

University of Queensland School of Veterinary Science Guidelines on Ethical Concerns on Use of Animals in Teaching

Introduction to the policy

Veterinary medicine/technology is more than just a scientific training. Students have to learn about many other issues, such as the ethical management of animals, animal welfare, client management and animal law. Nevertheless, the bulk of the curriculum involves learning how to provide animal care. As animal welfare concerns become more evident worldwide, students increasingly question the ethics of what they are taught, including the techniques used to inform them about treatment methods.

Ethical objection is defined as a deep inward conviction of moral injustice. It can only be held after a period of serious reflection and is usually resistant to any consideration of the advantage or disadvantage that the conviction may bring to the student in pursuit of their course of study.

There are a number of ethical reasons why students will be concerned about their involvement in specific parts of the BVSc and BAppSc (Vet Tech) curricula.

- *Religious reasons.* Muslim or Jewish students may not want to dissect pigs, similarly for Hindus and cattle.
- *Belief in the sanctity of life:* Some students may believe that animals should not be killed solely for the purpose of enhancing their training. Others may be concerned that incorrect attitudes to the killing could be fostered in the use of animals during their training. Vegetarian or vegan students may wish to avoid learning about practising veterinary medicine on food producing animals.
- *Environmental reasons:* students may not wish some species to be removed from their native habitat for teaching purposes.

Progressive, contemporary universities such as the University of Queensland welcome and foster free thought in their students. Objecting to specific practices on ethical or other grounds should not be used to stigmatise or otherwise disadvantage any student. For this reason the School of Veterinary Science at the University of Queensland has devised these guidelines for consideration of the provision of alternatives where ethical concerns are identified. However, students should be aware that many factors relating to protection of academic rigour and practicality need to be included in this consideration. In addition, all Australian Veterinary Boards require that *all* veterinary graduates are competent in all areas of veterinary science – this means that the University has a responsibility to ensure that *all* students demonstrate competence in all areas of veterinary science and veterinary public health, including livestock medicine and production, and abattoir management and hygiene.

Procedures and Responsibilities

1. Academics will advise students in writing of course requirements that involve the use of animals or animal tissues in teaching. Students should familiarise themselves with forthcoming learning activities by looking at existing course profiles, practical

- manuals and the Veterinary Science Handbook. It is the responsibility of the academic staff members to make such information accessible in a timely fashion. Students should consider whether entry into and/or progression through the BVSc/BAppSc (Vet Tech) program is consistent with their conscientiously held beliefs.
2. Students who identify ethical objections to the requirements described for a course need to bring their objections to the attention of the course co-ordinator at least eight weeks prior to the relevant teaching activity.
 3. All discussions will take place in a mutually respectful manner, balancing the requirements for academic rigour and practical feasibility with appreciation of the student's sincerely held beliefs.
 4. Students who then wish to formally request alternative teaching/learning activities are required to submit a written description of their objection to the course co-ordinator. This request should describe the student's ethical conviction, how this is compromised by the prescribed teaching activity, and discussions to date with staff on how the issue has been dealt with.
 5. The possibility of providing an alternative will be decided by the course co-ordinator in consultation with the lecturers concerned and the student(s).
 6. Alternative teaching and learning activities must:-
 - a. Allow students to fulfil course requirements.
 - b. Allow students to fulfil professional accreditation requirements. Students will be advised as to any potential repercussions to their suitability for registration in undertaking alternative activities.
 - c. Demonstrably fulfil minimal competency expectations of either the Australian Veterinary Boards' Council (e.g. "New Graduate Competencies") beyond accreditation requirements or the Certificate IV in Veterinary Nursing competencies for the BVSc and BAppSc (Veterinary Technology) programs respectively. Expectation requirements will be determined by course coordinators.
 - d. Be able to be implemented such that they are not prohibitively resource dependent or logistically unfeasible.
 - e. Be assessed in a manner that is equitable with the originally prescribed assessment undertaken by the peer group of the student(s) concerned.
 - f. Be described, along with the respective assessment plan, in a written document that is submitted for consideration to the Chair of the Teaching and Learning Committee.
 7. In the event that an alternative teaching activity cannot be designed to satisfy the above requirements, students will be required to participate in the original activity.
 8. An appeal procedure will be available to students who have registered an ethical concern and are not satisfied with alternatives offered. The appeal process will be led by the Head of School or his/her nominated representative in consultation with the Chair of the Centre for Animal Welfare and Ethics and the Director of Studies of the Faculty of NRAVS.
 9. Students are encouraged to seek support from year mentors, student representatives and/or student counselling services in dealing with their concerns.