"Before you dissect, Reflect!"

Have you seen this advertisement in your school's student newspaper?

A few years ago our department became concerned that we might be confronted with politically motivated Animal Right's Activists, resulting in the disruption of our teaching laboratories. We thought that the targets for political action by such a coterie would include both the Departments of Biology and Psychology, but that Biology would be the prime one. In some institutions such political activities have resulted only in simple annoyances. However, other institutions have suffered major damage to their facilities (i.e., building, equipment, personal files).

While we sympathize with many of the concerns of those who call themselves Animal Right's Activists and support their right to demonstrate and voice their opinions, we felt that as educators we had rights and obligations, too. Faculty rights include the freedom to design and implement courses in a thoughtful and professional way. We also have the right to run our courses without fear that 'at the last minute' a student will disrupt a laboratory with a vociferous refusal to participate in an exercise. For an additional exposition on this topic see ErkenBrack (1990) and references cited therein.

Given these concerns, we thought it prudent to develop a policy for our department which addressed animal, student, and faculty right's. Not only would this help to thwart confrontation, we also felt that it was the right thing to do. The policy was reviewed by the Dean of Faculty to make sure that it did not violate any school policy.

Once the policy was crafted, we posted it in every biology laboratory and animal care facility in our building and added it to all in-house laboratory manuals.

The policy is based on common sense, and it has been used successfully three times in two years. We welcome your comments on our policy; they may be directed to the Chair of the Department of Biology.
Ripon College
Department of Biology
Organism Use Policy

USE OF ANIMALS IS A NECESSARY PART OF TEACHING BIOLOGY

Whether animals should be used for research and educational purposes is a many faceted issue having philosophical, moral, scientific, and legal components. However, it is a fact that use of animals in research and education is vital to advancement of human and animal health; the alternative is to stop work and to permit our knowledge to stagnate at its current level. The faculty of the Department of Biology believe that use of animals for purposes of teaching and research is necessary as it ultimately leads to relieving humans and other animals from suffering caused by disease. We feel that depriving sick human beings and animals of benefits derived from animal research is inhumane.

Further, we believe that use of animals is vital for the education of students in the life sciences. Use of animals in a proper setting gives the student a direct understanding of how living systems work, an understanding that cannot be gained by reading a textbook, watching a video, or using a computer model. Textbooks, isolated cells, computer models, and other representations of intact living organisms are a good start, but they can only provide a partial understanding of life processes. To achieve the best biological education, students must have a complete learning experience which includes use of laboratory animals. Nevertheless, we appreciate the position which calls for 1) critical thinking and 2) respect for life when using animals in teaching and research. This last concept is one of the primary reasons that compels biologists in making their career choice.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES IN THE CARE AND USE OF ORGANISMS

Acquiring and Housing Animals, and Acquiring Plants:

Only organisms that are lawfully acquired will be used by the Department of Biology. The retention and use of rare, endangered, and threatened species will be in strict compliance with federal, state, and local laws, regulations, and statutes.

Animals will receive every consideration for their bodily comfort. They will be kindly treated, properly fed, and their surroundings kept in a sanitary condition. They will be housed in a humane, clean, safe, and uncrowded manner with adequate food, water, and ventilation.

Proper Use of Animals

Appropriate anesthetics will be used to eliminate sensibility to pain during operative procedures. Muscle relaxants or paralytic agents are not anesthetics and they will not be used alone for surgical restraint; however, they may be used in conjunction with drugs known to produce adequate analgesia.
When recovery from anesthesia is necessary, acceptable techniques to minimize pain will be followed. Postoperative care of animals will be such as to minimize discomfort and pain, and in all cases will be equivalent to accepted practices in schools of veterinary medicine.

Where the study does not require recovery from anesthesia, the animal will be quickly killed in a humane and painless manner.

When animals will be used by students for their education or the advancement of science, such work shall be under direct supervision of a qualified, experienced professor.

Courses that Use Animals

The appropriateness of procedures and the educational validity for use of animals in a particular course or independent study project will be determined by the faculty member in charge.

When organisms will be used in a course, the faculty member in charge shall inform the students as to the types of organisms that will be used and procedures that will be conducted at the first class meeting. Thus, students shall be fully cognizant of all course requirements and responsibilities at the start of the semester. Accordingly, students have a responsibility to inform the instructor of potential problems at that time (refer to the next section of this policy regarding conflicts of interest between student beliefs and course requirements).

POLICY REGARDING STUDENTS WHO CHOOSE NOT TO PARTICIPATE IN CLASSROOM AND LABORATORY EXERCISES BECAUSE OF PERSONAL BELIEFS

A student who chooses not to participate in a laboratory exercise because it contradicts personal beliefs may do so without grade penalty providing that he or she meet substitute requirements (as determined by the instructor) in lieu of the regularly scheduled work.

When a disagreement arises between a student and faculty member concerning a laboratory exercise, a standard procedure will be followed to reach a satisfactory arrangement that will accommodate the rights and interests of both parties. The principle theme in this regard shall be that the personal rights and beliefs of both student and instructor, and academic freedom of the instructor, shall not be violated.

This procedure shall be as follows.

1. A student that believes that he or she cannot participate in a particular classroom or laboratory exercise because that exercise involves the use and/or death of an animal shall make his or her feelings known to the instructor. This discussion shall take place in private (e.g., in the office of the instructor). Because the instructor will inform the students as to the type of organisms that will be used and the procedures that will be conducted at the first class meeting, it is expected that any refusal to participate shall be stated within the first two weeks of the semester.
2. The faculty member and student shall discuss each other’s concerns and views in a constructive manner and in a way that is respectful to the ideas of both parties.

3. During this discussion both parties shall determine whether the student can, in all good conscience, participate in part or all of the laboratory exercise. If the student believes that he or she cannot, then the faculty member and student shall develop a substitute exercise(s) which the student will complete in lieu of the normally scheduled work. In extreme cases there may be no feasible substitute work and the student may opt to drop the course (because students will be made aware of all course requirements and responsibilities at the start of class, they will have the option of dropping the course early enough in the term so that a add/drop does not appear on their transcript).

4. If a compromise cannot be reached, the faculty member and student shall make an appointment with the chair of the Department of Biology (or Animal Rights Officer) so that the three parties can discuss a reasonable alternative exercise(s).

5. If the meeting with the chair does not reach a compromise that is acceptable to all parties (or if the faculty member involved is the chair), then all parties shall meet with the Dean of Faculty to discuss this matter further.

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**Literature Cited**


**Additional Citations**

