

**UNIVERSITY COUNCIL
RESEARCH, SCHOLARLY, AND ARTISTIC WORK COMMITTEE
REPORT FOR INFORMATION**

PRESENTED BY: Eric Lamb; chair, Research, Scholarly, and Artistic Work

DATE OF MEETING: December 19, 2024

SUBJECT: **Annual Reports from the Research Ethics Boards**

COUNCIL ACTION: **For Information Only**

SUMMARY:

The terms of reference for the Research, Scholarly, and Artistic Work Committee state that the committee will receive and report to the council the annual reports of the research ethics boards

At its November 14, 2024, meeting, RSAW met with the chairs of the Biomedical Research Ethics, the Behavioural Research Ethics, and the Animal Ethics Boards. The reports provided are attached to this report.

Biomedical Research Ethics Board

The Biomedical Research Ethics Board is responsible for the review of all ethics applications involving human participants that include medically invasive procedures; physical interventions and therapies; administration and testing of drugs, natural products or devices; or physiological imaging measures, as well as research projects collective personal health information from medical charts and health records.

Behavioural Research Ethics Board

The Behavioral Research Ethics Board is responsible for the review of all protocols involving human participants which include social, behavioural, and cultural research using methods such as interviews, surveys, questionnaires, observations, psychological, social or behavioural interventions, audio and/or video recording.

University Animal Care Committee

The University Animal Care Committee (UACC) is administratively supported by the Research Services and Ethics Office Animal Ethics Staff, who are overseen by the University Veterinarian.

The UACC reviews and approves any use of animals for research, teaching, production, and testing before animal use is initiated for these purposes. The UACC's primary responsibilities are to ensure animal welfare, adequate veterinary care, and best practices concerning animal care and use in compliance with the University of Saskatchewan Policy, Canadian Council on Animal Care guidelines, and other applicable regulations.

The reports of all ethics boards are attached with details of the work of each board.

With regard to the work of the ethics boards, RSAW was impressed with the marked improvement in processing times, particularly for the Human Research boards. The volume of work board members undertake, both to review protocols and to support research at the U of S and in work with national regulatory bodies, is essential and very large. RSAW thanks everyone who devotes time to these processes.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. 2024 Annual Human Research Ethics Office Report
2. Annual Report of the Animal Care and Use Program and University Animal Care Committee (October 1, 2023 – September 30, 2024)

TO: University of Saskatchewan Research, Scholarly and Artistic Work Committee

FROM: Dr. Susan E Jelinski, Director, Human Research Ethics

DATE: Nov 12, 2024

RE: 2024 Annual Human Research Ethics Office Report

BACKGROUND

The University of Saskatchewan Research Ethics Boards (USask REBs) provide independent ethics review for all studies that involve human participants and are conducted by University of Saskatchewan faculty, students and staff. The USask REBs also serve as the board of record for the Saskatchewan Cancer Agency, Saskatchewan Polytechnic, and North West College. The purpose of research ethics review is to ensure that participants' rights are respected and protected, and that the intended procedures comply with ethical, scientific, methodological, and legal standards. The REBs apply thoughtful interpretation of national policies for ethics (the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Human Participants (2022); TCPS2), as well as other relevant and applicable national regulations, provincial legislation and institutional policies.

The Biomedical Research Ethics Board (Bio REB) is responsible for the review of all research ethics applications involving human participants that involve medically invasive procedures; physical interventions and therapies (including exercise and diet interventions); the administration and testing of drugs, natural products or devices; and physiological imaging and measures (e.g. MRI or CT scans, heart rate, blood pressure). The Bio REB also reviews all research projects that are collecting personal health information from medical charts, health records or administrative healthcare databases.

The Behavioural Research Ethics Board (Beh REB) is responsible for the review of all research ethics applications involving human participants that include social, behavioural, and cultural research using methods such as interviews, surveys, questionnaires, observations, audio and/or video recording, and interventions that are psychological, social, or behavioural.

REPORTING PERIOD

This report highlights the activities of the USask Research Ethics Office (REO) and the REBs for the period of Jan 1, 2024 through Nov 8, 2024. This reporting time period directly aligns with the time that the newly hired Director, Human Research Ethics has served in this leadership role.

REB MEMBERSHIP

Bio REB Chair: Dr. Ildiko Badea (current term: July 1, 2022 to June 30, 2025)

Bio REB Vice-Chair: Dr. Phil Chilibeck (current term: Jan 1, 2023 to Dec 31, 2025)

Bio REB #1 Membership Roster: https://vpresearch.usask.ca/documents/human-ethics/deadlines,-board-membership,-meetings/bio-reb-1_membership-roster.pdf

Bio REB #2 Membership Roster: https://vpresearch.usask.ca/documents/human-ethics/deadlines,-board-membership,-meetings/bio-reb-2_membership-roster.pdf

Beh REB Chair: Dr. Pammla Petrucka (current term: April 1, 2022 to March 31, 2025)

Beh REB Vice-Chair: Dr. Vivian Ramsden (current term: April 1, 2024 to March 31, 2027)

Beh REB Membership Roster: https://vpresearch.usask.ca/documents/human-ethics/deadlines,-board-membership,-meetings/behavioural_reb_membership.pdf

RESEARCH ETHICS OFFICE (REO) STAFF

At the time of this report, the USask REO is fully staffed. Positions that support the Behavioural REB include a 1.0 FTE Behavioural Research Ethics Specialist (ASPA II) and 2 x 1.0 FTE Research Ethics Coordinators (ASPA I). A 1.0 FTE Biomedical Research Ethics Specialist (ASPA II) and a 1.0 FTE Research Ethics Coordinator (ASPA I) support the Biomedical REB. A 1.0 FTE Research Ethics Coordinator (ASPA I) equally supports both the Behavioural and Biomedical REBs. The REO receives administration support from a 1.0 FTE Clerical Assistant (CUPE). A 0.5 FTE Clerical Assistant (CUPE) is specifically assigned to data entry duties, where these duties are required by the REO's use of the UnivRS system. A casual Research Ethics Coordinator is also available for periodic file assignment. Finally, the REO is led by a 1.0 FTE Director.

2024 RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD MEETINGS

The Bio REB typically meets twice per month where REB member attendance alternates between Bio REB #1 and Bio REB #2. Twenty (n=20) meetings were scheduled for the 2024 calendar year. The Bio REB reviewed all research applications where the research-related risks were considered to be above minimal risk.

The Beh REB typically meets once per month, excluding the months of July and August. Ten (n=10) meetings were scheduled for the 2024 calendar year. The Beh REB

reviewed all research applications where the research-related risks were considered to be above minimal risk.

PERFORMANCE METRICS

An upward trend is evident in the total number of new files received by the REO in 2024. Projection estimates are applied to year-to-date (YTD) values as of Nov 8, 2024 to predict total files received in the calendar year. Results are presented in Table 1. Files that undergo full board review or delegated review, or files that receive an acknowledgement or exemption determination, are new studies submitted in 2024. Amendments, renewals and closures are files associated with on-going research that was reviewed and approved prior to 2024.

Bio REB – Total Files Received

A 10% increase in the total number of new research applications is projected for the Bio REB in 2024 compared to 2023 values. This increase is driven by the large growth in requests for exemptions and a small increase in delegated reviews. Typically requests for exemptions submitted to the Bio REB involve projects that are defined as quality improvement, quality assurance and program evaluation. Although these projects may be exempt from formal Bio REB review, the workload for the REO/REB to determine if they meet TCPS2 Chapter 2 requirements for exemption is often equally laborious as standard REB review and approval.

The majority of all files received by the Bio REB in 2024 were submitted by Principal Investigators whose primary academic appointment is with the College of Medicine (Figure 1).

Beh REB – Total Files Received.

A 14% increase in the total number of new research applications is projected for the Beh REB in 2024 compared to 2023 values. There has been a significant increase in the number of delegated reviews and acknowledgements in 2024. Delegated reviews are conducted on applications where the research-related risks are minimal; these files can be reviewed by one or two REB members and do not require full board review. Applications that receive an acknowledgement determination are files that invoke TCPS2 Chapter 8 for multi-jurisdictional research. These files have been previously reviewed and approved by a non-USask TCPS2 compliant REB and involve, at some level, USask resources or people. These files are given a light review by the Chairs or Vice-Chairs, primarily to ensure they meet the criteria for acknowledgment and to identify any potential revisions due to local context.

The Beh REB receives files from a wide distribution of Colleges and Schools based on the primary academic appointment of the Principal Investigator (Figure 2). The majority of files are received from the College of Medicine and the College of Arts & Science.

Table 1. Number of files received from Jan 1, 2024 through Nov 8, 2024 (year-to-date; YTD) and projected to Dec 31, 2024, by file type.

BIOMEDICAL REB

	2022	2023	2024 YTD	2024 PROJECTED	Change from 2023
Full Board Review	58	64	39	43	32%↓
Delegated Review	178	163	155	172	5%↑
Acknowledgements	18	9	1	1	88%↓
Exemptions	26	16	57	63	294%↑
Total New Files	280	252	252	279	10%↑
Amendments	574	553	517	574	4%↑
Renewals	694	709	613	681	4%↓
Closures	155	168	123	137	18%↓
TOTAL FILES	1,703	1,682	1,505	1,671	---

BEHAVIOURAL REB

	2022	2023	2024 YTD	2024 PROJECTED	Change from 2023
Full Board Review	9	19	16	18	---
Delegated Review	317	307	344	382	24%↑
Acknowledgements	45	38	41	46	21%↑
Exemptions	130	141	113	131	7%↓
Total New Files	501	505	514	577	14%↑
Amendments	447	423	389	432	2%↑
Renewals	567	633	563	625	1%↓
Closures	225	239	221	245	2%↑
TOTAL FILES	1,741	1,800	1,733	1,879	4%↑

Figure 1. Distribution of new files received by the Biomedical REB in 2024 by primary academic affiliation of the principal investigator.

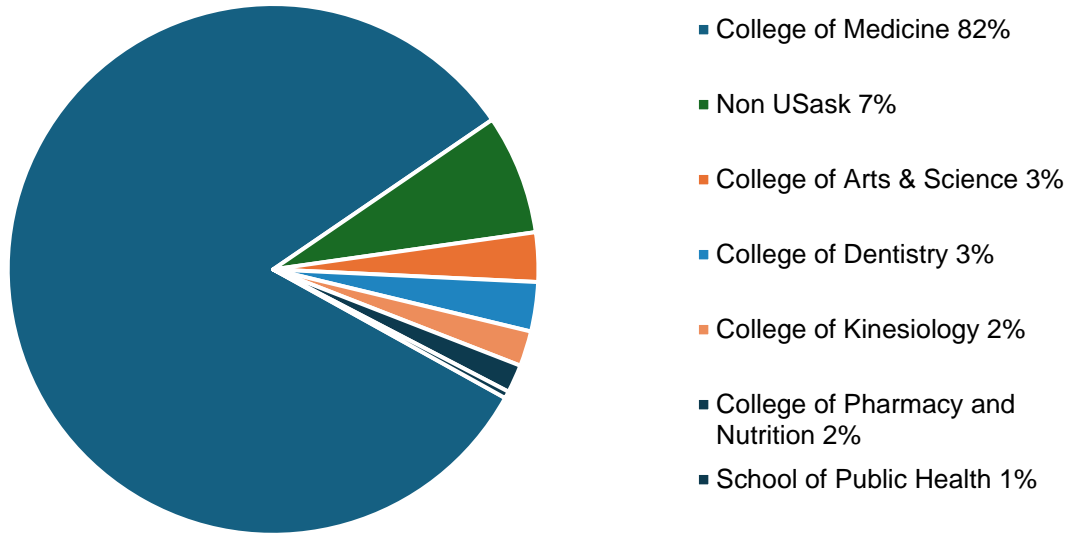
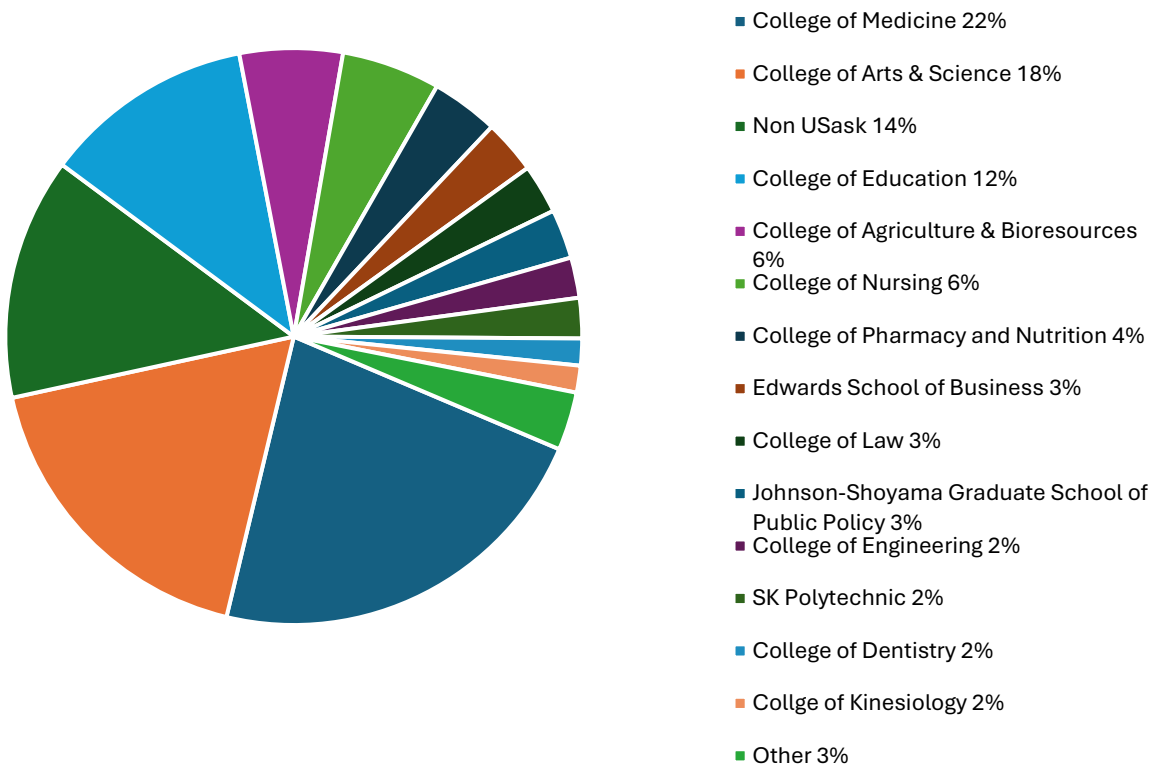


Figure 2. Distribution of new files received by the Behavioural REB in 2024 by primary academic affiliation of the principal investigator.



Combining all new files received for both the Bio REB and the Beh REB in 2024, the top twelve (n=12) academic affiliations that submit the greatest number of files are presented in Table 2. The greatest number of new files are submitted by PIs who belong to the College of Medicine.

Table 2. Percent of new files received in 2024 for both REBs, by primary academic affiliation of the principal investigator (top twelve only).

Principal Investigator Academic Affiliation	Percent of Total New Files
College of Medicine	45%
College of Arts & Science	12%
Non USask	11%
College of Education	9%
College of Agriculture & Bioresources	4%
College of Nursing	3%
College of Pharmacy & Nutrition	3%
College of Dentistry	2%
Edwards School of Business	2%
College of Law	2%
Johnson-Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy	2%
College of Kinesiology	2%

Approval Times

The number of calendar days from file submission (i.e., date the file is received by the REO) to approval (i.e., certificate of approval issue date) is presented in Table 3. There has been a 26% decrease in the time to approval for the full board reviews conducted by the Bio REB compared to 2023. The Beh REB also significantly improved its approval time by 36% for full board reviews.

The Bio REB time to approval for delegated reviews has increased compared to 2023. This is mostly due to an increase in time that the files are with the researchers.

Notably the Beh REB has significantly shortened its time to approval for delegated reviews. The time from submission to approval is 41% faster for delegated reviews compared to 2023.

Table 3. Number of calendar days from submission to approval for new delegated and full board reviews approved between Jan 1,2024 and Nov 8, 2024, separated by time with REO, time with REB, and time with researcher.

BIOMEDICAL REB					
	Avg # of Days with REO	Avg # of Days with REB	Avg # of Days with Researcher	Avg # of Days from Submission to Approval	Change from 2023
Delegated	13	21	27	61	22% Slower
Full Board	12	65	45	122	26% Faster
BEHAVIOURAL REB					
Delegated	26	15	17	58	41% Faster
Full Board	36	30	29	95	36% Faster

In the spirit of transparency, the most current approval times are now posted on the REO website: <https://vpresearch.usask.ca/ethics/human-ethics.php>

These publicly posted data represent the approval times for the most recent 8 weeks and are regularly updated. The purpose of this initiative is to enhance capacity for researchers to plan their REO/REB submissions in accordance with their preferred research start dates.

RESEARCH COMMUNITY OUTREACH

In 2024, the REO continued to prioritize its outreach activities with the research community. These activities included a number of workshops and presentations to various groups and academic units across the campus on how to complete research ethics applications. REO staff also met with individual groups and researchers to discuss research ethics issues that were specific to their areas of research. The intention for these discussions was to improve the research ethics process for both researchers and the REO staff/REB members who are processing and reviewing their files.

In 2024, REO staff have served on the following committees:

- Biosafety Advisory Committee
- Accelerating Clinical Trials Canada Consortium
- Canadian Association of Research Ethics Boards (CAREB) Board of Directors

- Canadian Collaboration for Child Health: Efficiency and Excellence in the Ethics Review of Research (CHEER)
- Research Data Management (RDM) Working Group
- Huron Software Implementation Team

Townhall Sessions

In May and June, the Director, Human Research Ethics collaborated with faculty members who are leading the Communities and Sustainability Signature Area of Research to learn about the experiences of USask faculty and students with regard to the research ethics application and review process. Topic-specific sessions were hosted by a professional facilitator skilled in Appreciative Inquiry. These sessions were followed by the dissemination of an online, anonymous survey where researchers who were unable to attend the sessions could share their concerns. The themes for improvement are summarized below:

- Shortened approval times
- Increased review process transparency
- Feedback consistency
- Consent form improvements/request for templates
- Community-based research challenges
- Online application system

As an immediate response to these concerns, the REO has identified areas for process improvement and has implemented changes that directly impact approval times.

The REO has enhanced its consultation service. Researchers are invited to book 1:1 consultations to discuss new files in the pre-submission stage. The purpose of these consultations is to provide project-specific advice that is intended to assist with the research ethics application process. This service additionally enhances transparency about the research ethics review process.

Arrangements are underway for specific researchers to meet with the REB Chairs and Vice-Chairs to discuss emerging trends in their research areas that pose challenges for the research ethics review process.

New, user-friendly consent form templates, with associated instruction guides, for the Beh REB are drafted.

A new online research ethics application system is forthcoming, and discussed in more detail below in the Technology Innovation in Research Ethics section.

CONTINUING EDUCATION – REO STAFF

All REO staff attended the 2024 Canadian Association of Research Ethics Board (CAREB) Annual Conference. Keynote sessions included presentations on artificial intelligence and its impact on research ethics, research security, and innovation in adaptive platform trials. A member of our USask REO participated in a national panel discussion regarding multi-jurisdictional research.

REO staff have completed/have participated in training in the following areas:

- Inspiring Change 2.0 – The Center for Implementation
- Prosci™ Change Management Certification Program
- Project Management Institute training
- Hamilton Integrated Research Ethics Board (HiREB) Chart Review Tutorial

TECHNOLOGY INNOVATION IN RESEARCH ETHICS

REO staff, REB members and USask researchers have all identified the challenges that exist with our current UnivRS system for submitting and processing research ethics applications. A technology upgrade is urgently needed. The REO, the Office of the Vice President, Research (OVPR) and the Information and Communications Technology (ICT) unit have collaboratively addressed this need and have sourced a solution. Beginning in Sept 2024 and continuing through to present, staff from the REO and ICT have been engaged in the Phase 1 and Phase 2 Discovery Sessions with the Huron Research Suite software team to work towards implementing the Huron software solution for USask research ethics. This is the same research ethics software system that the University of British Columbia, the University of Alberta and the University of Calgary are currently using. Bringing USask online with this same software solution is expected to improve approval times, enhance research file security, and increase the transparency of the research ethics process for researchers. Huron software implementation also allows USask to fully participate in REB Exchange (<https://www.rebexchange.ca/>), the technology solution that supports the Western Canada Research Ethics Review Reciprocity Agreement between the University of British Columbia, University of Alberta, University of Calgary and University of Saskatchewan.

REO staff are currently working to adapt our Word document application forms into a smart form, online application developed and delivered through Huron.

Annual Report of the Animal Care and Use Program and University Animal Care Committee

To the Research, Scholarly and Artistic Work Committee of Council

For the period October 1, 2023 to September 30, 2024

The University Animal Care Committee (**UACC**) Co-Chairs (Drs. Steven Machtaler and Robert Laprairie), Vice-Chair (Dr. Karen Schwean-Lardner) and University Veterinarian and Director of Animal Care and Research Support (Dr. Kurtis Swekla) are pleased to provide the following overview of the key accomplishments and activities of the Animal Care and Research Support (**ACRS**) office and UACC for the period October 1, 2023 to September 30, 2024.

OVERVIEW OF THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE UNIVERSITY ANIMAL CARE COMMITTEE

The UACC must review Animal Use Protocols (AUPs) and approve any use of animals for research, teaching, production, and testing before animal use is initiated. The UACC ensures animal welfare, animal user training, scientific and pedagogical merit review, adequate veterinary care, adequate animal facilities, animal user environmental safety, and best practices to comply with USask Policy, Canadian Council on Animal Care (CCAC) guidelines, and international, federal, provincial, and local regulations. UACC Policy reflects the perspective of USask which views the use of animals in research, teaching, production, and testing as a privilege and thus carries significant responsibility for all animal users. USask is committed to ensuring that all animal care and use is conducted with exemplary standards which is critical for high quality research outcomes.

The UACC receives administrative support from Research Ethics and Infrastructure (REI) Animal Care and Research Support (ACRS) Office staff. The University Veterinarian directs the ACRS Office which includes the following personnel:

- UACC Administrative Support
- UACC Animal Technicians
- UACC Clinical Veterinarians
- UACC Post-Approval Veterinarian
- UACC Aquatics Manager
- Animal Care and Research Support Services Facility Managers and Animal Technicians

SUMMARY OF ACTIVITIES (October 1, 2023 – September 30, 2024)

Review of research protocols, modifications, and renewals

There are currently 409 active USask Animal Use Protocols (**AUP**). This includes 19 AUPs which involve a collaboration with another institution, 15 AUPs which are “Category of Invasiveness (**CI**) Level E”, the highest CI level defined by the CCAC. In addition, 20 Exempt Activity submissions (CI level A study or live animal use that does not require AREB review) were received during the reporting period. The UACC serves approximately 200 principal investigators. AUPs, Renewals, and Modifications are reviewed at 2 full board meetings per month (CI Level D and E and major Modifications) and 2 subcommittee meetings per month (CI Level B and C and minor Modifications). During the reporting period the full AREB reviewed 94 AUP, 143 annual renewals and 110 modifications while the subcommittees reviewed 137 annual renewals and 71 modifications. There are 186 active animal researcher Principal Investigators (PI) and a total of 883 active animal users (staff, trainees, graduate students) in research teaching.

Online Animal Management System Update

With the cancellation of the Animal Ethics UnivRS module in 2021 we have been working on evaluation for a replacement with a vendor-based system. Initial discovery work revealed that animal use at USask is highly

complex. This prompted us to conduct additional discovery work to thoroughly understand the requirements for an Animal Management Solution that will meet institutional needs. Understanding these requirements is crucial because it ensures that the system we implement will effectively support all aspects of animal use at USask.

The RFP development process addressed the complexity of animal use by including additional consultations to understand the needs of both laboratory and agricultural animal facilities. The RFP has been drafted and will be released in late 2024 to early 2025, we anticipate this initiative will deliver technology and process improvements over the course of FY24/25 and FY25/26.

The procurement of the Animal Management Solution is part of a multi-phased plan for research administration technology and process renewal that is essential to supporting USask's ambition to grow its research enterprise. The necessary funds for implementation will be allocated from ICT and OVPR one-time funding sources, ongoing software licensing fees covered from sustainable institutional funding.

Enhancing Service

University Animal Care Committee

Dr. Steven Machtaler (College of Medicine, Department of Medical Imaging) and Dr. Robert Laprairie (College of Pharmacy and Nutrition) are the appointed UACC Co-Chairs along with Dr. Karen Schwean-Lardner (College of Agriculture and Bioresources) as UACC Vice-chair to assist the Co-Chairs with distribution of work and act as a Co-Chair as necessary.

Animal Research Ethics Board meeting frequency: The AREB, a subcommittee of the UACC, meets twice monthly to review and approve animal use protocol submissions and amendments.

Pedagogical Merit Review (PMR) of Teaching and Training AUPs: The CCAC requires pedagogical merit review of all new and 4-year renewal teaching and training AUPs. All USask courses for credit (undergraduate or graduate) that involve the use of animals require review by the TLSE Pedagogical Merit Review Committee (**PMRC**) prior to AREB approval. The PMRC is currently comprised of 10 members, including experts in pedagogy and the Three Rs. This CCAC-mandated committee, chaired by Dr. Al Chicoine, reports through the Office of the Vice Provost Students and Learning to Dr. Jerome Cranston (Vice-Provost); however, PMRC meetings and reviews are coordinated by staff from ACRS REI. This committee was established in spring 2019. PMRC Terms of Reference are in place and the committee worked diligently to develop the review form for course instructors to complete, along with the assessment form the PMRC now uses to evaluate the review forms. The PMRC is using a phased-in approach to review the 30+ active teaching AUPs that require review by the committee. During the reporting period 10 pedagogical merit reviews were completed by the PMRC.

Scientific merit review of research AUPs: The CCAC requires scientific merit review of all new and 4-year renewal research AUPs. For any research AUPs that are not funded via an agency that employs scientific peer review, the AUP must be reviewed by the OVPR Scientific Merit Review Committee for Animal-Based Research (**SMRCABR**). This committee functions at arm's length from the AREB and it reports to the Associate Vice-President Research. The SMRCABR is currently comprised of 11 faculty members, chaired by Dr. Lane Bekar. ACRS staff use SharePoint Online (SPO) as the platform to coordinate and circulate AUPs for merit review. During the current RSAW reporting period, the SMRCABR reviewed 21 AUPs for scientific merit. The Animal Ethics Specialist manually coordinates the SMRCABR review process with the Chair of the committee using SPO. As new data management system vendors are explored, management of the SMRCABR will be taken into consideration as a necessity to improve workflow and work efficiency.

Participation in the USask Live Animal Re-Use and Tissue Share Program has remained consistent this year. Through the tissue share program, investigators donate surplus or control animals to be used by recipient investigators for training or experimental use. This process was previously facilitated through an online user USask SharePoint site. The USask SharePoint site was closed in early 2023 and the current SPO is not adequate for facilitating and processing these requests. As such, the current processes are performed manually through email as there is no effective replacement available resulting in an increased workload for the ACRS administration staff. As new data management system vendors are explored, management of the Tissue Share Program and processes will be taken into consideration to improve workflow and work efficiency.

ACRS Office Updates

The UACC and University Veterinarian report directly to Dr. Terry Fonstad (AVPR Ethics and Infrastructure).

Additional administrative positions are necessary to fulfill the full scope of the ACRS mandate and CCAC reporting requirements and guidelines. Two permanent AREB coordinator positions were approved and hired in early 2024 allowing for more efficient management of the UACC and AREB functions and to maintain compliance with the CCAC guidelines and regulations. A training technician role was developed which will allow for more dedicated focus on the training program as a whole including updating the training information offered and ensuring adequate training sessions are offered to ensure students and staff are trained promptly.

Animal Order Desk

The Animal Order Desk tracked approximately 140,000 animals during this reporting period. This is an increase (by approximately 37,000 animals) from the previous year representing a significant increase in animal-based research. Animal ordering is centralized through ACRS REI to reduce costs by amalgamating animal orders, to track animal numbers for CCAC reporting, and to facilitate the acquisition of export/import permits. Animal orders historically total approximately \$600,000 annually; however, the fiscal 2023-24 year the Animal Order Desk processed \$927,000 in animal orders representing a combination of a large increase in animal-based research and some inflationary increases.

Animal User Training Opportunities

- Rodent handling, anesthesia, surgery, and fish user training practical skills workshops are offered regularly.
- ACRS staff offer specialized practical skills training by request.
- ACRS staff deliver animal handling laboratories to veterinary students.

Facility Expansion and Development

The UACC Veterinarians and animal facility managers actively engage in planning and design of new vivaria and renovations across campus, providing input to optimize facility operations and workflow, optimize biocontainment, ensure compliance with CCAC guidelines, and advise on species-specific requirements.

Crisis Management Planning

The Emergency Operations Team meets as needed to assess the anticipated or unexpected operational interruptions (inclement weather, on-campus violence, power outage, work action, etc.). The University Veterinarian sits on this committee to advise with respect to potential effects on animals housed at Usask and the impacts on animal health and welfare and animal-based research and teaching activities.

Training Initiatives for Laboratory Animal Veterinarians

USask offers distinct opportunities to engage students in laboratory animal medicine and research. Its diverse research programs, broad aquatics program, well-established veterinary pathology program, and unique, state-of-the-art facilities such as VIDO, the Canadian Light Source, and the Saskatchewan Cyclotron Facility offer ample opportunities and strength of experience for students interested in laboratory animal medicine and research. As such, the ACRS group continues to promote student engagement as follows:

- **Laboratory Animal Medicine Rotation:** A 2-week long fourth year WCVM veterinary student rotation is offered through ACRS. Students learn about laboratory animal medicine, a board specialty, by participating in clinical veterinary care, surgery, anesthesia, compliance activities, AUP review, animal facility management, research support activities, animal user training, and diagnostics activities.
- **Laboratory Animal Medicine Club (for Veterinary Students):** UACC Clinical Veterinarians interact frequently with the WCVM veterinary student laboratory animal club to foster student interest and knowledge in laboratory animal medicine and enhance their opportunities in laboratory animal medicine and residencies upon graduation from WCVM. ACRS offers group hands-on laboratory animal workshops and one-on-one or group discussions with regards to future training and career options in laboratory animal medicine.
- **Veterinary Medicine and Biology Student Engagement:** The University and UACC Clinical Veterinarians are tasked with providing lectures for first year veterinary students and mid-level biology students with respect to the USask Animal Care Program, CCAC requirements, and ethical care and use of animals within research and teaching domains.

International and Community Engagement

ACRS staff have initiated, coordinated, or collaborated in the development of several activities to bring a very positive international or national spotlight on the USask Animal Care Program.

Canadian Association for Laboratory Animal Science (CALAS) National Conference

This annual Canadian conference for animal-based research and teaching was held in Saskatoon June 22-25, 2024. CALAS was last hosted in Saskatoon more than 25 years ago. The planning committee was composed of Michele Moroz, (Animal Care Services Manager), Dr. Kurtis Swekla (University Veterinarian), and Taunia Arthur (Animal Order Desk Technician). This event successfully highlighted the contributions of USask to animal-based research and Saskatoon as a wonderful host city. The feedback from attendees was overly very strong and positive.

Canadian Council on Animal Care (CCAC) Assessments

Veterinarians and animal technicians within the ACRS as well as various USask faculty continue to be invited and complete CCAC assessments at other institutions. This provides an excellent opportunity for collaboration with animal research and teaching programs across Canada and heightens USask's role nationally with various regional and national stakeholders.

CCAC Site Assessment June 2025

The CCAC conducts full site assessments every six years and interim assessments every three years to ensure compliance with CCAC guidelines and support institutions in achieving best practices in animal ethics and care. The standards are CCAC policy statements, guidelines documents, and other CCAC-recognized standards designed to promote the ethical use and care of animals in science. Maintaining the CCAC Good Animal Practice (GAP) Certificate is vital to continued flow of grants from the Tri-agency and other funding sources to USask and its researchers.

USask's next full CCAC site assessment is scheduled for June 10-13, 2025.

Challenges

ACRS office Staffing

The ACRS office has experienced historical chronic lean staffing which has impacted their ability to comply with all CCAC guidelines and priorities. To ensure timely review of animal use protocols and projects, the priority has edged towards AUP review rather than other important tasks and projects. With the beginning of increased permanent positions in early 2024, we have started to alleviate some of those issues and take on other tasks and projects which have sat idle for a number of years. Most pressing is the update to the online learning modules for new animal users with plans for completion on these by the end of 2025 along with updates to the procedure and policy documents. Additionally, new and updated CCAC guidelines have been put into force over the last 1-3 years which requires the office and university to work towards complying with these guidelines for the entire USask Animal Care Program. We continue to evaluate staffing levels and will recommend adjustments as needed to fulfill the full roles and responsibilities of the office.

Facilities Response and Service

Over the past 12 months there has been a dramatic reduction in service and response from the Facilities department for various animal facility issues (plumbing, electrical, etc.). There have been some instances of negative animal welfare impacts (including loss of life) and near misses due to lack of staffing and expertise. Historically, animal facilities are prioritized for urgent attention to ensure the welfare and lives of the animals are not impacted, however with apparent Facilities staffing reduction there is the potential for this priority status to not be fulfilled. All told, Facilities staffing and expertise needs to be maintained and improved to prevent future negative impacts on animal welfare and animal-based research endeavours.