

ITEM FOR INFORMATION

Committee Name: Research, Scholarly and Artistic Work Committee, University Council

Date: March 19, 2026

Presented by: Eric Lamb, Chair, Research, Scholarly and Artistic Work Committee

Subject: Annual Animal Ethics Board Report

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 March 12, 2026, meeting, RSAW met with Kurtis Swekla, University Veterinarian and Director of Animal Ethics Research Ethics and Infrastructure to review the annual report of Animal Care and Use Program and University Animal Care Committee.

University Animal Care Committee

The **University Animal Care Committee (UACC)** is administratively supported by the Research Ethics and Infrastructure (REI) and the Animal Care and Research Support (ACRS) Office 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.

Key challenges discussed with RSAW included: animal holding facility capacity constraints due to increased faculty hiring and increased research funding, water quality issues at the Aquatic Toxicology Research Facility, USask Facility Services response times for animal facilities. There have not been any animal mortality incidents related to delays in Facility Service responses; however, staff sometimes need to take initiative due to delayed responses. Members also learned of cargo shipping issues with Air Canada and WestJet, which has resulted in approximately \$1,000 additional costs per animal shipment since November. The Animal Order Desk is working to mitigate these costs by grouping orders; however, remains an extra cost issue.

ATTACHMENTS

1. **Annual Report of the Animal Care and Use Program and University Animal Care Committee (January 1, 2025 – December 30, 2025)**

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 January 1, 2025 to December 31, 2025

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 January 1, 2025 to December 31, 2025.

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, adequate veterinary care, adequate animal facilities, animal user environmental safety, and best practices to comply with USask Policy, Canadian Council on Animal Care (CCAC) policy and guidelines, and international, federal, provincial, and local regulations. UACC policy reflects the perspective of USask which views the use of animals 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.

As per CCAC policy, assurance of scientific and pedagogical merit for animal use falls to committees outside of the UACC with separate reporting lines. OVPR Scientific Merit Review Committee for Animal-Based Research (**SMRCABR**) and TLSE Pedagogical Merit Review Committee (**PMRC**) are the responsible committees.

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 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 (January 1, 2025 – December 31, 2025)

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. We conducted approximately two years of discovery for a new Research Animal Management System solution and signed a contract with the vendor in June 2025. A-tune is the vendor and the product used is tick@lab which will incorporate animal use protocols, animal ordering and reporting, animal health management, and animal/facility billing. In September 2025 we entered into initial implementation and in-depth discussions with the vendor for the new software. As this project has a very large scope and includes over a dozen facilities and almost 1000 users, we anticipate full implementation will occur in Q1 to Q2 of 2027.

Communication plans are being developed to ensure the affected community is aware of the change and how they will be supported. Change management will be a key measure in communication and implementation as well as dedicated staff to assist users learning the new system.

The procurement of the Research Animal Management System 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 sustained institutional funding.

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.

Review of research protocols

There are currently **470** active USask Animal Use Protocols (**AUP**). This includes **15** AUPs which involve a collaboration with another institution, **27** AUPs which are "Category of Invasiveness (**CI**) Level E", the highest CI level of invasiveness defined by the CCAC. In addition, **26** 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 amendments are reviewed at 2 full board meetings per month and 2 subcommittee meetings per month. During the reporting period the AREB committees reviewed **91** new AUPs, **285** annual renewals and **146** amendments. There are **183** active animal researcher Principal Investigators (PI) and a total of **871** active animal users (staff, trainees, graduate students) in research teaching.

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 comprised of 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. Marjorie Delbaere, (Interim Vice-Provost); PMRC meetings and reviews are coordinated by staff from ACRS REI. 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. During the reporting period **7** 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 Vice-President Research. The SMRCABR is currently comprised of 11 faculty members in wide ranging fields, 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 SMCRABR reviewed **33** AUPs for scientific merit.

Updated USask Care and Use of Animals in Science Policy

The previous USask policy: Care and Use of Animals in Research, was last updated in 2001:

<https://policies.usask.ca/policies/research-and-scholarly-activities/care-and-use-of-animals-in-research.php>

This policy was long overdue for a revision as many areas of animal use has changed over the last 25 years in addition to the old policy being almost entirely a copy and paste of the old UACC Terms of Reference. We worked at developing an overarching policy that presents the USask's position on animals used in science (research, teaching, production, and testing) and provide information on the regulatory framework for which animal use is guided. Attached is the updated proposed **Care and Use of Animals in Science at the University of Saskatchewan Policy** for your review and input.

Tissue Share Program

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 previous USask SharePoint site was closed in early 2023 and the current SPO system at USask is not adequate for facilitating and processing tissue share requests. As such, the current processes are performed manually through email as there is no effective replacement available at USask resulting in an increased workload for the ACRS administration staff. As the new Research Animal Management System is being implemented, management of the Tissue Share Program and processes will be taken into consideration to determine if the workflow can be encapsulated within the vendor software to increase workplace efficiencies.

ACRS Office Updates

Animal Management System

With the implementation and integration of a new Research Animal Management System, we have hired 2 term full-time FTE to assist in backfill to allow current staff to focus attention on learning and implementing the new software. Without these additional hires, a smooth development and transition to the new software would be at risk as well as slowing current processes as staff would be required to balance current work along with implementation of the new software.

ACRS Website

A new website for OVPR units is in progress including sites for the Animal Care and Research Support Office and a public facing site related to transparency on USask animal use.

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.

Aquatic Toxicology Research Facility

In April 2024, the Aquatic Toxicology Research Facility (ATRF) encountered a spike of chlorine resulting in the death or euthanasia of hundreds of fish. Investigation for the cause appears to be at the level of carbon filters used to precondition incoming water prior to use for the fish. The water quality at ATRF has been historically difficult to manage well with aging equipment and an overly complex design. Since the mass mortality event, the ATRF has been closed for vertebrate work until renovations have been completed that satisfy the Aquatic Animal Manager, University Veterinarian, and the UACC. The CCAC was notified immediately after the mortality and have indicated during their last assessment in June 2025 that the UACC is the authority to determine when animals can be housed in ATRF again.

Current status of ATRF: awaiting funding from the University based on quotes obtained from various vendors to perform the necessary renovations which will improve the water pre-conditioning and reduce the complexity of the system. Additionally, part of the renovations includes backup and alarm systems to prevent a major mortality should water quality drop rapidly as happened in the past.

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 fourth year WCVN veterinary student rotation 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 Veterinarians interact frequently with the WCVN 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 WCVN. ACRS offers group hands-on laboratory animal workshops and one-on-one or group discussions with regards to future training and career opportunities in laboratory animal medicine.
- Veterinary Medicine and Biology Student Engagement: The UACC provide lectures for first year veterinary students and biology students with respect to the USask Animal Care Program, CCAC requirements, and ethical care and use of animals within research and teaching domains.

Animal Order Desk

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. The Animal Order Desk tracked approximately 160,000 animals during this reporting period. This is an increase (by

approximately 70,000 animals) from the previous year representing a very significant increase in animal-based research. Animal orders historically total approximately \$600,000 annually; however, the fiscal 2023-24 year the Animal Order Desk processed \$927,000 in animal orders with 2024-2025 fiscal year on pace to pass \$1,000,000.

Animal Order Desk animal usage 2023- ~140,000

Animal Order Desk animal usage 2024- ~90,000 a drop of ~53,000 animals partially due to a large drop in fish usage due to ATRF Toxicology Centre shutdown due to water quality concerns

Animal Order Desk animal usage 2025- ~160,000

National, International and Community Engagement

Starting January 2026, Dr. Kurtis Swekla is the CCAC representative for the Dean's council – Agriculture, Food, and Veterinary Medicine (DCAFVM). Dr. Swekla will work directly with the Deans of Agriculture and Veterinary Medicine at USask and across Canada to ensure their voices and concerns are heard at the national level of the CCAC and to promote a focused and balanced view regarding the use of animals in science. This involves at least yearly attendance at the CCAC AGM and representation on CCAC subcommittees.

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.

USask 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 care. The CCAC policies, guidelines, and other CCAC-recognized standards are 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 faculty.

USask's last full CCAC site assessment was on June 10-13, 2025, we await the full assessment report from the CCAC.

Challenges

Facility and Faculty Expansion

With new faculty member recruitment come unique challenges for the animal care program especially with respect to animal facility capacity. Many of the animal facilities across campus are approaching capacity for the number of animals that can be housed or procedure rooms available. Having facility managers and veterinarians present during prospective faculty tours provides an opportunity to determine what distinctive needs the individual may have and how that may or may not fit within the animal facilities as animal facilities have specialized features and requirements due to housing live animals. This would allow for appropriate planning if the faculty was hired at USask to take into consideration the associated costs for specialized needs or capacity issues. Longer term plans for increasing research output at USask may encounter capacity issues at

various animal facilities and USask will need to consider facility expansions/renovations/new builds to accommodate the increased demand for space.

Facilities Response and Service

Over the past 24 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 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.

Animal shipment challenges

Animal shipments into Saskatoon have been significantly affected by Air Canada's decision in fall 2025 to close cargo service to Saskatoon. Thus far we have been unsuccessful in attempts to address this issue with Air Canada, as the change has a major impact on research operations. Currently, all animals arriving from outside of Canada must ship via Air Canada; with the Saskatoon cargo shutdown, these shipments are now flown to Regina and couriered to Saskatoon. To assist researchers, we have adjusted our scheduling with a regular U.S. rodent supplier to combine orders whenever possible to help reduce shipping costs. However, if researchers are unable to wait for these consolidated shipments, they will be responsible for the increased shipping charges.

For animals coming from international sources that do not originate at regular suppliers (i.e. external Universities and colleges), researchers are responsible for the full shipping costs. These costs have increased due to the route change, and delivery timelines are now extended by an additional day.

Additionally, WestJet is experiencing a mechanical issue at the Montreal airport which is used for the majority of mouse and rat deliveries from Charles River. These shipments must now be shipped to Regina and couriered at cost from Regina to Saskatoon. WestJet anticipated repair in Montreal in February however, repairs were not completed and WestJet's next update to us is scheduled in April.