

DePaul University
Panel: IBC Panel
MINUTES OF MEETING
May 04, 2026

Members Present:	Members Absent:
Katie Abma (Voting) David George (Voting) Jingjing Kipp (Voting) Janine Kirin (Voting) Justin Maresh (Chair) (Voting) Nicolette Zielinski-Mozny (Voting) Anna Bernadska (Non Voting) Melodie Fox (Non Voting)	Rima Barkauskas (Voting) Jeremie Fant (Voting)

The meeting was called to order at 01:00 P.M by J. Maresh, Chair.

EARLY AGENDA ITEMS

1. Welcome

2. eProtocol System Issues

- The committee engaged in discussion regarding ongoing challenges with the eProtocol platform, focusing on both technical limitations and the reliance on temporary workarounds rather than long-term system improvements.
- Anna specifically highlighted the reliance on the secondary reviewer workaround to address agenda-related limitations, particularly with the issues of accessing protocols scheduled for review, while noting that this approach does not resolve the underlying issue.
- Janine initially understood that eProtocol was actively working toward a permanent fix and believed the current workaround was only a temporary solution. This reflects some uncertainty or inconsistency in eProtocol's communication about whether system improvements are planned or forthcoming.
- Melodie provided additional context by explaining that the system architecture is highly interconnected, making even small modifications complex and potentially disruptive. Because many features depend on one another, implementing fixes in one area may unintentionally affect others. This technical constraint helps explain why the eProtocol team may be reluctant to make changes and instead defaults to interim solutions.

Conclusion

- The committee agreed that, given the current constraints, they will continue using the secondary reviewer workaround as a practical solution for managing agenda-related system limitations. While not ideal, this approach allows work to proceed without significant delays and ensures that reviews can be completed within existing operational timelines.

3. IBC Manual Review

The committee completed a final review of the Institutional Biosafety Committee (IBC) manual, marking the conclusion of a multi-stage revision and approval process. This effort ensured that the manual reflects current regulatory expectations, institutional practices, and committee priorities.

- Justin facilitated the final review session, beginning with the remaining unresolved sections (starting around page 70). He guided the committee through outstanding comments and ensured that each issue was addressed.
- Anna confirmed that the manual had already undergone formal review by the policy committee and was approved without objection. This indicated that the document was aligned with institutional standards and did not require additional policy-level revisions, allowing the committee to focus exclusively on final refinements.
- Committee members collectively reviewed and finalized key sections of the manual, including:
 - Teaching protocols, clarifying expectations for instructional laboratory activities involving biological materials
 - Artificial intelligence (AI)-related considerations, ensuring guidance reflects emerging research practices
 - Biosafety cabinet requirements, including proper use, maintenance, and certification expectations
 - Personal protective equipment (PPE), reinforcing safety standards and appropriate usage across research settings
- Justin made several targeted updates to improve clarity and practicality, including
 - Removing the requirement for **institutionally-provided writing instruments (?)**, recognizing that this was not a widely practiced or enforceable standard and did not contribute meaningfully to biosafety compliance.
 - Adding explicit language requiring notification and consideration of immunocompromised individuals (e.g., students in instructional settings) when protocols involve potential biological risks. This addition strengthens the manual's alignment with safety and accessibility considerations.

Conclusion:

- All remaining comments were resolved, and no outstanding issues remain.
- Track changes were formally accepted, and draft markings were removed, transitioning the document to its final version.
- The revised manual was dated May 4, 2026

4. Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) Document Development

The committee proposed developing a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document to complement the IBC manual and improve overall clarity, accessibility, and efficiency in responding to investigator inquiries. This initiative is intended to reduce repetitive communication during protocol reviews and provide quicker, user-friendly guidance for common issues.

- Justin introduced the idea of creating an FAQ document as a practical tool to address recurring questions and common areas of confusion encountered during protocol review. He noted that many reviewer comments are repetitive, and consolidating responses into an FAQ could improve efficiency for both reviewers and investigators.
- David emphasized the importance of maintaining consistency between the FAQ and the official manual. He recommended that all guidance included in the FAQ should also remain documented in the manual, which serves as the formal reference. The FAQ would function as a simplified, accessible companion resource rather than a replacement.
- Anna suggested identifying relevant sections throughout the manual that frequently generate questions. These items can then be adapted into FAQ entries, ensuring alignment between the two resources and minimizing duplication of effort.
- Justin implemented a practical solution to support this process by creating a custom style tag within the manual to identify FAQ-relevant content. This tagging system will make it easier to search for, track, and compile FAQ items as the document evolves.
- The committee discussed multiple options for hosting and maintaining the FAQ, reflecting a desire to create a resource that is both accessible and sustainable:
 - Using SharePoint's built-in FAQ functionality for structured, searchable content
 - Embedding a "living document" on the institutional website that can be updated regularly using Issuu software <https://issuu.com/>, as mentioned by Lauren Miller, which may provide enhanced usability or navigation features.

Conclusion:

- The committee agreed that developing the FAQ document will be the next project following completion of the IBC manual.
- Initial content will be collected and organized in a Word document, allowing for collaborative input and refinement before final publication.

- FAQ entries will remain grounded in the official manual, ensuring that all guidance continues to be formally documented while also being presented in a more accessible format.
- The committee also agreed that key resources, such as the BSL2 SOP template, should be made readily available through the FAQ or website to improve accessibility and reduce repeated requests.

5. End-of-August Meeting Scheduling

Janine proposed scheduling a dedicated meeting at the end of August to proactively address protocol submissions that may require approval prior to the start of the fall semester.

- Janine noted that many instructional and research laboratories are expected to begin operations by the second week of classes, making timely approvals critical. Without an early meeting, the committee may be forced into a rushed review process.
- Justin supported the proposal, recognizing its value in improving planning and reducing last-minute strain on the committee. He indicated that he would need to review his August travel schedule before confirming availability, as summer commitments may affect his ability to attend.
- The committee informally acknowledged that submissions during the summer can be unpredictable, but having a tentative meeting in place would provide necessary flexibility to respond to time-sensitive protocols.

Conclusion:

- The committee agreed to plan for an end-of-August meeting, contingent upon confirmation of key member availability, particularly Justin's.
- Janine will coordinate scheduling once availability is confirmed.
- The meeting will remain conditional and flexible; if no submissions requiring immediate attention are received, it may be canceled to avoid unnecessary scheduling burden.

6. Protocol Review Issue – Joanna's Protocol

David raised a concern regarding how a recent protocol response from Joanna was addressed, highlighting a gap between the committee's requested clarification and the investigator's submitted response.

- David explained that Joanna responded to prior reviewer comments by providing documentation supporting a BSL1 classification for the bacteria involved in the study. While technically accurate, this response did not address the core concern raised by the

committee, which focused on the need to consider and document special precautions for immunocompromised individuals who may be affected by exposure.

- The issue centered on the fact that, although organisms classified as BSL1 are generally considered low risk, some may still function as opportunistic pathogens, particularly for vulnerable populations. The committee's original intent was to ensure that the protocol explicitly acknowledged this risk and described any necessary precautions.
- Justin confirmed that Joanna's response did not align with the committee's expectations and clarified that the intent was not to challenge the BSL classification, but rather to ensure appropriate risk mitigation measures were documented. He agreed that the protocol requires an additional review cycle to address this gap.
- The committee collectively agreed that protocols involving BSL1 organisms should still include clear documentation of precautions when there is a potential risk to immunocompromised individuals. This is particularly important in teaching or shared research environments where participant health status may vary.
- The discussion reinforced the need for clearer communication in reviewer comments, ensuring that investigators understand not only the technical requirements but also the broader safety considerations underlying those requests.

Conclusion:

- David will return the protocol to the investigator for clarification, specifically requesting documentation of appropriate precautions for immunocompromised individuals.
- The issue can be resolved through targeted clarification and does not require escalation to a full committee review.
- The committee emphasized the importance of ensuring that risk considerations are explicitly addressed in protocol language, even when the biological agent is classified at a lower biosafety level.

7. Biosafety Cabinet Certification Policy Communication

The committee discussed the implementation and communication of the updated biosafety cabinet (BSC) certification policy, focusing on clarifying departmental responsibilities and ensuring consistent compliance across units.

- Justin reviewed the finalized policy language from the IBC manual, which clearly states that individual departments are responsible for ensuring annual certification of their biosafety cabinets. Departments are also expected to communicate certification status to Katie, who oversees related compliance tracking and inspections.

- Katie confirmed that she currently conducts inspections of BSL2 laboratories, both prior to initial use and on an annual basis. These inspections already include verification of biosafety cabinet certification, but consistent departmental communication is still needed.
- Janine noted an inconsistency in current practices, explaining that certification services (previously handled by Gwen) have primarily covered the Biology department, with less clarity regarding coverage in the Health Sciences department.
- Katie identified specific individuals in Health Sciences - Sarah Connolly and Eiron Cudaback - who have biosafety cabinets that have historically been certified during inspection cycles. However, there is no clearly designated departmental contact or a systematic process to ensure compliance across that unit.
- Justin indicated that he will take responsibility for communicating the updated policy to the Biology Department Safety Committee, helping to formalize expectations and reinforce accountability.

Conclusion:

- Justin will manage internal communication with the Biology department to ensure alignment with the updated certification policy.
- The Health Sciences department must be contacted to identify and establish a designated point person responsible for biosafety cabinet certification compliance.
- The committee emphasized the importance of standardizing procedures across departments to ensure compliance and avoid gaps in certification oversight.

8. Faculty Replacement for Jingjing's Research Leave

The committee discussed staffing implications related to Jingjing's upcoming leave and identified next steps to ensure continuity of expertise and committee operations.

- Jingjing formally announced plans to take a one-year research leave from June 2026 through June 2027, creating a temporary vacancy on the committee.
- Justin noted that this absence results in a gap in faculty representation and subject-matter expertise, making it necessary to recruit a temporary replacement to maintain the committee's required disciplinary coverage.
- The committee discussed key areas of expertise that must be preserved, including:
 - Animal containment and research oversight
 - Plant pathogen and pest containment
 - Synthetic nucleic acid and molecular biology research
- Jingjing proposed potential candidates, including Jianfei Zhao and Margaret Bell.

- Justin noted that Jianfei would be a strong candidate due to his expertise in molecular biology and synthetic nucleic acid research, which fulfills a critical requirement. Although Jianfei is pre-tenure and primarily focused on plant-related research, his skill set aligns well with committee needs.
- Janine pointed out that Margaret Bell is already serving on the IACUC, which may limit her availability or create overlapping commitments.
- Anna highlighted that the committee is already operating with a relatively small number of members, and adding another member, even beyond a temporary replacement, could improve long-term capacity and stability.
- The discussion also noted that Rima Barkauskas will return from maternity leave in June, which will help partially offset workload pressures, though not fully replace Jingjing's role.

Conclusion:

- Jingjing will initiate discussions with Joanna Brooke, Chair of Biology/Microbiology, to identify and refine candidate recommendations.
- Jianfei has been identified as the strongest candidate and will be approached regarding participation.
- The return of Rima will provide additional support, helping to mitigate workload challenges.
- The committee will consider strategic recruitment of additional members beyond the temporary replacement to strengthen long-term resilience and maintain balanced expertise.

The following action items were identified to ensure timely follow-up on meeting decisions, improve operational efficiency, and support ongoing committee priorities:

9. Action Items

Justin will

- Review his travel schedule and other commitments to determine availability for the proposed end-of-August meeting, and communicate availability to Janine so scheduling can proceed.
- Share the updated biosafety cabinet (BSC) certification requirements with the Biology Department Safety Committee, ensuring clarity on departmental responsibilities for annual certification and reporting.
- Send a formal communication to the Departmental Safety Committee outlining expectations for establishing or maintaining internal policies related to BSC certification.
- Begin compiling and transferring FAQ-relevant content from the IBC manual into the new FAQ document to support the initial structure.

- Review and integrate relevant guidance from existing notes and working documents into the FAQ draft.
- and sign the minutes from the previous meeting to ensure proper recordkeeping and compliance.
- Contact Jianfei to discuss potential participation on the committee, including expectations, responsibilities, and term duration.

Janine will

- Coordinate August meeting scheduling. Once Justin confirms his availability, develop and distribute a poll or scheduling request to committee members to identify optimal meeting timing.
- Identify Health Sciences contact: Work with relevant stakeholders to establish a designated point person in the Health Sciences department responsible for biosafety cabinet certification coordination.

Anna will

- Publish finalized IBC manual. Upload the clean, finalized version of the IBC manual to the institutional website, ensuring accessibility for investigators and stakeholders.
- Explore FAQ platform options. Follow up with Lauren Miller about Issuu software <https://issuu.com/>, which could be used to host and maintain the FAQ resource in a dynamic format.

David

- Protocol follow-up. Return Joanna's protocol with a request for clarification, specifically asking for clear documentation of precautions for immunocompromised individuals, ensuring alignment with committee expectations.

Jingjing

- Consult with Joanna Brooke to gather recommendations and insights on potential candidates to fill the temporary committee vacancy.
- Engage in discussions with Jianfei to assess interest, availability, and suitability for serving on the committee during the leave period.

Katie will

- Identify and formalize points of contact within the Health Sciences department responsible for biosafety cabinet certification and coordination.
- Support certification tracking to ensure that once contacts are identified, there is a clear communication channel for tracking certification status and coordinating inspections.

All Committee Members will

- Contribute to FAQ development. Add potential questions, recurring issues, and clarifications to the shared FAQ document in the Teams folder, helping to build a comprehensive and practical resource.
- Identify recurring review themes: Proactively note common feedback provided during reviews to support consistent messaging and FAQ content development.

A list of the Protocols approved and reports reviewed is attached. The meeting was adjourned at 03:00 P.M.

Justin J Maresh

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(Chair)

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