



### **Policy on Environmental Enrichment**

The University of Georgia (UGA) Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) and University Research Animal Resources (URAR) are committed to ensuring the humane and appropriate care of research animals throughout its research and instructional programs. This policy is intended to uphold this commitment by ensuring institutional compliance with guidance documents and federal regulation by establishing policy that supports a program for **Environmental Enrichment (EE)** of animals used in research and instruction.

UGA's EE Program is designed to promote the psychological well-being of research animals while not compromising the safety of personnel, animal health and safety, or the scientific goals of UGA researchers. **EE must be provided to all housed animals as the default standard of care and exemption from this standard requires sound scientific justification provided in an approved Animal Use Protocol.** Withholding of EE for clinical reasons must be approved by the URAR veterinary staff (if at a URAR facility) or the Attending Veterinarian (if at a non-URAR facility). The EE program for animals covered by the USDA Animal Welfare Act must be consistently documented.

#### **Use of Environmental Enrichment in URAR Facilities**

The use of appropriate enrichment allows animals to better cope in an artificial setting, thereby reducing variability in research data and improving quality of life for the animals. The UGA IACUC and URAR recognize that the goals of EE can be achieved through multiple means. However, URAR has developed standard enrichment provisions in SOPs based on available scientific data that encourage natural behaviors and are cost-effective and minimally labor intensive. These provisions must be implemented for all animals housed in URAR facilities. The SOPs clearly define: Natural Behavior, Social Enrichment, Physical Enrichment, Activity/Food Enrichment (if applicable) and any stereotypical behavior that might indicate a need for environmental enrichment change or enhancement. The SOPs can be found on the [Animal Care and Use website](#) under Guidelines and Procedures.

Alternative EE must be approved by the URAR Director or designee and all associated costs will be assumed by the investigator. The UGA IACUC and URAR strongly encourage consistent application of all EE among individuals of the same species on the same research study, recognizing that uniformity minimizes the effect of EE on scientific outcome and ensures that the environmental enrichment needs of all animals are met.

The Environmental Enrichment Program is designed to be dynamic in nature. Through the regular revision and update of SOPs, the Program will meet the enrichment needs of new and existing animal models through regular monitoring, innovation and adoption of current science-based practices.

### **Use of Environmental Enrichment in Non-URAR Facilities**

Animals housed in non-URAR facilities must be provided species-appropriate EE unless otherwise justified and approved by the IACUC. Enrichment should be implemented consistently among individuals of the same species on the same research study. Factors that should be considered in identifying appropriate enrichment include animal and personnel safety, the species' biology and natural behavior, the enrichment's capacity for reliably providing novelty/stimulation in the animals' environment without stressing the animals, ability to be routinely sanitized or replaced, compatibility with providing adequate visual checks on the animals, the minimization or prevention of introduced research variability, and feasibility in implementing with consistency. For species that are also housed in URAR facilities, the URAR SOPs may be used as a reference. These SOPs can be found on the [Animal Care and Use website](#) under Guidelines and Procedures.