

Up Close with IRB chair Dr. Jennifer Randles

Communication is key for Dr. Jennifer Randles, who has transitioned smoothly into her new role as Chair of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), also known as the Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects (CPHS). Dr. Randles recently spoke with us about her work as a sociologist and her plans to keep the lines of communication open during the IRB process here at Fresno State.

Q. Dr. Randles, please tell us a little about yourself and the various positions you hold on campus?

A. I am a sociologist of families, childhood, policy, gender, race, and inequality. I have over 15 years of experience conducting research with human subjects, primarily through qualitative in-depth interviewing and participant observation with low-income parents.

I am originally from rural Texas, and I earned my Ph.D. in sociology from the University of California, Berkeley. This is my seventh year at Fresno State, where I am Chair and Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology. I also serve as Chair of the University Undergraduate Program Review Committee.

Q. What motivated you to take on the role of our IRB/CPHS Chair?

A. One of my favorite courses to teach in the Sociology Department is Soc 176: Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences. In that course, I devote almost three weeks to teaching about the ethical implications of research and how institutional review boards emerged in response to our nation's dark history of conducting egregious, inhumane research experiments on participants who were treated more as *subjects*, less as *humans*.

In my opinion, research and methodology really come alive when talking about ethics and protecting the fundamental rights of those we seek to understand. Serving as IRB/CPHS Chair allows me to apply my sociological knowledge, especially my expertise on inequality and social vulnerability, and to learn more about the vast and diverse types of research being conducted across our campus.

Q. For those not familiar with the IRB/CPHS, what exactly does this committee provide to our campus? What falls under your purview as the Chair and the entire committee as a whole?

A. The University CPHS provides a thorough review of research projects conducted by Fresno State administrators, faculty, staff, students, and other affiliates that: 1) involve people, including studies of their opinions, experiences, behaviors, and reactions to interventions; 2) seek to contribute to systemic knowledge (research done with the intent to lead to conference presentations or publication); and 3) present risks greater than what those people would encounter in daily life (in research ethics speak, "more than minimal risk"). We also review all externally funded research projects.

As Chair, I provide education across campus about IRB/CPHS policies and procedures, oversee the review process, and communicate with researchers and collaborators about the ethical implications of research. I work with an incredible committee composed of representatives from various academic departments and offices across campus, as well as community members with specific areas of expertise, including a faith leader a medical doctor.

Q. What plans (if any) do you have for this committee and the services it provides? Do you plan to make any changes/updates to the current policies and procedures?

A. I would like for the University CPHS to continue to play an important role in educational efforts about the ethical implications of research across campus. My predecessors were very effective in this regard, and I will continue to prioritize open lines of communication and timely responses between principal investigators (lead researchers and advisors) and our committee.

For now, we do not anticipate any significant changes to CPHS policies and procedures, but will continue to work with PIs and collaborators to facilitate ethical research and a smooth IRB review process at both departmental and University levels.

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