

Update: Changes in the Office of Research, Enhancing the Institutional Review Board Experience

Just about 15 days ago, we implemented the 5-day rule as part of our ongoing efforts to enhance researcher service in the Office of Research. Now I want to share some changes coming to the Institutional Review Board (IRB), which falls under our division.

The IRB is the group responsible for reviewing a research protocol to ensure it meets ethical and safety guidelines. Often referred to as “getting an IRB” the process is necessary for many grant submissions.

I heard from many of you that the process was painfully slow and cumbersome. We looked and found it was taking an average of 90 days to clear requests. We all agree that is too long. For the past several months, we have been making several changes aimed at improving service and the speed of our response.

The first step was hiring a new associate director. Jennifer Neal-Jimenez is leading the efforts to streamline the process. Some changes have already taken effect. A few are imminent and a few others are more long term. Let me share where we are now and where we hope to be in the next six months.

New faces

A big thank you to Professor Sophia Dziegielewski who served as the IRB chairperson for the past several years. She will continue to serve as a member of the IRB, but will now spend more time in the classroom and continuing her research in the area of social work. Kiminobu Sugaya, a neuroscience professor at the College of Medicine, has been named chair as of January 2018. Sugaya will also serve on the leadership team to identify needs and plan initiatives to help increase the IRB’s effectiveness.

http://www.research.ucf.edu/Compliance/IRB/About/Bio%20Pages/Sugaya_Kiminobu.htm)

A new process

Each submission to the IRB will be initially reviewed to ensure that it is human subject research. Investigators who believe their work to be exempt can now use a form in the ARGIS system to request early determination. In some cases, the submission will be determined to be exempt and the review will be completed within a week of submission. Those submissions requiring further review will be examined by an administrator and an IRB board member regardless of whether the submission needs full board review or not. This should make the process faster. Those requiring further review will be flagged earlier.

A “IRB 101” document is now posted on the IRB website <http://www.research.ucf.edu/Compliance/irb.html>. The document explains the IRB process and includes a “Top 10 Errors to Avoid” list to help applicants avoid unnecessary delays.

When we reviewed the backlog of applications we found many submissions were not completed because IRB staff were unable to get responses from the principal investigator or his/her research team. IRB staff often ask for additional information or for changes, to better position the investigator’s protocol for approval.

Responding in a timely manner – within 30 days – ensures a quicker resolution.

Investigators who respond within 14 days of such requests for additional information or changes, will be fast-tracked for final determination or board review.

Those who respond at 30 days, can expect reviews to take about 30 days.

Those who do not respond or respond after 30 days will see their protocols administratively withdrawn and the applicant will have to start all over again.

We all need to work together to succeed. IRB staff are here to help you get the approvals necessary. But that means we need shared responsibility.

IRB at your Doorstep

To improve communication between the research community and the IRB Office, IRB staff will be available in person to help faculty understand the new process and answer questions. “IRB at your door step” is scheduled to get started this month. IRB staff will spend a day at each college over the next few months.

The future

Lastly, we will be forming a second IRB board. Currently the board reviews all submissions. In the future one board will review applications for social and behavioral sciences research while the other board will review biomedical protocols. We are currently conducting a search for staff to manage both boards. By having experts in each area review what they are most familiar with, we expect the process to become even smoother. This is a common practice at other institutions.

If you would like to be considered for either IRB please contact Assistant Vice President for Research, Debra Reinhart (reinhart@ucf.edu). We anticipate organizing the boards in the next few months.

I appreciate your time, frankness and patience in communicating with me the challenges we are facing and suggestions for addressing them. Please continue to reach out to me and I will provide additional updates to you as we move forward.

Best

Elizabeth Klonoff