Pedagogical Merit Review Committee

Terms of Reference

Introduction
The Canadian Council on Animal Care (CCAC) and the McMaster University’s Animal Research Ethics Board (AREB) require that all proposed use of animals in teaching undergo pedagogical merit review prior to ethical review. Since animals used for educational purposes are not being used to discover, prove or develop new ideas or techniques, but rather to demonstrate principles and facts which are already well-known, animals must only be used for teaching purposes when that use has been found by the independent, expert peers on the Pedagogical Merit Review Committee to have pedagogical merit, and when the educational goals of the course that rely on the use of animals cannot be conveyed in any alternative manner.

When applying the 3Rs (replacement, refinement, reduction) to the use of animals in teaching, efforts should focus first on finding a replacement alternative. When no replacement teaching alternative is available, justification is required to use animals. The level and type of training for the students (undergraduate/postgraduate, specialized/non-specialized) are important factors. In collaboration with Veterinary Staff, all students are required to obtain appropriate animal user training prior to any work with live animals.

Note: Painful experiments or multiple invasive procedures on an individual animal, conducted solely for the instruction of students in the classroom, or for the demonstration of established scientific knowledge, cannot be justified.

Purpose of the Committee
To ensure all animal-based teaching at McMaster University has been reviewed for pedagogical merit and that the 3Rs have been considered, particularly replacement alternatives. Any proposed use of animals in teaching must be strongly justified, and all available non-animal alternatives must be clearly and defensibly ruled out.

Scope
The Pedagogical Merit Review Committee will robustly review all proposed teaching protocols involving animals. This review shall be performed prior to ethics review, and any proposed use of animals in teaching that the committee judges can be replaced by the use of non-animal alternatives shall not be eligible for subsequent ethics review. The Committee shall meet to review and discuss proposals on an as-needed basis.

Individual student research projects otherwise covered by a Principal Investigator’s (PI’s) existing ethics approval are exempt from this review process, as are formal animal user training programs administered by Veterinary Staff.

The pedagogical merit review shall remain valid as long as the Animal Use Protocol (AUP) remains valid, to a maximum of four years. Minor changes in the use of animals in the teaching protocol within that four-year time frame must be submitted to the committee as an amendment. If there are substantive changes to the use of animals in the approved project, a new teaching proposal must be submitted to the Committee for re-review.

Enough time must be allotted to the review process to allow non-animal alternatives to be implemented should that be necessary. Thus, proposals for teaching courses involving animals should be submitted at least 6 months in advance of the course start date.

Authority and Reporting Structure
Committee member suggestions are made by the Ethics Officer are appointed by Vice President of Research. The Committee reports their findings to AREB which then communicates the findings to the course instructor.
Composition

The Pedagogical Merit Review Committee shall have the following composition:

- at least one faculty members who are not currently members of AREB, with experience in the use of animals in teaching;
- at least one faculty/Instructional Assistant members who has not taught courses involving live animal use;
- at least one veterinarian as non-voting, advisory members;
- at least one expert in science pedagogy who is a faculty member/Instructional Assistant not involved in the use of animals in research in any capacity.
- At Least one university student who has taken part in undergraduate laboratories involving the use of live animals.

Chair of the committee should be appointed by AREB and should be chosen from among the committee members.

Terms of Office

Up to 8 years.

Responsibility

The Committee ensures that all proposed animal-based teaching at the University has undergone pedagogical merit review, with the exclusions of formal animal user training courses and individual faculty-supervised student research projects. Projects will only be approved for pedagogical merit when non-animal alternatives have been investigated and found to be inadequate to address the teaching goals.

The Committee advises AREB that a teaching proposal involving animals has been deemed to have/not have pedagogical merit.

The Committee annually administers a formal questionnaire to students in courses that utilize animals to obtain feedback on the value and learning experience of the course. This feedback is reviewed during subsequent pedagogical merit reviews.

Procedures

In order to evaluate the merits of the proposed use of animals in teaching, course instructors are asked to provide the following information to the committee members:

1. a copy of the completed Pedagogical Merit Review form, including details of the search(es) that were performed for non-animal alternatives;
2. a copy of the proposed course’s lab manual or course materials, if available.

For ongoing courses, the Committee will already have copies of the annual student evaluations of the course.

Each member individually completes the Pedagogical Merit Evaluation form and submits the form to the Chair, who then convenes a meeting of the whole Committee to discuss the proposal. Discussions of any issues identified by reviewers are carried out at that meeting, and a decision is made by consensus. If consensus cannot be reached after reasonable discussion, a vote may be taken. Quorum for a decision is at least four voting members of the Committee, including the Chair.

Administration

Administrative support, including correspondence with the course instructor regarding submission of documents for pedagogical merit review, communication of documents to the Committee, archiving of the documentation for each submission, communication of the committee decision to AREB and administration of student questionnaires, is provided by the Ethics Officer who then informs the VPR of the merit standing.
Appeals Process

The Pedagogical Merit Committee espouses a philosophy of facilitative interaction with investigators to support responsible teaching activities which involve the use of animals. To this end, and to optimize the information available to the Board in its deliberations, the Committee encourages ongoing discussions with investigators, through the University Veterinarian and veterinary staff, prior to submission of new Animal Utilization Protocols to the Board. There may be occasion, however, for review of a decision by the Board.

1.0 Pedagogical Merit Review Committee

1.1 All decisions made by the Committee will be communicated in writing to the investigator. Copies of the decision are on file with the Ethics Office (Health Research Services) and the University Veterinarian.

2.0 Appeals

2.1 If the applicant wishes to appeal any decision made by the Committee, a formal written request for review must be received by the Ethics Office, HSC-3H9, ext. 22469, no later than 30 days after notification is received of the original decision being appealed.

2.2 The applicant will submit all relevant information which supports the request for an appeal to the Ethics Office for distribution to the Committee members.

2.3 The applicant will be invited to submit their prepared documents to be reviewed for his/her request for appeal.

3.0 Appeal Response

3.1 The response to any appeal will be made to the applicant in writing within ten (10) business days following the meeting discussing the appeal, with a copy to the academic department chair.

3.2 The decision from the majority of all Committee members undertaking the review will prevail.

3.3 The Board will attach any relevant references or copies of pertinent sections of guidelines, legislation or internal policies supporting this decision, including, if appropriate, advice from external experts or sources.

4.0 Second Appeal

If after the Board reviews the appeal and does not decide in favor of the applicant, the last step will be to provide a copy of the original Teaching AUP, original decision, complete documentation and supporting references encompassing the appeal and the final decision that was made by the Committee to the Ethics Office.

4.1 The final appeal package in its entirety will be sent to:
- the VP Research (or designate);
- the Department Chair of the applicant
- a member of a Pedagogical Merit Committee from another institution *(chosen by Health Research Services)*
- any animal care committee member from another Canadian institution *(chosen by Health Research Services)*
- a Laboratory Animal Veterinarian *(chosen by Health Research Services)*.

4.2 The Ethics Office (HSC-3H9, x22469) will arrange a meeting of the above reviewers.

4.3 Individual decisions will be submitted in writing to the Ethics Office.
4.4 The majority decision will be final.

4.5 A copy of the final decision will be sent to the applicant, the Vice-President and all members of the review panel.

Review Date: October 2018
Revised: October 2019