

**Final Report of IACUC Process Improvement Working Group  
November 30, 2022**

In February 2022, Dr. David Norton, Vice President for Research, convened an IACUC Process Improvement Working Group (“Working Group”) in response to concerns raised by faculty and senior administrators regarding the efficiency and culture of conducting animal research at the University of Florida. The Working Group consisted of faculty and research stakeholders knowledgeable about conducting animal research.

Working Group membership:

**Dr. Jennifer Bizon**, Professor and Chair, Department of Neuroscience, *Working Group Chair*  
**Dr. Dan Brown**, Associate Professor, Department of Infectious Diseases & Immunology, IACUC Chair  
**Dr. Nancy Denslow**, Professor and Chair, Physiological Sciences  
**Dr. Laura Eurell**, Attending Veterinarian and Associate Director, Animal Care Services  
**Erica Gonzaga**, Associate Director of Research Services, Environmental Health and Safety  
**Dr. Eric Krause**, Associate Professor, Department of Pharmacodynamics  
**Michael Mahoney**, Director of Research Operations and Services, Office of Research  
**Dr. Cherie Stabler**, Professor, Department of Biomedical Engineering  
**Dr. Dan Wesson**, Associate Professor, Department of Pharmacology

The charge to the Working Group was to assess the issues and to provide a list of actionable items to improve the processes related to animal research, as well as address concerns relating to efficiency and culture. The Working Group was self-governed and presented its findings, included in their entirety in the attached report, to Dr. Norton. The Working Group reported six primary areas of concern along with a plan to address the issues.

It is important to note that the Group did not note any concerns regarding animal welfare or regulatory compliance. UF is routinely subjected to external oversight by both the USDA and AAALAC and is fully committed to ethical and compliant research involving animals.

The Group indicated that *“External consultants are needed to provide objectivity and the benefit of experience from other institutions, as well as for establishing a comprehensive implementation plan to maximize the positive impact of actions taken.”* Dr. Jennifer Bizon, Dr. Rebecca Kimball, and Michael Mahoney have been engaged to assess and recommend potential consultants as soon as possible.

The Group listed six primary areas of concern as follows, along with the plan to address the issues.

Working Group Finding	UF Research Response
<p>1. IACUC COMMITTEE. Investigators expressed a desire for the IACUC committee to incorporate a greater breadth of scientific expertise, and for more transparency and investigator input with respect to member selection and accountability. Some concerns raised by investigators indicated additional clarity in the charge and process of the IACUC would be helpful (examples can be found in the Investigator Questions Addendum which collates questions that arose during the investigator focus groups). Actionable items:</p> <p>1.1. Incorporate greater investigator input into the membership selection process and create a structure to elevate the prominence of IACUC committee to encourage service. Specific suggestions include implementing:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A consistent incentive structure to attract new membership to the committee and to reward service.</li> <li>• Greater recognition of IACUC service within the promotion and tenure process.</li> <li>• A process for soliciting self- and peer-nominations for committee service.</li> <li>• A process for regularly soliciting investigator feedback regarding potential gaps in scientific expertise on the committee. Incorporate this feedback when filling committee vacancies, or address by adding to committee membership.</li> </ul> <p>1.2. Educate investigators regarding the performance metrics whereby the committee members are evaluated; and how accountability is accomplished.</p> <p>1.3. Develop new, and/or enhance the visibility of existing, mechanisms for investigator feedback regarding IACUC committee performance and establish ways to communicate back to investigators actions arising from their feedback.</p>	<p>1. Nominating and appointing members:</p> <p><u>Historical process:</u> Traditionally the IACUC Chair, with input from other stakeholders, identified if expertise/representation is needed in a certain area. Department Chairs were asked to nominate a faculty member in order to provide that expertise/representation. Members have been historically added throughout the year as needed and since they are appointed for three-year terms, appointments end at various times throughout the year.</p> <p><u>New process:</u> We are implementing a variety of steps to improve committee composition and performance, giving the research community greater input into the membership selection process, and elevating the prominence of the IACUC committee to encourage service. These changes go into effect January 1, 2023 and include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Enhancing assessment of member performance <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Collect feedback from researchers after approval of new studies and modifications</li> <li>ii. Collect feedback anytime via IACUC and new Animal Research Program websites</li> <li>iii. Include above feedback as part of member’s annual evaluation</li> </ol> </li> <li>b. Every February, the Vice President for Research, IACUC Chair, and Director of Research Operations will assess: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Member performance</li> <li>ii. Members whose terms are ending at the end of the fiscal year will be assessed for reappointment.</li> <li>iii. Committee composition:</li> </ol> </li> </ol>

1. is new or different representation (e.g., scientific expertise) is needed on the committee.
  2. If the number of members on the committee should be increased or decreased.
  3. How many new members need to be appointed to the committee at the start of the upcoming fiscal year.
- c. The Vice President for Research will continue to appoint members for 3-year terms. Moving forward the term start/end date will be set to coincide with the fiscal year. Existing members will have their terms adjusted to coincide with the fiscal year.
  - d. Every March, UF Research will run an open self- and peer- nomination process where researchers or others can nominate themselves or their peers for service. The nomination period will be announced every February and, based on the evaluation listed in 1.b.iii above, will identify how many new members and if specific scientific representation is needed. The nomination period will be communicated via multiple avenues including UF Research and IACUC listservs, announcements to the Associate Deans for Research, and, if specific disciplines are needed, announcements to Department Chairs for those specialties.
  - e. Every April, UF Research will contact nominated faculty to assess interest in serving, describe the workload/expectations, and verify department/college support for serving.
  - f. Every May, the list of interested and supported faculty will be provided to the Vice President for Research who, after consultation with the IACUC Chair and others, will appoint new members to begin serving a 3-year term

	<p style="text-align: center;">starting July 1<sup>st</sup>.</p> <p>2. Incentivizing and recognizing service on the IACUC:</p> <p>Starting in FY 23-24, collegiate faculty and community members serving on the IACUC will receive:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. an annual reimbursement of \$1,500 for service.</li> <li>ii. the Vice President of Research will provide members with a letter of recognition which describes the work involved and impact of serving.</li> <li>iii. UF Research will work with the colleges to obtain equivalent time offsets for service.</li> </ul> <p>3. Process transparency</p> <p>UF Research will publish how members are evaluated and accountability is accomplished, how researchers can provide feedback/input, and where appropriate, what actions resulted from feedback. This information will also be posted on a new Animal Research Program website, shared with the Associate Deans for Research, communicated via other avenues such as brown bags or visits to departmental faculty meetings, as well as other methods should the community request it.</p>
<p>2. <b>ONBOARDING.</b> Specific concerns were raised by “new-to-UF” investigators regarding lack of direction for efficient onboarding. Actionable item:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Develop a comprehensive onboarding process for all new investigators involved in animal research that is integrated across IACUC, EH&amp;S, and ACS offices and includes in-person introductions to key staff who can address their questions.</li> </ul>	<p>UF Research is developing a comprehensive onboarding process for all new investigators involved in animal research that is integrated across IACUC, EH&amp;S, and ACS offices and includes in-person introductions to key staff who can address their questions. This process will be managed by the new Research Regulatory Liaison Team and will include in-person assistance, directly connecting researchers with applicable units, new Animal Research Program and Human Research Program websites, and on-demand tools / always</p>

	<p>available resources. This process will be developed and maintained by ongoing benchmarking and input from researchers, college/department representatives, and other research stakeholders (IACUC, EH&amp;S, ACS, DSP, etc.). Addendum 3: Targeted training for departmental Human Resource representatives for issues related to the Animal Contact Program / Health Assessments will be included. We anticipate launching this program by 4<sup>th</sup> quarter FY 23.</p>
<p>3. <b>GoIACUC TRANSITION.</b> Investigators and IACUC staff raised concerns regarding inadequate support for making the GoIACUC transition as seamless as possible. Actionable items:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Develop and quickly implement a comprehensive strategy to assist in the transition to the GoIACUC platform. Specific suggestions include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Expedite hiring of additional staff to support investigators in transitioning into GoIACUC.</li> <li>ii. Develop a communication and education strategy regarding GoIACUC for investigators, IACUC, and ACS staff, including informational and instructional videos.</li> <li>iii. Hold regularly scheduled informational workshops wherein investigators can learn how to use GoIACUC.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>UF Research and the IACUC have already initiated steps to address all of these issues.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Vice President for Research has committed to hiring 3.0 FTE to assist research staff with transitioning to goIACUC. The first member of this new Navigator Team started 11/14/22 and is expected to start assisting researchers asap. Additional recruitment is occurring for the other 2.0 FTE. Additional FTE support will be considered if this team proves to be effective and demand for their services exceeds bandwidth.</li> <li>2. IACUC has already published informational/instructional videos based on researcher feedback and pain points noted by stakeholders. These videos can be found on the IACUC website at: <a href="https://iacuc.ufl.edu/secure/goiacuc-faq.html">https://iacuc.ufl.edu/secure/goiacuc-faq.html</a>. Additional videos we be developed and published as suggested/requested/needed.</li> <li>3. In October 2022, the IACUC started hosting goIACUC Information Sessions. These sessions were hosted in a hybrid setting (in person and Zoom), were recorded, with the recording posted for those unable to attend or future viewing on the IACUC website at: <a href="https://iacuc.ufl.edu/secure/goiacuc-faq.html">https://iacuc.ufl.edu/secure/goiacuc-faq.html</a>. Additional/repeat sessions will be hosted moving forward.</li> <li>4. The new Navigator Team will also develop / host educational sessions, videos, and tools.</li> </ol>

	<p>5. All sessions and tools will be readily available on a new Animal Research Program website.</p>
<p>4. <b>PROCESS.</b> Major investigator concerns regarding process included 1) a continual escalation in the administrative burden resultant from maintaining protocols and laboratory compliance; 2) consistency of protocol review between reviewers and from one submission to the next; and 3) expediency of protocol review. With respect to expediency, investigators specifically cited a need to reduce back-and-forth during protocol review, and a desire to increase speed of review for simple amendments. IACUC committee members noted that revising the structure of veterinary protocol review could expediate the process. Actionable items:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Expediate hiring of Research Regulatory Liaisons to work with investigators as colleagues, assisting with the GoIACUC transition, protocol submissions, and modifications, and serving as a key source of information regarding new guidelines and regulations.</li> <li>2. Develop and/or share the strategy for monitoring and continually improving consistency in review.</li> <li>3. Overhaul the process for adding new personnel to IACUC protocols. This includes creating a new process for health/safety screening which is integrated with the IACUC office from start to finish.</li> <li>4. Evaluate the current protocol review processes to determine opportunities for more efficient review</li> <li>5. Expand the list of universal SOPs in GoIACUC that include veterinary input and approval for procedures that are common across many investigators.</li> <li>6. Enable sharing of protocols/procedures/SOPs among investigators conducting similar work.</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Vice President for Research has committed to hiring 3.0 FTE to assist research staff with transitioning to goIACUC. The first member of this new Navigator Team started 11/14/22 and is expected to start assisting researchers asap. Additional recruitment is occurring for the other 2.0 FTE. Additional FTE support will be considered if this team proves to be effective and demand for their services exceeds bandwidth. These Liaisons will work with investigators as colleges, assist with goIACUC submissions/modifications/triennials, serve as a key source of information and communication between the research community and units charged with facilitating research, meeting regulatory requirements, and protecting animal welfare.</li> <li>2. A new Vice Chair has been appointed to the UF IACUC and is leading a new effort to better mentor members. Members will be surveyed to identify areas for improvement and the plan is to provide multi-modal training opportunities including in-person, video, and an annual group session at the IACUC Retreat to optimize performance in areas such as conducting reviews, using goIACUC, engaging/communicating with researchers, and performance in semi-annual inspections.       <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Annual member evaluation is now moved to February each year and will now be assessed by the Vice President for Research, IACUC Chair, and Director of Research Operations. Evaluations can be used to identify if additional mentorship is needed as well as be a factor in determining re-appointment of members.</li> </ol> </li> <li>3. Adding personnel to IACUC protocols: the steps required to add personnel to IACUC protocols spans multiple units, some</li> </ol>

of which are outside of UF Research. UF Research will engage these stakeholders and members of the research community to review requirements for activating personnel to see what can be eliminated, combined, and/or streamlined. UF Research will also work with these stakeholders to develop step-by-step guides and/or templates to concisely inform/direct researchers on how to activate new personnel. UF Research will publish the results of this effort.

- a. Environmental Health & Safety (EH&S) oversees the Animal Contact Program which requires a health/safety screening assessment. For the past year EH&S has been leading a multi-stakeholder effort (which included Human Resources securing an outside vendor to provide recommendations) to revamp the health assessment process. We expect significant changes are forthcoming and are committed to partnering with EH&S and others to improve/optimize the process.
4. UF IACUC routinely evaluates the protocol, modification, and triennial processes to determine opportunities for more efficient review. This includes assessing approval metrics for Time to Approval (from initial receipt of the submission to sending the approval letter to the research), questions researchers struggle with, and more. We are working on exporting goIACUC data into a data warehouse to produce scheduled reports and dashboards and will publish data on the Animal Research Program website along with our assessments and benchmarking to improve our process.
5. UF IACUC will work with stakeholders (including ACS vets and researchers) to continuously expand the universal SOPs in goIACUC. We will regularly communicate with the community about updates to the SOP library.

	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>6. goIACUC already enables the sharing of protocols/procedures/SOPs among researchers. We will develop instructional materials including videos, handouts, and live sessions to show researchers how to do this.</li> <li>7. A single point of entry system for all research is being evaluated as part of the recommendations from the Human Research Improvement Working Group. Data integration, reduced redundant data entry, dashboards for comprehensive submission tracking, and reporting metrics are all being evaluated.</li> <li>8. Addendum 3: The process for Animal Contact Program / Occupational Medicine health assessment clearances has been evaluated over the past year by a working group, with the bulk of the health assessments likely being conducted by an external commercial vendor (e.g., Care Spot). Commercial vendors have their own tracking systems, so we will have to evaluate how those operate, how visible the data is to researchers and departmental Human Resource representatives, and opportunities for integrating data into goIACUC or other systems.</li> </ol>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. <b>STAFFING.</b> Investigators, ACS veterinarians and staff all expressed concern regarding ACS understaffing. Actionable items: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Increase resources to enhance recruitment and improve retention of ACS Veterinarian and staff. Additional feedback should also be solicited from ACS staff regarding ways to increase recruitment and retention efforts.</li> <li>2. Re-evaluate the laboratory animal medicine Veterinary residency program, which provided an important connection to the laboratory animal medicine community and is valuable for retaining and attracting skilled faculty to the University of Florida.</li> </ol> </li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Vice President for Research has already provided additional resources to enhance recruitment and improve retention of staff (e.g., increased ABSL3 technical salaries as well as Vet tech salaries). Second, the ACS operational structure was re-organized to establish a career path/progression for technical staff. Third, many promotions along with SPIs were provided to qualified technical staff to encourage retention. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. On the clinical side, there is a national shortage of lab animal veterinarians and all universities are facing the challenge of recruiting lab animal veterinarians. However, ACS was able to hire an</li> </ol> </li> </ol>



	<p>additional 0.6 veterinarian with a cost-sharing agreement with CVM.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>b. Recruitment: ACS is exploring out-of-the box options for recruiting technical staff. For example, ACS is reaching out to the Center for Autism and Related Disabilities at UF as well as other local organizations like Catholic Charities and Vet Space.</li> <li>c. Feedback was solicited in many ACS team meetings with clinical and operational leadership to find out how to increase retention and recruitment. Salary was a certainly a motivator, but work/life balance was also important. ACS is trying to determine how to meet both needs.</li> </ul> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. The Residency program was re-evaluated and the need for this program was recognized by ACS and the VPR. A budget and cost proposal was developed but currently there are no funds available to support this program.</li> <li>3. Addendum 3: The process for Animal Contact Program / Occupational Medicine health assessment clearances has been evaluated over the past year by a working group, with a proposal to move the bulk of the health assessments to an external commercial vendor (e.g., Care Spot) and hiring a dedicated Occupational Medicine MD. EH&amp;S is leading this effort and expects to announce more specific details in the near future.</li> </ol>
<p><b>6. COMMUNICATION AND CULTURE.</b> Feedback across focus groups indicated that bi-directional distrust and negativity are pervasive across the animal research community. A need for improved communication was also recognized across groups. Actionable items:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Invest in a comprehensive communications strategy to improve bi-directional information flow between investigators and all offices involved in animal research. Specific suggestions include creating:</li> </ol>	<p>UF Research strongly supports improving communication and relationship building to enhance the research culture.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A new Animal Research Program website will be launched in early 2023. This website will be a one-stop shop for all resources associated with conducting animal research at UF. The website will include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. A comprehensive and concise listing of all units related to animal research, with phone numbers and emails for assistance.</li> </ul> </li> </ol>

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A one-stop website that merges policies, guidelines, and resources across institutional offices.</li> <li>• A network of liaisons to improve information dissemination.</li> <li>• Step-by-step guides and video tutorials for new procedures.</li> <li>• A ‘living document’ of FAQs to aid investigator understanding of federal, state, and institutional policies and procedures.</li> </ul> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. Develop a shared code of conduct for all members of the research community that involves expectations of collegiality from all. This should include clear expectations for behavior that exemplify values of trust, transparency, and efficiency.</li> <li>3. Consider ways to promote teamwork and build trust among ACS, EH&amp;S, IACUC, and investigators. Ideas include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Expanding opportunities for in-person “meet and greets” for new faculty and staff and increasing the number of informal interactions that promote the building of relationships (e.g., regularly scheduled appreciation breakfasts, lunches at different facilities).</li> <li>• Holding weekly “office hours” with representation from all regulatory offices to enable collaborative problem-solving with investigators.</li> <li>• Creating more opportunities for bringing ACS staff, veterinary faculty, and animal users into discussions about ongoing research projects to promote collaboration and shared investment across these entities. ACS staff and veterinary faculty should be recognized as not only providing a service, but as valued colleagues with unique expertise within the UF research community.</li> <li>• Enhancing the visibility of existing mechanisms for feedback to ACS to EH&amp;S and promote ways to</li> </ul> </li> </ol> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>b. Workflows showing how the process works and how and when units contribute to the process.</li> <li>c. An interactive tool that asks researchers concise questions (yes/no or multiple select answers) and identifies what units the researcher needs to work with, what training is needed, links to resources, and connects researchers with the units.</li> <li>d. Prominent contact information for the Research Regulatory Liaisons (aka Navigators).</li> <li>e. Training materials/opportunities will be clearly visible, with new on demand training materials (concise videos, step-by-step guides, etc.) continuously developed and published by the Research Regulatory Liaisons.</li> <li>f. FAQs will be hosted and routinely updated/adapted based on feedback from the research community and other stakeholders.</li> </ol> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. After benchmarking other institutions, an Animal Research Program Mission Statement &amp; Code of Conduct has been developed (attached). This not only defines the IACUC’s mission but also emphasizes four principles of conduct: professionalism, teamwork, collegiality, and respect.</li> <li>3. New opportunities and activities to promote teamwork and trust will be implemented in 2023: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Bimonthly collaboration session / meet and greets for limited research faculty/staff (~20) with applicable IACUC members, IACUC Staff, ACS vets, ACS staff, and EH&amp;S staff. Each session will be devoted to research teams in a specific college. Based on the number protocols approved by IACUC, 1/3 of the protocols originate in College of Medicine (CoM), 1/3 in College of Veterinary Medicine (Vet Med), and the remaining 1/3 from the rest of campus. Our plan is to host these sessions as follows:</li> </ol> </li> </ol> |
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communicate about how such feedback is being used.

- Creating campaigns which promote a “we are in this together” mentality to increase comradery.

- 02/23 CoM
- 04/23 Vet Med
- 06/23 Campus
- 08/23 CoM
- 10/23 Vet Med
- 12/23 Campus

- i. Invitees will be solicited to see if there are any specific topics they would like to discuss, assisting us with identifying who should attend from IACUC/ACS/EH&S, and ensuring we are prepared to address any challenging issues.
  - ii. Food and refreshments will be provided.
  - iii. We will follow up with attendees and publish on the Animal Research Program website that the activity/outreach occurred and encourage participation in future collaborative sessions.
- a. Starting in January 2023 UF IACUC administration will host regularly scheduled office hours which will be published on the website. We also intend to deploy on-demand collaborative sessions that include all needed representation to problem-solve with researchers.
4. ACS leadership, veterinarians, and staff are committed to collaborating with researchers and appreciate recognition as colleagues. ACS welcomes ideas and suggestions from the research community on how to promote greater collaboration and shared investment.
  5. UF Research will promote and enhance (a) the visibility of feedback mechanisms for all units on the new Animal Research Program website, in the collaborative sessions, FAQs, training materials, and other venues/methods; and (b) how such feedback is used.

	<p>6. In 4<sup>th</sup> quarter FY 23, UF Research will initiate and sustain an ongoing campaign to promote a shared mission, respect, collegiality, and professionalism in the Animal Research Program.</p>
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