

To: SSSP Board of Directors
From: Val Leiter, Chair, Research Review Committee
Re: Annual Report of the Committee
Date: July 17, 2017

The Research Review Committee was established last year, in response to a request from a SSSP member to the Board to recruit other SSSP members to participate in their research. The Board formed it as an ad hoc committee, with Donileen Loseke, Héctor Delgado and myself as members. I was happy to take on this role, as I have been co-chair of my college's IRB for a while and am used to this kind of review work. I suggest that in the future that the chair of the committee have IRB experience, if possible, because of the immersion in federal guidelines for human subjects research that usually accompanies such service work.

The Committee received three research requests, the first one by Giovanna Follo to recruit members at the annual meeting to participate in a survey on teaching controversial topics in the classroom. Dr. Follo submitted her institution's approved IRB application for our review. We granted Dr. Follo access to our members at the annual meeting in Montreal, allowing her to set up a table near the book exhibit where she can talk with people about the study and invite them to join. She will recruit from behind the table, so that members do not feel any pressure at all to interact with her if they do not choose to do so.

One request came from ICF International, which was conducting a survey on behalf of the National Cancer Institute about how doctoral and medical students' decisions about careers and postdocs. This study included a Survey Monkey questionnaire and potentially a one-hour interview. In my review of the request, I found no informed consent statement, promise of confidentiality, etc. that are typical human subjects protections in studies. Companies such as the one doing this work are not required to comply with IRB regulations, so there were no protections for Ph.D. student members who might participate. We declined this request to recruit our members.

The committee also fielded a request from the AAAS, which was conducting an NSF-funded survey about the nature of social responsibilities of scientists and engineers. We thought this is an important issue in contemporary U.S. society, and that SSSP members would not mind being asked to weigh in on these issues, and approved their request to send the survey out to our members.

At one point over the year, the Committee debated whether we should have rules governing future review of research proposals, but given the small number of annual requests and the extensive time and effort that would be involved in creating such rules, we all decided that it was best to keep the committee's approach on an ad hoc basis. This allows flexibility and discretion.

I wish to thank Héctor Delgado and Doni Loseke for their quick and thoughtful contributions to this committee over the past year.