



**Senate**

Policy Name	<b>Research Ethics Policy for Research Involving Human Participants</b>
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Responsibility for Implementation	UREB

**Purpose:**

The University Research Ethics Board (UREB) is a committee of Mount Saint Vincent University Senate and was established under the provisions of the Tri-Council Policy Statement. The *TriCouncil Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (2010)*, hereafter referred to as TCPS, is a comprehensive document that describes the policies of the three federal granting councils (CIHR, NSERC, and SSHRC) for research with human participants. It has been informed, in part, by leading international ethics norms, all of which may help, in some measure, to guide Canadian researchers, in Canada and abroad, in the conduct of research involving humans. The mandate of the UREB is to ensure that research carried out by Mount researchers or research involving members of the Mount community adheres to the TCPS as well as applicable ethical guidelines and principles. This includes research conducted by all faculty members (both full and part-time), post-doctoral fellows, PhD students, masters and undergraduate students, visiting researchers, and staff engaged in research under the auspices

of the university. For the purposes of this policy, research is defined as a disciplined inquiry or a systematic investigation for purposes of developing perspectives, creating knowledge, gaining insights, developing generalizations, informing policy or practice, or otherwise making a positive difference in the lives of individuals and/or communities.

**Scope:**

The Mount has developed this institutional human research ethics policy and further created procedures, guidelines and forms to guide researchers as well as the UREB in regards to the ethics of research involving humans that, as a minimum, meets the requirements set out in the TCPS. The UREB provides a service to the University community by working with researchers to identify and resolve ethical issues in their research in order to protect the interests of participants, maximize the benefits of the research, and minimize harms. The UREB is empowered to approve, reject, propose modifications to, suspend, or terminate research projects that involve human participants and that fall under the jurisdiction of the Mount and the purview of the TCPS or relevant regulations and guidelines. The intent of this document is to develop and support the highest level of ethical standards possible and to protect both participants and members of the university community who conduct research.

**Policy:**

The Tri-Council (CIHR, SSHRC, and NSERC) has developed, approved and implemented a joint policy statement to promote the ethical conduct of research involving human subjects – the *TriCouncil Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (TCPS), the official version of which can be found at <http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca/eng/policypolitique/initiatives/TCPS-eptc2/Default/>. The **online** version of the TCPS, which shall include all updates and revisions, shall be considered the official version and shall serve as the minimum standard for Mount Saint Vincent University.

The development of this document has benefited directly from similar documents made public by the national research councils and other Canadian universities, including but not limited to McGill University, University of Manitoba, Saint Mary's University and the University of Toronto. In some instances specific formulations drawn from these sources have been incorporated into this document. Similar documents developed and made public by additional agencies, such as those of the Interagency Advisory Panel on Research Ethics (PRE), have also been consulted extensively through the course of developing the policy governing research with human participants.

## **1. Core Principles**

Respect for human dignity has been an underlying value of the TCPS since its inception. Despite clear recognition of its centrality in research ethics, the term lends itself to a variety of definitions and interpretations that make it challenging to apply.

Respect for human dignity requires that research involving humans be conducted in a manner that is sensitive to the inherent worth of all human beings and the respect and consideration that they are due. Respect for human dignity is expressed through three core principles – Respect for Persons, Concern for Welfare, and Justice. These core principles transcend disciplinary boundaries and, therefore, are relevant to the full range of research covered by this policy.

It is the policy of Mount Saint Vincent University that all research involving human participants will be carried out by its faculty, students and other members of the University community in a manner consistent with these fundamental principles. In particular, these principles can be expressed as:

- Protection of academic freedom and respect for the norms of academic responsibility;
- Respect for persons, who, having been adequately informed, should have the right to choose voluntarily what shall happen to them;
- The fair inclusion and equitable treatment of individuals, groups and/or communities in research;
- Risks of research should be reasonable in the light of the expected benefits, and every reasonable effort be made to minimize the potential risks of research;
- Researchers should be competent to both conduct the research and safeguard the welfare of the research participants.

Therefore, all research projects involving human participants, prior to their initiation, must be reviewed in light of these principles. This policy shall apply to all research projects undertaken at or under the auspices of the University, whether or not the project is funded and, in the case of funded research, whether or not the funding, in whole or in part, is administered by the University.

## **2. Proportionate Approach to UREB Review**

Because research seeks to understand something not yet revealed, research often entails risks to participants and others. These risks can be trivial, profound, and physical or psychological, individual or social. Ethical principles and guidelines play an important role in advancing the pursuit of knowledge while protecting and respecting research participants in order to try to prevent such occurrences of risks. People have also been gratified and have had their lives

enriched by their participation in research, either because they may have benefited directly or because their participation has contributed to the expansion of knowledge.

This Policy aims to strike an appropriate balance between recognition of the potential benefits of research, and protection of participants from research-related harms, including injustices and breaches of respect for persons. A crucial element of UREB review is to ensure that the level of scrutiny of a research project is determined by the level of risk it poses to participants given that research involving humans spans the full spectrum of risk, from minimal to significant. A reduced level of scrutiny applied to a research project assessed as minimal risk does not imply a lower level of adherence to the core principles. Rather, the intention is to ensure that adequate protection of participants is maintained while reducing unnecessary impediments to, and facilitating the progress of, ethical research. This approach is in keeping with the need to respect academic freedom and not to place unwarranted constraints upon it.

In the context of both initial and continuing research ethics review, the UREB assesses the ethical acceptability of a research project through consideration of the foreseeable risks, the potential benefits and the ethical implications of the project. These two steps constitute the proportionate approach to UREB review that is recommended throughout the TCPS.

### **3. Membership and Functions**

Membership of the UREB shall be consistent with the terms of reference as outlined in Senate By-law 14.13 and referred to in UREB documentation as the Terms of Reference (REB.POL.002), changes to which shall require Senate Approval.