Veterinary Students Making a Difference

University of Illinois Veterinary Student Outcry Leads to Halt of Animal Labs

Twenty-six conscientious-objectors in the freshmen class at the University of Illinois, College of Veterinary Medicine, balked when it came to the current first-year physiology laboratories which use and kill more than 100 animals each year. Subsequent student efforts to implement viable alternatives, as well as acquire a permanent policy allowing for conscientious objection, have resulted in major changes within the veterinary medical school with respect to its approach to animal use issues.

For several months, the Illinois students worked diligently to convince administrators of the documented efficacy of alternative educational tools. The students submitted a list of goals to their administration, a wealth of information about the more than 200 alternatives that would meet the learning objectives of the school's six harmful physiology laboratories, a 7-page discussion on the 'concept' of alternatives and their proven efficacy, a petition signed by the 26 conscientiously-objecting first-year students, and letters in support of their right to a humane education from animal protection organizations. The faculty initially responded by claiming that the requested alternatives would not represent an adequate education. It became obvious to the students that assistance outside the college was needed, so the students contacted the media, made extensive use of the Internet, and sought out the support of various animal protection organizations, including the AVAR, which enlisted its veterinary members' support.

The students have been successful in drawing attention to their concerns and getting a response from the faculty toward a more compassionate curriculum. The college responded positively to the students by immediately halting all its planned physiology animal laboratories, which include using live dogs, pigs, rabbits, and rats. According to Dean Victor Valli, the Courses and Curriculum Committee will begin reviewing and approving all animal-use protocols for the teaching program that currently are on file with the Office of Laboratory Animal Resources. The college will also discontinue most of the hands-on animal laboratories in the first year of the curriculum through the spring semester until the committee can determine whether to modify the curriculum or drop such laboratories altogether. First-year students may not meet the university's standards for participation in such labs, and the university also wants to improve its curriculum based on student input. It is reported that another motive for the quick action to stop these laboratories is that university officials took an informal poll of other veterinary schools and found that only two other schools in North America include terminal experiments in first-year physiology labs.

Another decision that was made in response to the students' concerns included discontinuing the use of live dogs purchased from Class B dealers. The dogs from these dealers are often former companion animals or, in some instances, have been stolen. However, instead of the school seeking the elimination of terminal laboratories altogether, it has opted for purchasing dogs who are sold to laboratories from Class A dealers. This trade-off in the source of live dogs reflects a lack of understanding on the part of the faculty that these dogs suffer fear and stress the same as dogs purchased from other

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sources. These dogs, who are purposefully-bred for research or teaching, are raised in cages and are deprived of social interaction with other dogs or people. It also sends a message to students that all dogs are not equal or deserving of life. While the students have gotten the administration to acknowledge their right to an education that does not require them to harm animals, the school must now acknowledge their further responsibility in pursuing a curriculum that does not perpetuate harm to animals.

The students received an exceptional amount of support by Dean Valli when he made it clear that the university has a zero-tolerance policy on harassment. Faculty were reminded that they are expected to show respect for the values and convictions of students and others and create an environment that fosters the educational process. The dean also stated further support for the students when he said, “Their efforts have played an important role in the process of helping us reassess the best way to provide them with a quality education.” All in all, the students have made it clear that they, too, will accept a zero-tolerance policy on harmful animal use and expect that they will receive a humane education. A decision on the school’s future curriculum is expected in the next few months.

Alternatives

Database:
Alternatives in Education
A database that contains thousands of alternatives, including alternatives to dissection and other laboratory uses of nonhuman animals.

The database can be searched online from the AVAR website at http://AVAR.org

Contact: AVAR

Booklets:
Alternatives to the Harmful Use of Non-human Animals - Updated in 1997
Description of alternatives in the basic sciences.
Cost is $3.00.

Contact: AVAR

All Media:
Videos, fax sheets, and information on nonanimal alternatives in medical education and trauma training.

Contact: Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine (PCRM)
5100 Wisconsin Avenue, Suite 404
Washington, DC 20016
Phone: (202)686-2210
E-mail: research@PCRM.org
Web site: www.PCRM.org

Animal Welfare Information Center (AWIC)
National Agricultural Library
10301 Baltimore Avenue, Beltsville, MD 20705
Phone: (301)504-6212 Fax: (301)504-7125
E-mail: awic@nal.usda.gov
Web site: http://www.nal.usda.gov/awic

The UC Center for Animal Alternatives
School of Veterinary Medicine
University of California, Davis, CA 95616
Phone: (530)752-1800
E-mail: mwwood@ucdavis.edu

Animal Rights Law Clinic
State University of New Jersey
School of Law
15 Washington Street, Newark, NJ 07102
Phone: (973)353-5989 Fax: (973)353-1445

Organizations that provide dissection alternatives on a temporary loan basis:
The Humane Society of the United States (HSUS)
2100 L Street, NW
Washington, DC 20037
Phone: General - (202)452-1100
Direct - (301)258-3042
E-mail: hsuslab@ix.netcom.com
Web site: www.hsus.org

The National Anti-Vivisection Society (NAVS)
53 West Jackson Boulevard
Chicago, IL 60604
Phone: (800)888-NAVS Fax: (312)427-6524
E-mail: NAVS@NAVS.org
Web site: www.NAVS.org

The Ethical Science Education Coalition
167 Milk Street, #423
Boston, MA 02109-4315
Phone: (860)875-1808
E-mail: puresc@ig.net

The American Anti-Vivisection Society (AAVS)
801 Old York Road, #204
Jenkintown, PA 19046-1685
Phone: (800)-SAY-AAVS
E-mail: avsaa@aol.com
Web site: http://www.avas.org

Research and Development
Alternatives Research and Development Foundation
14280 Golf View Drive
Eden Prairie, MN 55346
Phone: (612)949-2409 Fax: (612)949-2619
E-mail: ardfjmc@aol.com