

ANNUAL REPORT

July 31, 2021

COMMITTEE NAME

Institutional Review Board
University of North Alabama

Dr. Tim Loughrist
Committee Chair

7/31/21
Date submitted

Submitted to:

Title/Committee (if applicable)

Date received

UNIVERSITY OF NORTH ALABAMA

ANNUAL REPORT

2020-2021

I. Executive Summary

We received fewer proposals than is typical, likely due to projects being suspended or delayed during the Covid-19 pandemic. Consequently, fewer committee meetings were required.

As UNA becomes a doctoral granting institution, it will be important for there to be continuity in leadership of the IRB from year to year. To that end, I have suggested, in VII.A. below, the creation of an IRB administrative position.

II. The Committee's Charge (from the Shared Governance Document)

1. To review compliance with and administer the University of North Alabama policy on the Use of Human Research Participants
2. To examine the University of North Alabama policy on the Use of Human Research Participants annually and assess University practices in light of the information obtained
3. To propose changes in University practices relating to the use of human research participants
4. To handle any proposals the committee may make affecting university policy according to section C.2 "Shared Governance Procedure for Policy Change Recommendations"
5. To submit a final written report electronically by the first day of the fall semester to the Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost with a copy sent to the Chair for the SGE.

III. The Committee met on the following dates:

1. Monday, October 12
2. Tuesday, April 20

IV. What were the Committee's actions and accomplishments this year relative to each of the items of the charge?

1. The primary role of the IRB is review compliance and administer UNA's policy on the use of human research participants. In that role, the IRB reviewed 87 research proposals to date (more are expected over the summer). Of those 87 proposals, 42 were exempt, 40 were expedited, and five required full review.
2. We established, with the help of the Kinesiology Department, clearer guidelines concerning the collection and handling of biological samples.
3. In terms of reviewing UNA's IRB protocols, the main work in this area concerned modifications due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Covid-19 restrictions are currently being relaxed.
4. We made no proposals affecting university policy.
5. Concerning the submission of a final written report, see items I-VIII of this document.

V. What were the Committee's formal recommendations?

Besides that various and sundry recommendations to applicants, none.

VI. What does the Committee plan to accomplish

A. In the coming year?

To navigate the ever changing Covid-19 situation. At this point, just staying on top of that is an accomplishment in itself.

B. In future years?

Refine our forms and documents.

VII. What are the Committee's weaknesses?

In order to run smoothly, the committee chair should be well-versed in IRB standards and protocols as well as experienced in reviewing research proposals. Because the chair is turned over every year, any knowledge and experience gained is lost at the beginning of the next committee chair's term. Of course, the previous chair is typically still available for consultation, but that only slightly ameliorates the problem.

Furthermore, the workload associated with chairing the IRB makes it very difficult to find senior faculty who are willing to act as chair. Increasingly, the role has fallen on the shoulders of junior faculty members. This is not ideal, as situations can arise wherein the chair must take a position opposite that of a senior researcher. A junior faculty member should not be placed in such a precarious position.

Lastly, IRB protocols and policies have not been clearly communicated to researchers, making the IRB application process more onerous than it needs to be.

A. What can the Shared Governance Committee help you do to address the weaknesses?

I suggest the creation of a permanent IRB administration position. This position would include the following responsibilities:

- Stay up to date on changes in nationwide IRB protocols, norms, and procedures.
- Apprise and advise IRB committee members on the above protocols, norms, and procedures.
- Communicate with applicants.

- Quickly sort incoming proposals into exempt, expedited, and full review categories.
- Track approved proposals to ensure that researchers submit the required updates, termination reports, or renewal requests.
- Review exempt and expedited proposals.
- Communicate IRB protocols to the UNA community.
- Schedule IRB committee meetings.
- Maintain the IRB webpage.
- Update IRB documents and forms.
- Ensure that all IRB committee members have completed the requisite training.
- Keep the minutes of IRB committee meetings.

Such a position would greatly reduce the chair's workload and would obviate the need for a course-release. More importantly, such a position would streamline the research proposal process, allowing researchers more time and energy to focus on their research. As it is likely that number and complexity of research proposals will increase in the coming years, I believe that such a position will become necessary. As it stands now, it is very difficult to find an IRB committee member willing to act as chair due to the workload.

VIII. Comments

It has been my honor to serve as chair of UNA's IRB.