

West Chester University of Pennsylvania
Position Paper on the Use of Animal Models in Research

West Chester University (WCU) supports the judicious use of humane, ethical, and translational animal models in research to advance scientific understanding and health outcomes for people and animal species. All animal-related activities at WCU are approved by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Laboratory Animal Welfare (OLAW), which complies with the Public Health Service (PHS) Policy on Humane Care and Use of Laboratory Animals. WCU adheres to the NIH OLAW Assurance document in all animal-related activities both on and off-campus that are affiliated with WCU personnel. WCU also complies with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) guidelines for animal research with or without the presence of USDA-covered species. At WCU, we recognize that research utilizing animal models provides critical contributions to human and veterinary medicine and saves countless lives, but it must be done so respectfully, responsibly and ethically.

Prior to the commencement of any animal-related research activity, the project design and purpose of the research must be reviewed and approved by the WCU Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC). Our IACUC is comprised of members who are scientists, non-scientists, university personnel, veterinarians, and non-university affiliated individuals to provide multiple perspectives, including those of external community members. The WCU IACUC rigorously reviews all proposals for multiple ethical considerations. These include the necessity and justification for the use of an animal model, appropriate species selection, prioritized animal welfare, and adherence to the “3Rs” principle: replacement, reduction, and refinement.

Researchers must prioritize replacing animal model with non-animal models whenever possible, including computer models, cell cultures, or human tissue samples. Researchers must reduce the number of animal subjects used to a minimum by optimizing experimental design and statistical analysis. Lastly, researchers must refine activities to minimize pain and distress through proper anesthetic use, appropriate housing conditions, and skilled handling practices. Activities using animal models are only approved if researchers can ensure responsible use and demonstrate significant potential contributions to medical progress.

All animals on WCU campus are checked daily for general health, demeanor, access to food and water, socialization and enrichment, husbandry needs, and laboratory space cleanliness. Animals receive on-call medical care from highly trained and licensed veterinarians with specialized training in laboratory animal medicine. In addition, the veterinarians provide regular assessments of animal health and well-being, suitable colony conditions, and appropriate laboratory environment conditions. All animal facilities on WCU campus are inspected semiannually by IACUC and annually by NIH OLAW and the USDA; annual reports are submitted to the NIH OLAW and USDA to provide any changes or deficits in the animal-related activities on campus. Thus, we take our responsibility to ensure the humane and ethical treatment of animal subjects very seriously and seek continual feedback on the state of our animal research program.

In closing, WCU is dedicated to the humane and ethical treatment of all animals. We are committed to ensuring that any individual who is afforded the privilege of working with animals in affiliation with the university does so ethically, respectfully, and responsibly. As a public research institution, WCU acknowledges the significant obligation bestowed upon us to ensure the ethical treatment of all animals. By adhering to the strict guidelines at the university and federal levels, researchers can safeguard animal well-being and monitor all projects that involve the use of animals while providing critical contributions to public health.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'KRISTEN R. BREIT', with a stylized, looping flourish at the end.

Kristen R. Breit, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Biopsychology, Department of Psychology
Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) Chair