

UNIVERSITY COUNCIL
RESEARCH, SCHOLARLY, AND ARTISTIC WORK COMMITTEE
REQUEST FOR DECISION

PRESENTED BY: Paul Jones, Chair, Research, Scholarly, and Artistic Works Committee

DATE OF MEETING: June 22, 2017

SUBJECT: Dissolution of the University Committee on Ethics in Human Research (UCEHR)

DECISION REQUESTED:

*It is recommended:
That Council approve the dissolution of the University Committee on Ethics in Human Research, effective immediately, to be replaced with ad hoc committees that will be struck as needed by the research ethics board chairs with RSAW, as per the attached request.*

PURPOSE:

The University Committee on Ethics in Human Research (UCEHR) was formally adopted as a committee by University Council, through the Research, Scholarly, and Artistic Work Committee in 2002. As the committee was approved through Council, the dissolution will require Council approval as well.

CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND:

The mandate of the UCEHR included responsibility for the adoption of codes, guidelines, standards, and policies, with respect to research ethics review in accordance with the Tri-Agency guidelines and other applicable policy and legislation, including hearing appeals of Research Ethics Board decisions.

The UCEHR was useful in drafting the original policies and procedures for Ethics in Human Research and translating the tri-council policy into University policy when it was founded, its current utility is unclear. The committee meets infrequently and it is difficult to ensure that members are no conversant with the broader and more complex issues related to research ethics.

The chairs of the Research Ethics Boards (REB) recommend that the functions previously served by UCEHR would be better served by ad hoc committees. The use of ad hoc committees would make it easier to ensure appropriate knowledge to handle the issues that might arise. The membership of the ad hoc committee will be determined by the REB chairs and will be approved by RSAW.

Appeals of REB decisions will be formed on an ad hoc basis, as well. It should be noted that there has only been one formal appeal since the inception of the committee in 2002.

CONSULTATION:

The chairs of the Biomedical and Behavioural Research Ethic Boards met on October 28, 2016 to discuss the future of the UCEHR and recommended the dissolution to RSAW at their May 23, 2017 meeting. The RSAW agreed that the functions of the UCEHR could be replaced by ad hoc committees and that this move would ensure better engagement and appropriate knowledge on the ad hoc committees.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Recommendation to Dissolve the University Committee on Ethics in Human Research

Recommendation to Dissolve the University Committee on Ethics in Human Research (UCEHR)

On October 28, 2016 the Chairs of the Biomedical and Behavioural Research Ethics Boards (REBs), Dr. Gordon McKay and Dr. Vivian Ramsden, met with the Chair of the University Committee on Ethics in Human Research (UCEHR), Dr. Valerie Thompson, to evaluate the future need for the UCEHR.

The UCEHR was formally adopted as a Committee by University Council, through the Research, Scholarly and Artistic Work Committee of Council in 2002. The mandate of this Committee included responsibility for the adoption of codes, guidelines, standards, and policies, with respect to research ethics review in accordance with the Tri-Agency guidelines and other applicable policy and legislation. UCEHR was also responsible for hearing appeals of REB decisions. UCEHR is still the standing appeals committee.

While UCEHR was useful in drafting the original Policies and Procedures for Ethics in Human Research document in 2002, and translating the Tri-Council Policy into University Policy, its current utility is less clear. The Committee meets infrequently (once per year in the last three years, though the terms of reference specify twice a year or at the call of the Chair). Although the committee membership meets the criteria set out in the Terms of Reference, with the exception of the three Chairs, the members are not conversant with the broader, more complex issues related to research ethics, which in turn, limits their ability to address the elements within their Terms of Reference. The membership does not have the necessary depth of contextual understanding to make informed decisions on behalf of the University and the Research Ethics Boards, and therefore UCEHR has served its function and should now be dissolved.

We recommend that the functions previously served by UCEHR could be better served by ad-hoc committees. In terms of the adoption of codes, guidelines, standards, and policies relevant to research ethics, the ad-hoc committee should consist of individuals knowledgeable with the implications such guiding documents will have for the REBs, researchers and the University. Such a committee(s) could be struck by the REB Chairs, and consist of themselves, the Vice-Chair or REB members as needed, as well as experts (e.g., Indigenous, legal, etc.) in the relevant area related to the guidelines/procedure/policy under development.

Similarly, the appeals committee could be formed on an ad-hoc basis, as needed. We note that there has been only one formal appeal since the inception of the committee in 2002; consequently the University of Saskatchewan could appoint an ad-hoc committee to hear appeals if/when necessary rather than maintaining a standing appeals committee.

