



## Scientific Merit Assessment Committee - Procedures -

The use of animals for research demands that the research meet high standards of scientific integrity and review. This document outlines Lethbridge College's policy for peer review of scientific research involving animals.

The Canadian Council on Animal Care and the Lethbridge College (LC) Animal Care Committee (ACC) require that all research protocols involving animals undergo peer review for scientific merit prior to the use of any animals. The procedures for internal review at LC (see below) should be followed unless one, or more, of the following exemptions apply:

- a) The project's funding agency employs a peer-review process that is acceptable to the LC ACC (e.g., NSERC, SSHRC, or CARIF).
- b) A proposed project is deemed to be a minor extension of, modification of, or supplement to, a previously accepted peer-reviewed project.
- c) Animals are used solely for the purpose of teaching.

### Exemption Granted

If exemption "a" applies then Part VII of the AUP Form will indicate the agency that has approved the scientific merit of the research and the status of this vetting. If exemption "b" applies then the applicant must also describe in Part VII "Potential Benefits of the Research", how the research project has been extended, modified or supplemented from the original proposal submitted to the granting agency and why these changes are scientifically justified.

### No Exemption Granted

If none of the exemptions listed above apply, the Principal Investigator is responsible for providing the research proposal to the Scientific Merit Assessment Committee (see note below). This may be in the format of the existing proposal that was submitted to the sponsor, or it may require additional information as requested specifically by the Peer Review Committee. The investigator will also provide the sponsor's name, title of the project and animal care protocol title with the proposal, along with a list of prospective peer reviewers. For further details, see the internal peer review process outlined below.

**Note:** It is important that researchers submit Animal Use Protocols (AUP) that require review of their scientific merit to the ACC Coordinator in a timely fashion so that peer reviews can be conducted before the quarterly (March, June, September, and December) ACC meetings, when AUP applications are reviewed. Therefore, all potential principal investigators should submit research proposals well in advance of proposed research activities involving animals, to allow for the completion of the peer review process, followed by the animal use review process. Upon receipt of a proposed research project, peer reviewers will be reminded by the Scientific Merit Assessment Committee Chair about the relevant dates for completion of their review(s).

## Internal Peer Review

All LC faculty members who are using animals for any research project, and for whom a peer-review exemption does not apply, will be required to submit their research proposals for internal review of scientific merit. This review must occur prior to any Animal Use Protocol application review by the ACC.

Typically, the Chair of the Scientific Merit Assessment Committee will identify two (2) LC faculty researchers to review the Animal Use Protocol as part of the internal review process. However, these reviewers must not collaborate on research with the investigator or have other conflicts-of-interest. Internal reviewers cannot be current members of the ACC.

The Animal Use Protocol will be forwarded to Animal Care Committee Coordinator who will verify the application for completeness and will pass along the review package to the Scientific Merit Assessment Committee Chair, whose selected reviewers will then complete the five sections of the **Scientific Merit Review Assessment Form**. Peer reviews are returned to the Chair of the Scientific Merit Assessment Committee for collation and appropriate action, based on the suggestions made by the peer reviewers. The reviews will be documented and kept on file at the ACC office for future reference.

Upon completion of the internal review process, the Chair of the Scientific Merit Assessment Committee will notify the ACC Coordinator that the Animal Use Protocol application can then be considered by the ACC committee.

Should the research proposal be rejected on scientific merit by the reviewers, the Principal Investigator may be asked by the Chair of the Scientific Merit Assessment Committee to clarify or appropriately modify the proposal for resubmission to the reviewers. Should the proposal be deemed to not have scientific merit, the ACC will be notified by the Chair of the Scientific Merit Assessment Committee that the protocol cannot be approved.