

RYERSON UNIVERSITY
POLICY OF SENATE

POLICY ON RESEARCH INVOLVING HUMAN SUBJECTS

(formerly called: Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Human Subjects)

Policy Number: 51

Submitted by: Research Ethics Board

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Reformatted by: Research Ethics Board Committee Members: Robert Rinkoff (Chair), Geoff Arnold, Kate Azure, Anthony Chan, Robert Dirstein, Gord Emslie, Richard Kup, Jay Mowat, Bob Murray, Ann Rauhala, Marc Rosen, Melina Spinosa, Sue Williams

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Responsible Office: Vice-President, Research and Innovation

The University has both a legal and moral responsibility to take steps to ensure that any research carried out involving institutional personnel, resources, information, or students meets appropriate standards of ethical acceptability. This Policy outlines the principles intended to discharge this responsibility.

The Research Ethics Board (REB) – whose Terms of Reference are to approve, reject, propose modifications to, monitor, or terminate any proposed or ongoing research involving human subjects which is conducted within or by faculty, staff, or students of the University so as to protect research subjects and ensure that research is conducted in an ethical manner – is charged with the task of ensuring that research involving human subjects meets appropriate standards of ethical acceptability. All research involving human subjects must be brought before the REB for review and approval before it can proceed. In addition, all research involving human remains, cadavers, tissues, embryos or biological fluids is also subject to review by the REB.

The ethics review process itself must be fair both in standards and procedures, as well as impartial towards particular proposals and independent of institutional agendas or pressures.

The guiding thought behind this policy is that the welfare and integrity of the subjects of research are not to be compromised by such participation, even in the interests of some greater good the research might intend to accomplish or achieve (and certainly not for any other reason). Any risks to the subjects of research incurred by their participation can be justified only when subjects are fully informed, capable of making decisions, and free

of coercion or manipulation. Moreover, any such risks must be reasonable relative to the potential benefits pursued.

To specify further, research on human subjects must be guided by the overriding ethical principle of respect for persons. It is the responsibility of researchers, research supervisors, and the Research Ethics Board to ensure that the following are adhered to:

- **Respect for individual autonomy.** Subjects must be fully informed of the nature of their participation (i.e., of reasonably foreseeable potential risks and benefits), must be so informed in an atmosphere free of coercion or manipulation, must give their consent to participation, and must be free to change their minds and withdraw during the research. Failure to meet these conditions nullifies any apparent consent.
- **Respect for vulnerable persons.** Subjects who either lack the capacity to decide regarding their participation, or who are particularly subject to coercion or influence regarding participation (e.g., students, children, institutionalized persons, those with severe or terminal illnesses) stand in need of special protection from exploitation, discrimination, or abuse. It is incumbent on researchers involved with such populations to address such issues, often with special procedures and resources.
- **Respect for privacy and confidentiality.** In general, any release of information which could identify individuals requires justification, the informed consent of the person, and REB approval. Exceptions to this include research that is based exclusively on publicly available information. This includes materials from public archives, published works, and the like, to which the public is granted access. It also includes research about a living individual involved in the public arena, or about an artist, provided that the research is based exclusively on publicly available information, documents, records, works, performances, or archival materials. Research involving people outside the public arena must be reviewed.
- **Inclusive research.** Researchers shall not exclude prospective or actual research subjects on the basis of such attributes as culture, religion, race, mental or physical disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity, sex, or age, unless there is a valid reason for doing so. This is not intended to preclude research focused on a single living individual or on a group of individuals who share a specific characteristic.
- **Attention to Risks and Benefits.** Researchers have the responsibility to evaluate carefully the risks to the subjects inherent in their protocols and to justify the risks in light of the potential benefits of the research.

The REB will develop and implement procedures and guidelines to fulfill the objectives of this policy.