

## Mexico's Veterinary Schools:

# Moving Toward a More Humane Education

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The harmful and fatal use of animals for educational purposes is a common practice in Mexico at all levels of education. In veterinary education, many of the students are concerned about participating in what they perceive as inappropriate training methods and would, if given the opportunity, choose to participate in an alternative track.

In February 2006, a survey of students and discussion with faculty at the Centro Universitario de Ciencias Biológicas y Agropecuarias (CUCBA) in Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico, was undertaken. Twenty seven percent (27%) of the veterinary students were surveyed, ranging from 1st to 10th semester. The results were significant. For example:

- 81% of the surveyed students said that, if given an alternative (that didn't involve the harming or killing of animals), they would take it.
- 87% of the surveyed students said "yes," when asked if they would like the right to conscientious objection.

Student's comments about the harmful use of animals were:

*"Yes. [I have felt uncomfortable] It is hard for me to kill an animal."* Male, 10th semester

*"[I felt] uncomfortable because, on one occasion, the dog woke up while still being bled and suffered a lot."* Female, 6th semester

*"Yes [I have felt uncomfortable], because too many animals are sacrificed for one practice."* Female, 9th semester

The students' testimonies reveal that they are aware that harming or killing another living being is wrong, even if they gain knowledge or expertise. They do feel uncomfortable, stressed, and, in some cases, guilty. Even so, they still believe "they **have** to do it" or they will be failed.

The survey of students and faculty also revealed a significant amount of blatant animal abuse, such as animals being killed by beatings, animals waking up from anesthesia while being prepared as cadavers for dissection, and that the fourth source of animals to be used in laboratories (after pounds, farms, and slaughterhouses) is from the streets.

A significant effort is being made to eradicate the harmful and fatal use of animals completely. As a first step, the "First Session on Progressive Education in the Life Sciences" took place this past February at the CUCBA, where the survey results were presented and where issues, such as the use of animals, conscientious objection, alternatives, and holistic education were addressed.

The faculty responded in contrasting ways to the survey results. On one hand, a number of teachers and students reacted skeptically and felt offended. But on the other hand, some teachers and students reacted with horror when realizing how negligently animals

were being treated. A professor from the *National Autonomous University of Mexico* even suggested that students should go on strike until the fatal use of animals ceased. Some of the faculty looked a bit nervous when listening to this type of encouragement.

But overall, the faculty has shown genuine interest in the implementation of alternatives and is discussing the possible acquisition of some. Subsequently, the "Second Session on Progressive Education in the Life Sciences" is being planned. Even though the progression into an entirely humane education seems to be going slowly, the faculty is moving in the right direction.

## Students as Animal Advocates

Hello everyone, and welcome back to another school year! Many of you were likely doing something animal-related this summer. I was curious to see what veterinary students were up to and subsequently found out that some of you devoted the last few months to working on animal welfare issues.

Gwendy Reyes-Illg (University of Florida, DVM 2008), spent her summer doing externships that combined veterinary medicine and animal advocacy. One of her externships was at Chimp Haven, a national sanctuary for chimpanzees who were once used in research. She worked alongside the sanctuary veterinarian, Dr. Elysse Orchard, to help provide veterinary care to the 119 chimpanzees currently living there, including bi-annual health exams, as well as working with the behavior staff on positive reinforcement training to facilitate medical procedures. Gwendy also completed another externship at the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animal's (ASPCA) shelter in New York City, where she was able to learn about high-quality shelter medicine, as well as about animal welfare issues shelters face.

Several students at Western University of Health Sciences spent their summer working with non-profit organizations. Lena Stewart (09) volunteered at the Baja Animal Sanctuary in Rosarito, Mexico, where she helped provide much needed medical treatment and care



*Sarah Burbridge, a third-year veterinary student at WesternU, participates in a RAVS clinic in North Dakota*

to hundreds of dogs and cats. Many other students participated in spay-neuter clinics with the Rural Area Veterinary Services (RAVS) all over the country, including Arizona, South Dakota, North Dakota and California. They gained valuable clinical and surgical experience but also worked on welfare issues on various Native American reservations.

These were only a few of the wonderful ways veterinary students all over the country were helping animals over the summer. Congratulations to you all for your hard work and dedication. I hope you continue to work for the animals throughout the year! Keep sending emails to me so I will know how you've been advocating for the animals – you just might be featured in the next *Alternatives* newsletter.

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