

Milan Ilnyckyj
Massey College
4 Devonshire Place
Toronto, ON, M5S 2E1

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University of Toronto Office of Research Ethics
McMurrich Building, 3rd floor
12 Queen's Park Crescent West
Toronto, ON, M5S 1S8

Research ethics board members,

Thank you for your instructive comments from December 5th, 2017. Each of them will be addressed below, either by explaining the changes made to my updated research ethics protocol or by more fully explaining the basis for the original design. The numbered sections in this letter correspond to the numbered paragraphs from your review comments. At the end I have included two other matters for consideration by the board. Changes in the attached document CFFD-ethics-1-6.docx are highlighted in bold as requested.

1. Research risk and group vulnerability

Section F has been revised to indicate medium group vulnerability because some individuals who have engaged in campus fossil fuel divestment (CFFD) activism may have taken part in forms of activism which involve criminality, such as trespassing to drop a banner or continuing to occupy a university building despite being ordered to leave by the university administration, the police, or a court.

Research risk has also been re-categorized as medium because of the socio-legal risks associated with privacy which may exist for research subjects.

2. "Ethnography" and survey use

In the original version of the proposal, the detailed examination of a selected subset of CFFD campaigns was described as the "ethnography" phase, however the research ethics board (REB) indicated that the term would "not typically be understood as including quantitative methods such as surveys". The intent of the proposed surveys is to collect information from CFFD activists who are for whatever reason unwilling to take part in interviews and the questions included in the surveys would be very similar to those used in the interviews. Nonetheless, the ethics protocol has been amended to refer to this as the "case study" phase instead.

3. Subject recruitment methods

As identified on p. 36-39 of my research proposal, one of the foremost potential problems identified for this project is difficulty in recruiting research subjects and in conducting a reasonably representative sampling of those involved.¹ Several special features of CFFD activism exacerbate this risk, including high turnover in student-run campaigns and limited institutional memory.

Nonetheless, my amended ethics protocol now makes clear that CFFD campaigns will not be asked to disclose contact information for participants without their consent. In all cases, potential research subjects will be identified by one of the following means:

- a) I found their name in a public document such as a press release or news story
- b) I submitted information about my project and a call for participants to CFFD campaign organizers or previous interview subjects, asking for them to be passed along to other potential research subjects
- c) I have requested that CFFD campaign organizers or previous interview subjects ask further potential subjects for permission to be contacted, sending them information about my project only if they assent
- d) I have asked CFFD campaign organizers or previous interview subjects to introduce me to further potential subjects
- e) I have advertised for suitable research subjects through means including social media, email mailing lists associated with universities, or on-campus postering

Your email says: "The protocol has not appended recruitment materials". I have added Appendix 5 to my updated ethics protocol, showing the text of a recruitment appeal which will be distributed by email, social media, and on-campus postering.

4. Confidentiality, quotation, and data use

This project has been designed to allow research subjects to control any risks which may arise from participation by choosing an appropriate level of protection from a confidentiality menu (included in Section E).

Your email called for "distinct options relating to confidentiality" to be "broken out" and for clarification on confidentiality, the use of quotes, and uses of data. This has been done in the updated protocol by explicitly listing the implications of each menu choice in terms of these three matters and providing additional clarifying questions to make sure research subjects will understand how information from them will be used.

¹ <https://www.sindark.com/phd/thesis/proposal/CFFD-proposal-2-4.pdf>

5. Possible external pressure to disclose research materials

As noted in your email, there is reason to be concerned that information relating to the topics in question might be of interest to authorities and hence be associated with legal risks such as possible external pressure to disclose confidential identifiable data (e.g., in connection with a subpoena). These concerns will be addressed in several mutually-reinforcing ways.

These protective measures incorporate two of the three suggestions from your email: avoiding the collection of identifying information related to criminality and destroying any such confidential identifiable information relating to criminality as soon as possible. In cases where research subjects choose the maximally protective confidentiality option – or at the discretion of the researcher in the event that any reasonable risk of external pressure to disclose has arisen – the third suggestion of not linking the research materials generated to identifiable subjects will also be implemented.

As discussed in Section C, participants will be warned about the possibility of such pressure:

"All interview subjects will be warned that it's not impossible that a police force, intelligence service, court, or other government entity will demand access to research materials like interviews and transcripts, or may obtain such research materials via clandestine means. Third party requests for access to research materials may also be initiated by university administrations. Interview subjects will be told that only crimes which meet the definition of civil disobedience should be mentioned. Interview subjects will be specifically warned not to discuss any other criminal activities, whether witnessed personally or otherwise understood to have occurred. Participants will be told that they can request that interview recording be paused at any time, in order to make comments which will not be included in recordings, interview transcripts, or handwritten interview notes." (p. 14)

Section E, part (c), discusses the process which will be used to evaluate and potentially respond to external disclosure pressure. It also discusses measures which will be used to guard against clandestine access to research materials.

Subject risks associated with potential criminality will also be mitigated by immediately ceasing to record and take notes during any interview in which any reasonable risk of external pressure to disclose is perceived by the researcher and, if any such information is recorded, promptly producing an anonymous summary and then destroying the sections in any research materials which include such information

Your email also raises the possibility that Skype specifically may be subject to government surveillance. In response, I have added a warning to both consent letters that there is evidence such ubiquitous surveillance is ongoing and that they should bear it in mind when choosing what to disclose via electronic channels which have been known or suspected to be subject to government monitoring.

6. Withdrawal of subjects after irrevocable de-linking

The research questions of this project rely on being able to use information from research subjects to more fully understand the history, nature, and consequences of a selected set of CFFD campaigns. The purpose of this project is to examine how CFFD campaigns have changed the behaviour of targeted institutions and whether and how they have developed student participants into committed and effective activists (p. 3). Research materials which have been irrevocably de-linked from identifiable information would generally have little use for answering these questions so this project is not intended to generate or retain such information.

That said, this ethics protocol does anticipate a limited number of circumstances in which irrevocably de-linked research materials would be produced, either because the research subject has chosen the maximum confidentiality option or because the researcher feels that the identifiable research materials create the risk of external pressure to disclose their contents. In the event that such irrevocably de-linked research materials are created, it would not be possible to destroy them in the event that the research subject from whom they originated withdraws from the project. Consent letters for both phases of the project have been updated to make this clear to prospective research subjects.

7. Confidential access to data by the REB

The updated ethics protocol has been amended to inform research subjects that the research ethics program may have confidential access to data to help ensure participant protection procedures are followed, and a link has been added to the resource suggested at: <http://www.research.utoronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/documents/2014/10/GUIDE-FOR-INFORMED-CONSENT-V-Oct-2014.pdf>

Matters not raised in your email

There are also two other matters I would like to raise with the board.

Section D in the ethics protocol explains that research subjects will have access to my departmentally-approved research proposal and REB-approved ethics protocol. Given the amendments that have been made to my methodology during the research ethics stage, there is a risk that subjects who read the unaltered research proposal will be confused by apparent discrepancies. To avert this risk, I plan to add an introductory information box explaining the process of ethics review and all

substantive changes to the methodology which have been made since the research proposal was approved.

The second concerns the first proposed stage of the research project: a census of all Canadian universities based on unobjectionable questions which are not expected to raise any risks for participants. This is described in Section D and Appendix 1. In the event that the ethics board has any further issues with the case study phase of this project, I request that they provide immediate approval to begin the census phase.

Thank you for your guidance,

Milan