Steps for IRB Approval: What Researchers Might Expect

In general, for a well-written proposal eligible for expedited review, a researcher should anticipate that the IRB process will take approximately one month (from submission to approval). Here are typical steps in the process:

Step 1. The researcher accesses information about Augustana’s IRB procedures, completes the online NIH-sponsored Ethics Education module or the CITI ethics module, and may choose to consult with the IRB Chair (irb@augie.edu) about ethics and/or methodological questions prior to submission of his/her proposal. Care should be taken at this step to determine whether the proposal will be submitted assuming it is exempt, or deserving expedited or full IRB Board review. Consult the IRB Proposal Submission Form table to help in making this determination.

Step 2. The proposal is submitted to Academic Affairs. Within two business days, the researcher will receive an e-mail acknowledgement that the proposal has been received. Academic Affairs begins a documentation folder for that specific proposal and forwards the proposal to the IRB Chair.

Step 3. The IRB Chair will read the proposal and make an initial determination about whether the proposal qualifies as exempt, is eligible for expedited review, or requires full IRB review. If the proposal is deemed exempt or eligible for expedited review, the researcher will receive a reply from the IRB (via Academic Affairs) after two weeks. If the proposal requires a full Institutional Review Board review, such a review will be scheduled within one month, and the researcher will be notified of said meeting and invited to attend.

Step 4. If the IRB requests that clarification and/or revision be made to the proposal, the researcher must address these concerns prior to resubmission. The amount of time this process takes is researcher-dependent.

Step 5. If/when the researcher resubmits the revised proposal, the researcher may again anticipate a reply from the IRB after two weeks. This process may continue until the IRB is satisfied that human subjects are protected and ethical considerations are sufficiently addressed.

Step 6. The proposal is approved. At this point, a letter will be sent to the researcher. The approval by the IRB is for one year (365-days).

Step 7. When the research is completed, the researcher must complete a brief report on the study. As the one year timeframe ends, the researcher will receive an e-mail from Academic Affairs reminding him/her that the one year window will close in one month. At that juncture, the researcher will need to decide whether the study will be completed in the remaining time or whether he/she should apply for an extension. Upon submission of a request for extension, e-mail response will be provided in one week.