



**UNIVERSITY ANIMAL CARE COMMITTEE  
STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURE  
PEER REVIEW OF SCIENTIFIC MERIT**

The use of animals for research demands that the research meet high standards of scientific integrity and review. Most such research at the University of Toronto is funded by granting agencies that employ a process of well-defined peer review to ensure that high standards of scientific review are achieved. A smaller component involves research funded by contracts or grants from agencies or individuals that, while not employing peer review, support the extension of peer reviewed research into a new area. An even smaller component of research involves funding from agencies, individuals or other sources not employing peer review, for studies that are not an extension of peer reviewed research.

The Canadian Council on Animal Care and the University of Toronto Animal Care Committee require that all animal research protocols undergo peer review of scientific merit prior to the use of animals. The University of Toronto's procedures for internal and/or external review should be followed unless one of the following exemptions is applicable:

- The funding agency from which funding is secured employs an accepted peer review process;
- A proposed project is deemed to be an extension of, or supplementary to, a peer reviewed project (maximum of 2 years allowed beyond the expiry date of a peer-reviewed grant), subject to LACC approval;
- Animals are used solely for teaching or diagnostic purposes (teaching projects will require pedagogical merit review);
- Pilot study (5 - 10 animals), subject to LACC approval.

**\* Exemption**

If the protocol fits any of these exemptions, the investigator is asked by the Office of Research Ethics to provide documentation that clearly supports the exemption request.

**\*\* No Exemption**

If the protocol does not fit any exemption, the investigator is asked by the Office of Research Ethics to submit a research proposal for the project for internal peer review. This may be in the format of an existing proposal that has been submitted to the sponsor or the format of a CIHR/NSERC proposal. The investigator is asked to provide the sponsor's name, title of the project and animal protocol title with the proposal. The

proposal should include the objectives, hypotheses, methods and contributions of the project. Additional documents that could assist with peer review, such as recent external peer reviews from unsuccessful funding applications, may also be submitted.

### **INTERNAL PEER REVIEW**

If the proposed research has recently undergone external peer-review for scientific merit, the University Peer Review Committee will determine whether this existing external peer review is sufficient to exempt the protocol from internal review. For the protocol to be considered for exemption, the Investigator must provide the Research Proposal section of the grant, along with the external reviews and the score sheet. The submitted documents will be considered by all Committee members.

If an internal review is warranted, it will be conducted by all members of the Committee. The research proposal will be forwarded to the members and decisions on scientific merit documented.

If the Committee does not consider that its members have the pertinent expertise to conduct an internal review, they may seek additional reviewers within the University. In this case, the research proposal will be forwarded to the reviewers. The reviews must be documented and must contain sufficient information to support the reviewer's conclusions.

On approval, the appropriate LACC is notified that the animal protocol can proceed. Should the research proposal be rejected, the investigator may be asked to clarify or appropriately modify the proposal. Should the proposal not be deemed to have scientific merit, the appropriate LACC is notified that the protocol cannot be approved.

If necessary (e.g. individuals with the pertinent expertise are not available within the University's research community to conduct the review), the Committee will identify two researchers (from a list that should include an individual or individuals suggested by the principal investigator), external to the University, who do not have a conflict-of-interest, and who do not collaborate with the investigator, to review the proposal. The same procedure, as listed for internal review, is then followed.

### **TERM OF PEER REVIEW**

Approval of protocols through either exemption from internal review or internal peer review will be valid for a term of 3 years. There will be no extension of peer review beyond this term and a protocol will have to be resubmitted to the Committee after 3 years unless it qualifies for exemption as outlined at the beginning of this document.

**Revised – August 2014**  
**Approved – September 2014**