

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 fourth 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). Caveat: If the fourth year renewal AUP application deviates significantly from the previously approved research objectives and aims, the AREB can request an independent scientific merit review through the SMRCABR. If the AUP is maintained for a second fourth year renewal (i.e. 8 years total) without new peer-reviewed funding listed, the AUP will undergo scientific merit review by the SMRCABR as would occur if it was an initial AUP submission without peer-reviewed funding.
- 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 (PI) when scientific merit is not evident.

COMPOSITION, AUTHORITY AND TERMS

The Office of Vice-President Research appoints 9-11 committee members for a term of three years with the possibility of renewal for up to two additional terms (for a total of nine years) 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. One of the appointed SMRCABR members may be a trainee representative (graduate student or postdoctoral fellow). 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 PI regarding requirements for scientific merit review; 2) communicates the review comments from the SMRCABR to the PI and the subsequent response from the PI 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 PI submits the [SMRCABR Scientific Merit Review Form for Principal Investigators](#) (research proposal) to the Scientific Merit Review Committee (Animals) at smrcabr.office@usask.ca with a request for scientific merit review. The review process is outlined in the "*Procedure for Scientific Merit Review Required for Animal Use Protocols (Principal Investigators)*" document.
2. The ACRS Research Ethics Specialist assigns two committee members (one of which could be the Chair) the task of reviewing the research proposal (4 page maximum) of the proposed project for scientific merit.
3. Each reviewer receives the research proposal. The associated AUP will be provided to the SMRCABR reviewer if requested for additional reference; however, the research proposal should be a stand-alone summary. If not, then the scientific merit review form may be sent back for an update to include additional information. Any revisions resubmitted should be accompanied by a revised AUP, where applicable. A SMRCABR member must decline to review a research proposal if they have a conflict of interest with the applicant (as defined in the *OVPR Procedures for Obtaining Assessment of Scientific Merit of Projects Relating to Animal Use Protocols by the OVPR Scientific Merit Review Committee for Animal-Based Research*) or they may decline the review if they have other concerns with respect to the research proposal. Each reviewer returns a completed peer review assessment form to the Research Ethics Specialist within two weeks of assignment. The Research Ethics Specialist reviews the assessment forms, and if both reviewers indicate scientific merit, the scientific merit review will be considered complete. All reviews are maintained electronically within the OVPR Animal Care and Research Support (ACRS) Office for archiving. The Research Ethics Specialist communicates to the AREB that scientific merit is established.
4. If the reviewers identify issues with the research proposal, the reviewers may discuss the issues with the SMRCABR Chair 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. If there is disagreement between the two SMRCABR reviewers about the merit of a research proposal, the SMRCABR Chair will complete a scientific merit review and provide a third review. The SMRCABR Chair will determine if the overall scientific merit of the research is acceptable or not. If the SMRCABR Chair does not have sufficient expertise to assess the research proposal, they will request review from another SMRCABR member or select an external reviewer, if needed.

6. The Principal Investigator may respond to the reviewer’s 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 research proposal as appropriate for review by the SMRCABR assigned reviewers.
7. The Chair may seek outside peer review support if the proposal is considerably outside the expertise of all SMRCABR members. The Chair may identify two researchers external to USask and who do not have a conflict of interest with the Principal Investigator to review the research proposal for scientific merit. The same procedure of review that the SMRCABR employs is followed in this instance.

Date Created: 07 November 2017		Created by: J. Alcorn
Review and Revision History		
Revision Number	Revision Date	Reviewer
01	25-Nov-2021	SMRCABR
02	26-Apr-2024	SMRCABR
03	23-Dec-2024 Updated link to SharePoint Online site and added new e-mail address: Scientific Merit Review Committee (Animals) at smrcabr.office@usask.ca	A. Plante
04	07-Nov-2025 Revised to indicate ACRS Research Ethics Specialist will assign SMRCABR reviewers instead of SMRCABR Chair assigning reviewers	T. Fonstad
05	06-Apr-2026 Revised to indicate (a) One of the appointed SMRCABR members may be a trainee representative (graduate student or postdoctoral fellow); and (b) revised term to indicate renewal for up to two additional terms (for a total of nine years).	T. Fonstad