

Working
to make
alternative
tracks the
status quo

ALTERNATIVES

IN VETERINARY MEDICAL EDUCATION



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Association of Veterinarians for Animal Rights

WSU Students Betrayed by University Policies and Politics

Several first- and second-year Washington State University, College of Veterinary Medicine (WSU-CVM) students are now experiencing what it feels like to be forced into participating in harmful animal use laboratories so as not to fail veterinary medical school. The students express a feeling of betrayal, as they entered veterinary school hoping that their concern for animal well-being would be respected by faculty, only to find that university policies and politics do not put student or animal interests first.

While the university claims to not force students into participating in terminal surgeries or invasive procedures and has stated that alternatives are offered to conscientious-objecting students when requested, faculty ultimately have forced students against their protests to use live animals in an anesthesiology laboratory where the animals do not benefit from the procedures. Tantamount to the unnecessary harm done to the animals in these procedures, the animals were purchased from a local animal shelter, were used in previous procedures, and face ultimate death after undergoing additional procedures in other laboratories.

“Live animals purchased from animal shelters usually are former companion animals, those who trust humans the most,” said Hannah Mueller, a second-year student who is now considering a lawsuit against the university for violation of her constitutional rights to not have her religious or moral standards compromised. “Shelters were not designed to be warehouses for animals for teaching or research. Their sole purpose should be caring for unwanted or lost animals; they should not benefit monetarily from the animals’ unfortunate circumstances. The school also should not take advantage of unwanted animals for education. Their dependence on unwanted animals presumes that they hope to

have a constant supply. This does not speak well of the veterinary profession, as far as I’m concerned. This especially because we could be learning on animals who need to be anesthetized because they must undergo surgery or another procedure which will benefit them,” she said.

Cadavers are used in the surgery alternative; however, students are not promised that the cadavers will be from an ethical source. Instead, students fear they will be given a cadaver of a dog who was killed earlier the same day at the animal shelter. In a letter from AVAR President Nedim Buyukmihci, VMD, to Dean Warwick M. Bayly, Dr. Buyukmihci stated, “Disregarding the source and eventual disposition of the animal is no different from requiring students to harm these animals directly.”

To date, university faculty has not conceded to the students’ requests. Instead, the response to students and letters it has received criticizing its policies has been defensive. The dean touts progressive measures have been taken at the university over the years; however, the track record shows WSU-CVM is actually digressing in humane educational methods.

WSU-CVM can claim to be one of the first U.S. veterinary medical schools to offer an ethical alternative surgery laboratory, which it established in 1991. The summer laboratory offered training through the use of ethically-sourced cadavers and sterilization surgeries on shelter dogs and cats who were recovered and returned for adoption. This surgical training alternative course has recently been cancelled. Instead of making that popular and ethical course the standard, it appears that WSU-CVM has decided to continue to have terminal surgeries in both required and elective courses.

Please write a letter to:

Gilbert A. Burns
Associate Dean of Academic Affairs
Washington State University, College
of Veterinary Medicine
Pullman, WA 99164-7010

Tell him that students should not be forced to participate in educational training that goes against their moral or ethical beliefs. WSU should set up an Educational Memorial Program where donated cadavers of animals who died of natural causes or who were euthanized due to injury or illness are used.



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