis proposal
- (3) Informed Consent Form(s) and Child Assent Form (if applicable).
- (4) Measurement tools
- (5) Any other supporting documents (e.g., recruitment materials, telephone scripts, assent scripts, etc.)

The application package must be submitted to the Research Services Office via email. To be reviewed during the week, applications must be received by [*date and time to be determined in September*]. Late applications received after that time will be accepted for review in the *following* week. The last week for submission is usually the end of October. Students must plan accordingly.

Application should be emailed to Anthony Wright, Research Services Officer, at [awright@sl.on.ca](mailto:awright@sl.on.ca). The student's college **supervisor should be copied on all emails to the Research Services Office.** Each application is assigned a number (i.e. 2017-REC-01) and confirmation of receipt of the application is emailed to the student.

## 2. Distribution of application to REC-P members:

The applications are distributed to the reviewers along with the 'reviewer package'

(guidelines and checklists for review).

### 3. Review of application:

If any student research proposal poses greater than minimal risk, the REC-P Committee members may recommend having the application sent to the SLC-REB for full board review. Typically, using the checklists, REC-P applications are reviewed by REC-P Committee members. The committee on each campus meets to discuss the application and reach a consensus about the decision and possible recommendations to students.

### 4. REC-P Committee decision feedback to student:

The Research Services Office will email the REC-P Committee decision and recommendations to the student (with a copy to the supervisor). There are four decisions that can be rendered:

- a. **Approved** – no revisions are necessary, approval letter is issued
- b. **Approved with recommendations** – revisions must be made to the application, approved by the supervisor and re-submitted to the Research Services Office (where they will be verified)
- c. **Approval Pending** – revisions are more substantial and the application must be more extensively revised. Revisions must be approved by the supervisor. The REC-P Committee will re-review the application upon re-submission in the next review cycle.
- d. **Not approved** – major revisions are needed

## 5. Revision of application

The student can then modify and revise their application as requested. **All revisions must be reviewed by the supervisor.** **Revisions must be highlighted in the electronic document.**

Deletions should be indicated with a ~~striketthrough~~ (use of track change mode in Word is advisable) or comment in the electronic document.

## 6. Re-Submission of revised application by student:

All resubmissions must be reviewed and approved by the student's college supervisor. The student's college supervisor must also be copied on all emails to the Research Services Office. The revised application **is re-submitted by the student to Anthony** Wright in the Research Services Office (RSO). Please refer to your project number (i.e. 2017-REC-01) in the email. Revisions can be submitted at any time and will be reviewed in the timely manner as they are received. Revisions are verified by the Research Services Office (RSO). If further clarification or further changes are required, the student and supervisor will be informed via email. Please note that if the decision rendered by the committee is "Approval Pending" or "Not approved", the committee must re-review the application in the next weekly review cycle.

## 7. Final approval:

Once all of the required changes are confirmed by the RSO, the student and supervisor will be issued a letter of approval. Only after you have received your letter of approval for your proposed research project may you begin recruitment of your participants (i.e., assuming no other REB approvals are required).

## 8. Project Completion:

Once your project is completed (i.e., you are ready to submit your thesis to your supervisor to be graded)

- i. Ensure that any identifiable data and consent forms are securely stored for the duration of your required retention period.
- ii. Students must submit an end-of-study report or [SLC-REB Project Completion Form](#) to the Research Services Office, Anthony Wright, at [awright@sl.on.ca](mailto:awright@sl.on.ca) and copy your supervisor on this email.



### REC-P application tips:

- Use current version of application form and consent template (2017).
  - Provide as much detail as possible about the intervention procedures (e.g. time, place, repeats, duration, a description of the intervention itself).
  - Provide detail of what is required of the participants (e.g., activities, tests, questionnaires) in both the application and the consent form.
  - Provide information on the tools you will be using to assess how well the intervention is working.
- Provide detailed information on the data collection methods and statistics being used to analyze the data once it is collected.
  - Provide details on how you will mitigate any risks to the participant.
  - Be sure to include a safety/emergency plan (how to manage problems that may arise, supervision, etc.) concerning both the participants and the student researcher.
  - The starting date **must be** after ethics approval is obtained. An approximation is allowed.
  - Submit a clean copy of your work

## Informed consent tips:

- Include clear details about what participants will do including the timing of the interventions, where the intervention will take place and what types of activities the participants will be doing.
- Provide details on how confidentiality will be maintained including how data is stored, who has access to the data and more practical matters like removing identifying information from data (e.g. agency name).
- Consent form must include a statement that the study is voluntary and the participants can withdraw their consent at any time (including requesting their data not be used).
- Use clear and concise language – you need to remember the target audience and gear the language of the consent to this population. In Word documents you can use the Flesch-Kincaid Grade Level to ascertain the readability level of the document. Generally, a grade 8 reading level is often required depending on your participant population.
- Do not overstate the benefits of the research – it “might” help the participants and it “might” help in the future (e.g., direct – participation has direct benefits for participants; indirect benefits – participant may benefit indirectly by knowing that they helped contribute to the advancement of understanding in a specific area of research, or results from the research may go to guiding policy makers, improving services, etc.).
- Contact for further information – include the statement:

“This research project has received ethical clearance from the Research Ethics Committee for Behavioural Psychology (REC-P) under the authority of the St. Lawrence College Research Ethics Board (SLC-REB) [*and list other required approvals, if any, for example, and Agency X’s REB*]. The project was developed under the supervision of [College Supervisor name]\_\_\_\_\_, my supervisor from St. Lawrence College. I appreciate your cooperation and if you have any additional questions, feel free to ask me, [student name]\_\_\_\_\_ (*student@sl.on.ca*). You can also contact my College Supervisor [College Supervisor name] \_\_\_\_\_ (*supervisor@sl.on.ca*).

If you have concerns about the way this research is being conducted or about your rights as a participant you may contact the SLC-REB Chair at [reb@sl.on.ca](mailto:reb@sl.on.ca).”