

Ethical guidelines for students using animals or animal tissues for educational purposes



Australian and New Zealand
Council for the Care of Animals in
Research and Teaching

Introduction

The use of animals or animal tissues for educational purposes is a privilege that brings with it responsibilities. These responsibilities go well beyond the need to avoid cruelty to animals and involve a genuine commitment to their welfare and a respect for the contribution they make to your learning. Outlined below are principles to consider in helping you to meet these responsibilities.

Principles to Consider

- 1. Consider why animals or animal tissues are being used**

The justification for using animals should be that their use is essential for the achievement of educational outcomes, while recognising the potential harm to animals to achieve these outcomes. Always consider whether the outcomes could be achieved without the use of animals or animal tissues. Students and staff members should be mindful of the “Three Rs” (replacement, reduction, and refinement) when working with animals.
- 2. Consider the requirements for animal welfare and animal handling**

At all times the welfare of the animal you use is your responsibility, not just your supervisor’s responsibility. This can be considered as a “duty of care”. If you are required to handle animals, it is important to follow the instructions of staff in the correct handling and restraining techniques for the species being used.
- 3. Consider the regulatory environment and obey the law**

The use of animals in research and teaching in Australia is regulated by State and Territory government legislation incorporating the *Australian code of practice for the care and use of animals for scientific purposes*¹. The use of animals for research and teaching must first be approved by an Animal Ethics Committee (AEC). Gaining this approval involves justification for using animals (species and number), the means by which animals will be handled and, if required, humanely killed, and the potential research and educational outcomes of the work balanced against any potential harm to the animals used. The skills of the staff involved and the supervision of the students are also evaluated. In fact, the questions raised by AECs should be those asked by each student regarding the use of animals for their education.
- 4. Consider your own views in using animals or animal tissues**

You should discuss the use of animals or animal tissues with other students and staff. Opinions should be formed and aired, with appropriate justification, in an open and accepting environment. Feel free to suggest ways of improving future classes. Some institutions have developed policies for ethical objections by students to the use of animals. If you feel unsure of your options consult these policies or the relevant AEC.
- 5. Consider your responsibility to ensure that good use is made of the learning opportunity**

You should know what underlying principles are being taught and understand the details that illustrate those principles. This involves reading background material from lecture notes, references and laboratory manuals before attending class, and being generally prepared to maximise the learning experience.

ANZCCART has the following objectives:

- to promote excellence in the care of animals used in research and teaching and thereby minimise any discomfort that they may experience;
- to ensure that the outcomes of the scientific and educational uses of animals are worthwhile; and
- to foster informed and responsible discussion and debate within the scientific and wider community regarding the uses of animals.

¹ “Australian code of practice for the care and use of animals for scientific purposes” (Seventh Edition, 2004: Australian Government; National Health and Medical Research Council): <http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/publications/synopses/ea16syn.htm>