

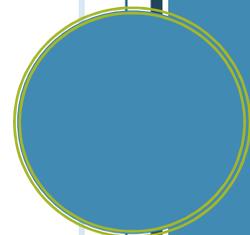
RESEARCH ETHICS

ANNUAL REPORT

2019-20

Research Ethics, Dalhousie University

Research Ethics advances Dalhousie's research initiatives by providing knowledgeable guidance and timely research ethics review and oversight of research involving humans.



Annual Report 2019/20

Research Ethics, Dalhousie University

Fast Facts

- Reviews:
 - There were **359** new project submissions in 2019/20, up from 286 new submissions in 2018/19.
 - The median and mean time from submission to initial REB review response to researchers was **22 calendar days (or 16 workdays)**, this compares to a mean of 19 workdays in 2018/19. Median time to final approval was 46 calendar days (or 34 workdays).
 - Most submissions (58%) required one round of review, 12% were approved as submitted.
 - In all, over 2700 separate reviews of research involving humans were conducted by the Research Ethics Boards and staff.
 - This includes multiple reviews of new submissions and other submissions including 197 amendments, 237 continuing reviews and 182 final reports.
- Boards:
 - Dalhousie has two Research Ethics Boards (Health Sciences, Social Sciences & Humanities).
 - Sixty percent of reviews were conducted by the SSH REB, 40% by the HS REB.
 - There were 18 Board meetings held in 2019/20.
 - Between the two boards there were 26-28 active faculty board members at any given time throughout 2019-20.
- Reviewer Workload:
 - Each board member was assigned an average of 2 new projects/month (range 0-6) as a primary reviewer, in addition to reviewing 2 new projects/month at REB meetings. This workload is consistent with 2018/19.
- Research:
 - Most new research (81%) was minimal risk research and received delegated review by two reviewers, 12% required full board review.
 - Just over half of new projects (53%) were submitted by faculty members, 39% were submitted by students.
 - Forty-two percent of new projects reviewed had research funding.
 - The majority (97%) of new submissions involved prospective research; 3% of new submissions were exclusively secondary use of information for research.
 - Approximately 11% of new submissions required REB review at more than one institution (multi-jurisdictional). This is in addition to the 7% of multi-jurisdictional research that qualified for Board of Record acknowledgement.

Summary

Research Ethics at Dalhousie University was managed with 2 full-time permanent staff positions (a director and a manager) and a part-time (80%) ethics support specialist / administrative assistant. The staff coordinated and supported the work of two Research Ethics Boards: Health Sciences and Social Sciences and Humanities. There were 18 Board meetings held during 2019-20. At any given time in 2019-20 there were 26-28 active faculty board members, along with 6 community members, and 1 student member.

The Research Ethics Boards and staff conducted over 2,700 reviews, including review of 359 new research projects, 197 amendments, 237 continuing reviews, 182 final reports and 21 ethical approval terminations for non-compliance with continuing review reporting requirements. Quarterly reports were generated from research ethics boards at affiliated hospitals (IWK Health Centre, Nova Scotia Health Authority and Horizon Health) and annual reports from unit-level research ethics committees. Research Ethics authorized 55 release of funds agreements with researchers to permit research-related activity to proceed prior to the requirement for research ethics review; the office also coordinated the peer review process on behalf of the University Committee on Laboratory Animals.

This report offers an overview of the activity of Research Ethics for the period April 1, 2019 to March 31, 2020.

Appointments

Both boards had a change of leadership during 2019-20. **Dr. Lori Weeks** (School of Nursing) started her appointment as chair of the Health Sciences Research Ethics Board taking over from Dr. Tannis Jurgens (College of Pharmacy). **Dr. Karen Foster** (Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology) was appointed as chair of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Board taking over from Dr. Karen Beazley (School for Resource and Environmental Studies).

The research ethics office was staffed by Catherine Connors (Director), Angela Hersey (Manager) and Nardeen Grace (ethics support specialist, 80% FTE) for the first third of the year. Nardeen left the position in July of 2019 and Cali Goud was hired as the new ethics support specialist in August of 2019. Catherine went on a 12 month leave of absence effective August 2019 and Martha Brilliant took on the role of Acting Director. Angela began parental leave in late October, and Jim Karle joined the team as Acting Manager at the beginning of November 2019.

There was a high turnover of members on both boards. Several members completed their 3 year terms, while others began sabbatical and parental leaves.

Accomplishments & Initiatives

Research ethics working group ● The REB **working group** tasked with identifying strategies to advance the long-term sustainability of the research ethics review system, issued a summary of recommendations in May 2019. The following recommendations were implemented in 2019/20:

- Reduce Duplication of Multi-jurisdictional Reviews: A Board of Record Acknowledgement process for acceptance of REB approval from another TCPS-compliant institution for multi-jurisdictional research was developed and implemented beginning July 2019. Twenty-four submissions (7% of new submissions) qualified for Board of Record acknowledgement in 2019/20 and were diverted from the REB review process.
- A member with specialization in secondary use of information for research was appointed to each board. These members are tasked with reviewing new submissions that rely exclusively on secondary use of information. Such research accounted for 3% of new submissions in 2019/20.
- Proportionate review of substantially similar projects: A new section was added to the ethics submissions forms that invites researchers to identify whether their project is substantially similar to a project for which the researcher has previously received approval from the REB. This allows board members to focus their review on “new” elements of the project. Approximately 5% of recent new submissions have utilized this feature.
- Shifting Review Culture: REB staff and Chairs have emphasized proportionate review and focus on ethical rather than scientific review during training of new board members. Review letters are shared with new board members during their first few months on the boards and staff and Chairs are provide ongoing education and mentoring.
- **Evaluation:** Although the implementation of the above measures has not changed the reviewer burden compared to 2018/19 it has likely contributed to reviewer burden remaining steady despite a substantial increase in the number of new submissions (an increase of 25%).

Community members ● New **legal community members** were recruited to both boards.

Student members ● A **student member** has been added to both boards. The student member plays a role similar to that of a community member. This provides the board with a valuable learner perspective on full review files while simultaneously providing the student with a unique learning opportunity.

New specialist members ● Members with expertise in **secondary use of information** for research from the Dal Libraries were appointed to each of the boards. Faculty with expertise in **indigenous research** were also appointed to each of the boards as ad hoc members.

New submission forms ● The **research ethics submission forms** for prospective and secondary use research along with the corresponding guidance documents and consent form templates were revised. The new versions were made available in November 2019.

Recruitment poster ● A sample **recruitment poster** was created as a resource for researchers.

Template revisions letter 🌀 A template **ethics cover letter and revisions form** was created to facilitate researcher's response to ethics reviews.

Research Data Management 🌀 Work on a comprehensive **research data management guide** for researchers was begun but has been put on hiatus during the COVID-19 emergency.

REB Review During COVID-19 Pandemic 🌀 Effective March 16, 2020 the Dalhousie Research Ethics Board invoked Dal REB SOP501.01 – **REB Review During Publicly Declared Emergencies**.

- All research involving in-person data collection was suspended. Exceptions were: research where an interruption would pose significant risks to participant safety and research directly related to the COVID19 emergency.
- Research activities that did not involve contact with participants were allowed to continue if they could be conducted off-campus and/or online.
- Researchers were advised to submit an amendment request if significant modifications to protocols were required to enable remote data collection.
- The boards and staff began operating remotely. Workflow protocols were modified to be completely online. Board meetings were held via videoconference using MS Teams.
- New research directly related to the COVID-19 pandemic response was prioritized and given rapid review.
- A triage system for prioritizing new submissions was later implemented to reflect the time sensitivity of the research (Rapid Review, Priority Review, Regular Review).
- All approvals (new or continuing) issued during the pandemic included the following statement: *Effective March 16, 2020: Notwithstanding this approval, any research conducted during the COVID-19 public health emergency must comply with federal and provincial public health advice as well as directives issued by Dalhousie University (or other facilities where the research will occur) regarding preventing the spread of COVID-19.*

Educational Activity

Dalhousie supported educational opportunities for Board members and staff. The Research Ethics Board chairs and staff were involved in presentations and discussions regarding research ethics principles and the review process with members of the University research community, especially students.

- Research Ethics Boards chairs and staff attended the Canadian Association of Research Ethics Boards national conference (April 2019).
- REB Chair Karen Beazley organized an REB workshop and public talk on Ethics in Research with Indigenous Peoples, with speakers Julie Bull and Elder Geri Musqua-LeBlanc, Dalhousie University (June 2019)
- REB orientation sessions for incoming members were held (October 2019, February 2020).
- Continuing Education for Board members at REB meetings:
 - Atlantic PATH Briefing, HS REB (May 17, 2019)
 - Briefing on SONA psychology subject pool and credit points, SSH (July 24, 2019) and HS (Sept 20, 2019)
- Nineteen board members and staff completed the OCAP® online training module.
- Between Apr 1, 2019 and Mar 31, 2020, 1196 Dal researchers completed TCPS online *Course on Research Ethics* tutorial.
- Outreach and Class presentations:
 - NURS 5060, Research & Evidence-based Nursing Practice (Catherine Connors, Lori Weeks), June 2019
 - ENVI5035, Research Design & Methods (Karen Beazley, Martha Brilliant), October 2019
 - CH&E MSc Students (Lori Weeks, Jim Karle) February 2020
 - Faculty of Management Research Ethics workshop (Karen Beazley, John Cameron, Dana Kabat-Farr, Martha Brilliant) March 2020

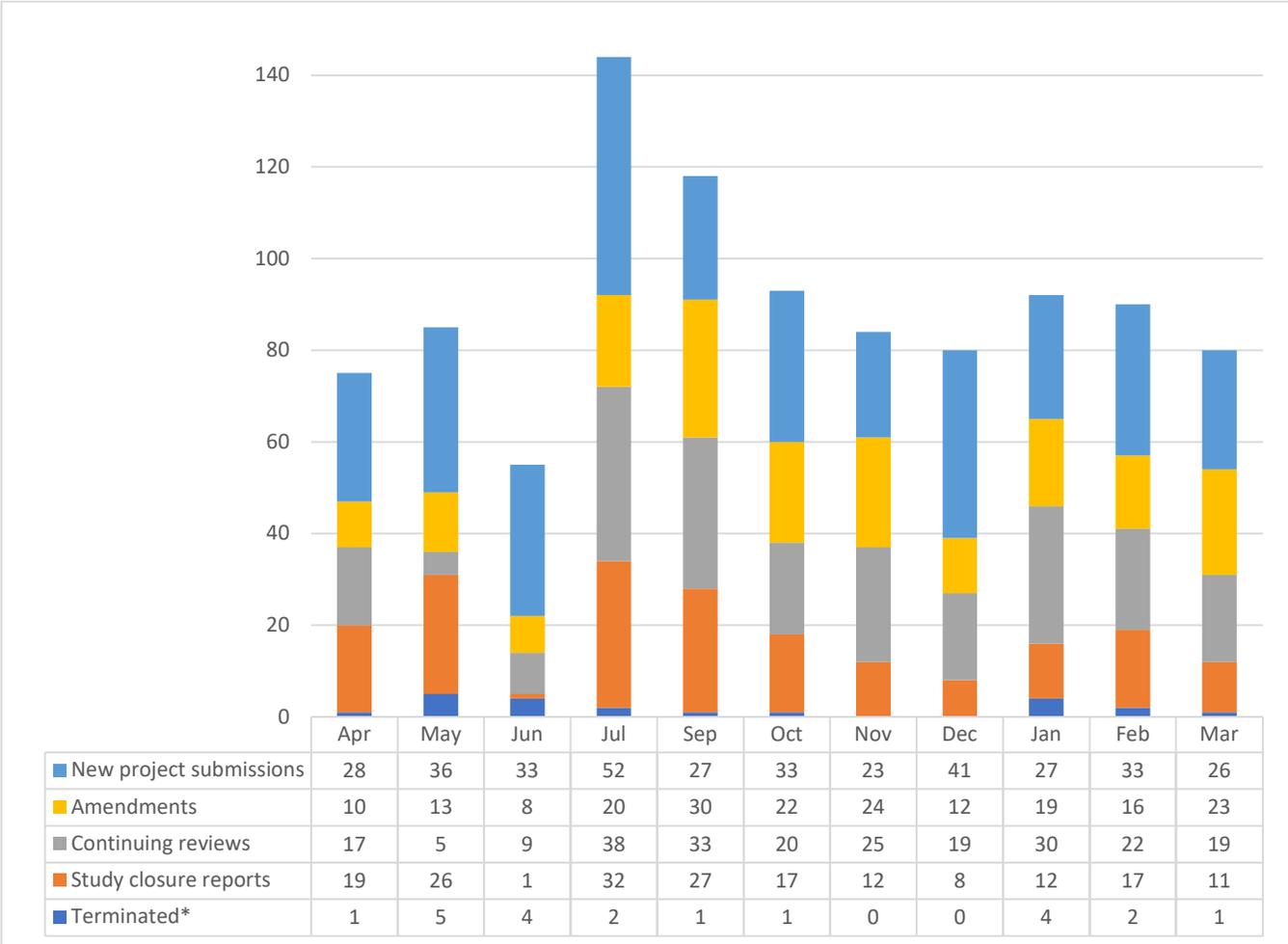
Feedback from Researchers

I'd like to thank the board for the extraordinarily fast review of my application! I was surprised and delighted to receive it back so soon after submitting it. Thank you! (Faculty member)

Thanks so much for your attention and your help. You make ethics fun! (Graduate Student)

That was such a helpful and supportive phone conversation. Many, many thanks for facilitating this research ethics application. I so appreciate it. (Faculty member)

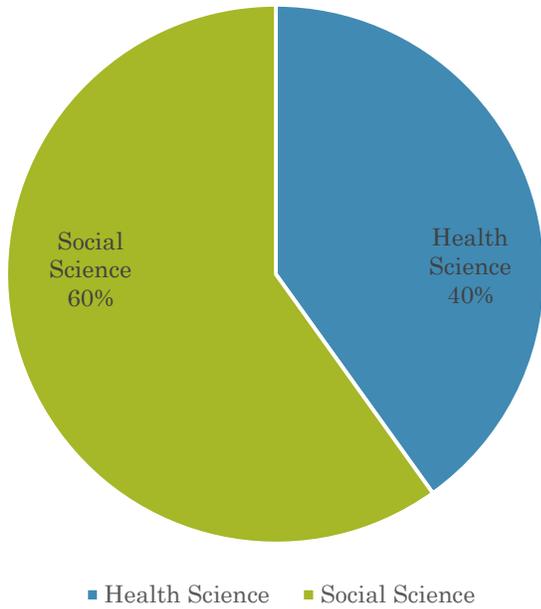
Research Ethics - Activity Cycle



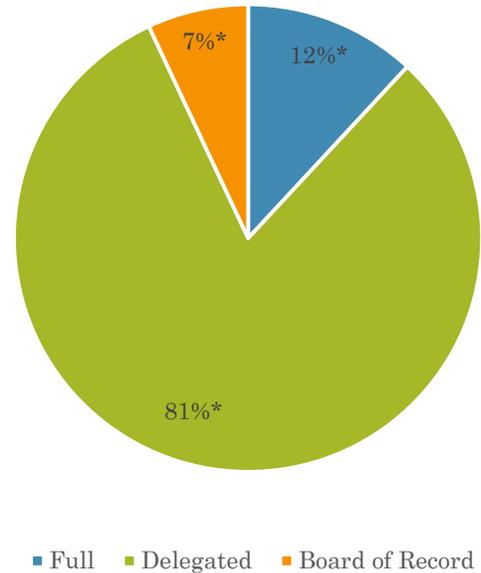
* REB approval terminated for non-compliance with continuing review reporting requirements

Profile of New Research Ethics Submissions

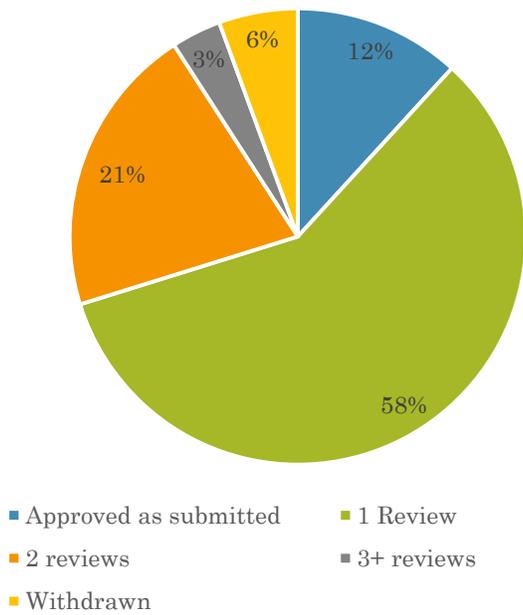
Board Assignments



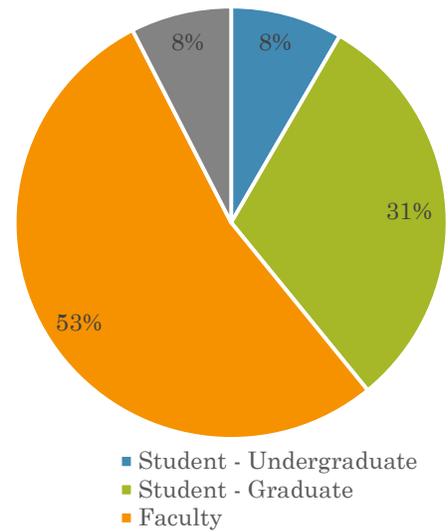
Proportionate Review



Rounds of Reviews

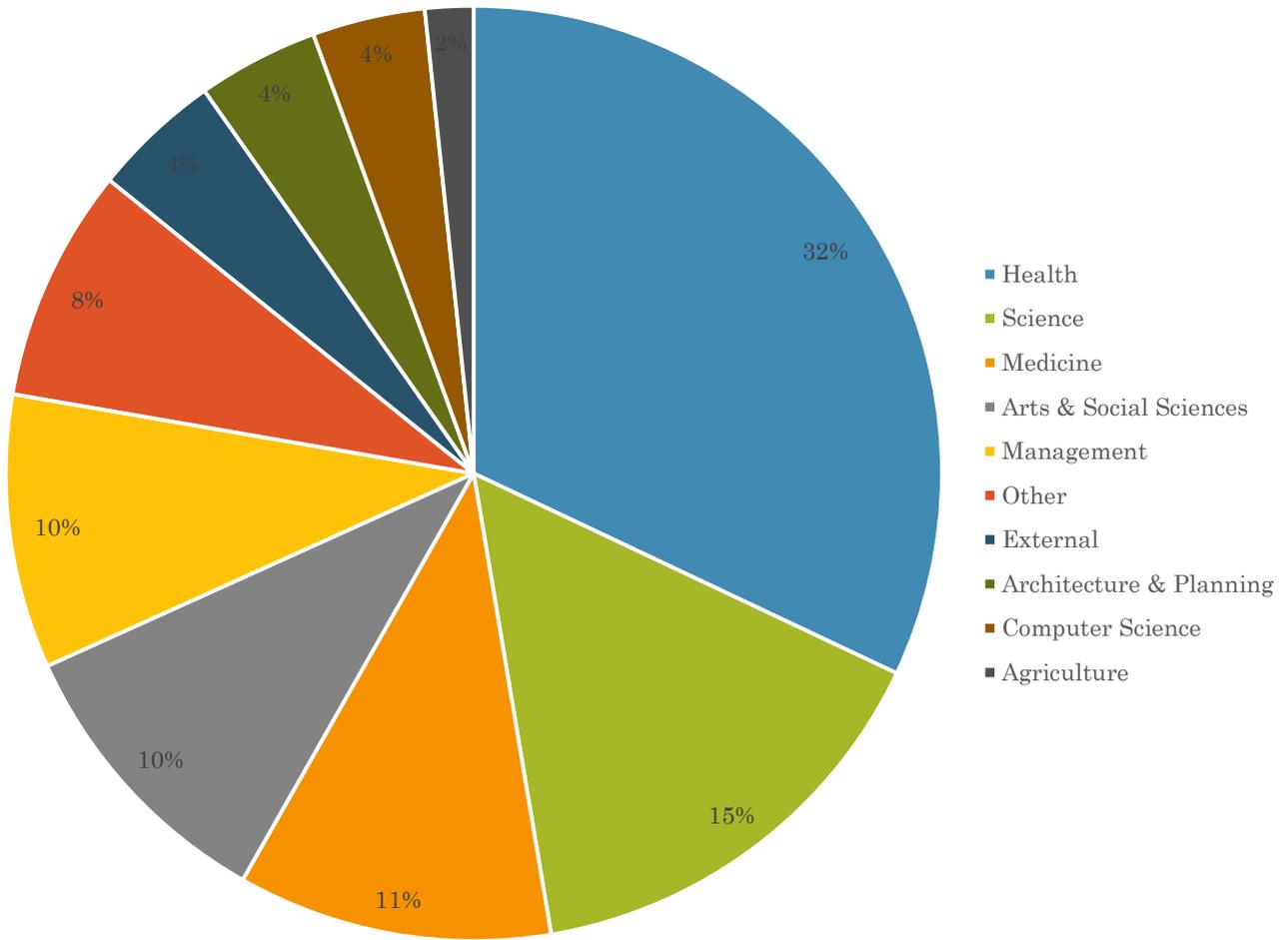


Researcher Profile



*Other: staff, external researchers, postdoctoral fellows

Submissions by Faculty



Board Membership*

Health Sciences Research Ethics Board

Lori Weeks (Chair)

Rachel Banks
Sean Barrett
Sarah Burm
Gail Dechman
Merle Emms
Sanaz Gerami

Gordon Gubitz
Melissa Helwig
Christine Herman
Jennifer Isenor
Melanie Keats
Michel Ladouceur

Gillian Martin
Mary McNally (ad hoc)
Heather Neyedli
Sam Stewart
Swarna Weerasinghe
Igor Yakovenko

Social Sciences and Humanities Research Ethics Board

Karen Foster (Chair)

Peter Arthur
Megan Bailey
Catherine Bryan
John Cameron
Peggy Cunningham
Helene Deacon
Steven Dukeshire

Laura Eramian
Kirstie Hawkey
Shannon Johnson
Marjorie Johnstone
Dana Kabat-Farr
Niki Kiepek

Debbie Martin (ad hoc)
Jill McSweeney-Flaherty
Hannah Steeves
Cathie Watson
Jeff Waugh
Diane Zwicker

* as of March 31, 2020

Staff

Catherine Connors (Director)
Angela Hersey (Manager)
Cali Goud (Ethics Support Specialist - 80%)

Martha Brilliant (Acting Director)
Jim Karle (Acting Manager)

Core Principles:

Respect for Persons
Concern for Welfare
Justice