

INTRODUCTION

All research involving the use of animals by University of Saskatchewan (USask) researchers must meet the highest standards of scientific integrity. Consistent with Canadian Council on Animal Care (CCAC) policy, the University Animal Care Committee (UACC) requires all animal use for research purposes goes through a scientific merit peer review prior to final approval of the animal use by the UACC Animal Research Ethics Board (AREB). Scientific merit is established for those research Animal Use Protocols (AUPs) associated with funding (current or recently expired) from granting agencies that use an accepted and well-defined peer review process. All other research AUPs submitted to the AREB must undergo a peer review of scientific merit. This review must occur independent from the UACC. The Scientific Merit Review Committee for Animal-Based Research (SMRCABR) under the Office of Vice-President Research (OVPR) is tasked with this review.

PURPOSE

To conduct a peer review of the scientific merit of all research based animal use at USask to meet the University's and CCAC obligations to ensure the highest scientific integrity of any research that involves animal use.

SCOPE

The SMRCABR will undertake a peer review for scientific merit of all animal use proposed for research except when:

- The AUP is associated with a funding agency that employs an acceptable scientific merit review process.
- The four year renewal of an AUP has had previous scientific merit review (either through a funding agency that employs an acceptable review process or by the USask SMRCABR).
- The animal use is only for educational purposes (these are subject to pedagogical merit review) or for diagnostic purposes.

RESPONSIBILITY

The SMRCABR has responsibility to provide scientific merit review on all animal-based research that has not undergone review for scientific merit at the time of the AUP submission to the AREB. Through the Research Ethics Specialist from Animal Care and Research Support, OVPR, the SMRCABR reports to the AREB whether the animal-based research has scientific merit and, if not, advises the Principal Investigator when scientific merit is not evident.

COMPOSITION, AUTHORITY AND TERMS

The Office of Vice-President Research appoints 7-9 committee members for a term of three years with the possibility for renewal of a second term at the request of the committee member. The SMRCABR Chair is chosen from among the committee members (with possibility of renewal for an additional term) and is appointed by the Associate Vice-President Research. Member composition includes tenured faculty from the various departments, schools, and colleges engaged in animal-based research and with sufficient cross-section to satisfy the various expertise required for the highly diverse USask Animal Care and Use Program. The SMRCABR Chair reports the review findings to the Research Ethics Specialist who subsequently communicates the findings to the AREB and Principal Investigator.

The Research Ethics Specialist provides administrative support to the SMRCABR. Specifically, the Research Ethics Specialist: 1) corresponds with the Principal Investigator regarding requirements for scientific merit review; 2) communicates the review comments from the SMRCABR to the Principal Investigator and the subsequent response from the Principal Investigator to the SMRCABR if necessary; 3) communicates to the AREB the decision of the SMRCABR on the scientific merit of the animal-based research, and; 4) archives all peer reviews on behalf of the OVPR.

PROCEDURE

1. The Research Ethics Specialist provides the SMRCABR Chair with a research proposal (3 page maximum) of the proposed project along with a complete AUP (this is outlined in the *“Procedure for Scientific Merit Review Required for Animal Use Protocols (Principal Investigators)”* document.
2. After a quick review, the SMRCABR Chair assigns three committee members (one of which could be the Chair) the task of reviewing the proposal for scientific merit.
3. Each reviewer receives the proposal and AUP. Each reviewer returns a completed peer review assessment form to the Chair within two weeks of assignment. The Chair reviews the assessment forms, and if ≥ 2 reviewers indicate scientific merit, the Chair communicates this outcome to the Research Ethics Specialist. All reviews are saved electronically by the Research Ethics Specialist for archiving. The Research Ethics Specialist communicates to the AREB that scientific merit is established.
4. If ≥ 2 reviewers identify issues with the proposal, the reviewers may discuss the issues by e-mail or telephone, if necessary. Adjustments can be made to the review or if the decision of each reviewer stands, the Chair corresponds with the Research Ethics Specialist, who then makes the anonymous reviews available to the Principal Investigator.
5. The Principal Investigator may respond to the reviewer concerns and these responses are communicated back to the reviewers via the Research Ethics Specialist and SMRCABR Chair. The Principal Investigator should include a revised proposal as appropriate for review by the SMRCABR assigned reviewers.
6. The Chair may seek outside peer review support if the proposal is considerably outside the expertise of all SMRCABR members. The Chair should identify two researchers (which may include individuals suggested by the principal investigator) external to USask and who do not have a conflict-of-interest with the Principal Investigator to review the proposal for scientific merit. The same procedure of review that the SMRCABR employs is followed in this instance.

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