



Teaching vet tech students about lab animal science

In two previous *Fruits of Education* columns, I shared my syllabus for teaching veterinary technician students about lab animal science (LAS). The course is part of my university's 4-year animal health science program accredited by the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), which in California prepares them to take the registered veterinary technologist exam. Many LAS colleagues are similarly engaged with veterinary technician training programs (VTTPs), as adjunct professors, guest lecturers and mentors, serving as contacts to students considering a career in our field. The Society for Laboratory Animal Veterinary Technicians (<http://slavt.net/>) underscores this network.

There are 218 VTTPs accredited by the AVMA's Committee on Veterinary Technician Education and Activities (CVTEA); these programs include LAS courses that encompass both lecture and procedures. The CVTEA requires that all animal activities be reviewed and approved by an IACUC. The CVTEA also mandates that VTTPs apply the regulations of the Animal Welfare Act (AWA; 9 CFR, Chapter 1); many are USDA-registered.

Many VTTPs are fortunate to be affiliated with research institutions and thereby take advantage of the IACUC and its policies applying to training research associates and teaching undergraduate and graduate students. But some VTTPs (e.g., those at community colleges or vocational tech schools) may not have access to established research programs that can provide instructors, hands-on labs with various LAS species, access to vivarium space for teaching and opportunities for students to gain experience in LAS. Oversight of animal use, care and welfare for regulatory and accrediting purposes might not be easily accomplished. There may not be an IACUC professional to provide assistance.

I suggest that these VTTPs form an affiliation with an institution that has an established research program.

Many in the LAS network belong to the Association of Veterinary Technician Educators (AVTE), whose mission is to promote quality education in veterinary technology. Many questions posted on the AVTE list-serve specifically address protocols, use of client- and shelter-owned animals, IACUC oversight of the use of health animals in teaching of medical procedures and similar matters. In many ways, these concerns mirror those within LAS. Being a member of both AVTE and Laboratory Animal Welfare and Training Exchange (LAWTE), I started to think that these groups could forge a relationship. As LAWTE's then-president, I proposed that LAWTE sponsor several LAS sessions at the 2013 AVTE conference in Denver, CO. These included a discussion on managing protocols by Melissa Hunsley (American Association of Laboratory Animal Science and ACUP Consulting); presentations of various LAS techniques by Heather Waldis (Charles River Laboratories) and a team led by Michele Wallace and Lorraine Bell (University of Colorado, Denver); and the LAWTE booth, coordinated by Denise Ostmeyer (Colorado State University, Ft. Collins).

During the AVTE conference, there was considerable discussion about the AWA and its importance in teaching with animals. Most attendees knew that, according to the AVMA's website, "programs that do not own animals, do not house animals, use remote sites for hands-on animal instruction, or only treat animals as part of a veterinarian-patient-client relationship have often been told by their local USDA inspector that they do not need to be registered." This is the case for most VTTPs (Scott Keller, DVM (AVTE President



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and Coordinator of Veterinary Medical Technology, Joliet Junior College, Joliet, IL), personal communication). Other programs that involve performing procedures outside the veterinarian-patient-client relationship (i.e., not medically necessary) must register with the USDA, write protocols describing their animal use and establish an IACUC to review and approve these protocols in order to comply with the AWA, which covers dogs, cats and other animals that are used in teaching (among other specifications).

It's clear that LAS individuals can act as instructors to aid VTTPs, fulfilling several requirements of the USDA *Animal Welfare Inspection Guide* (US Department of Agriculture, Riverdale, MD, 2013). Members of the LAS community can serve as "personnel doing the teaching [who] are qualified and properly trained," can help VTTPs to utilize "alternatives such as the use of veterinary mannequins" and can assist in evaluating the "number of students per animal and procedures to be learned". As trainers and compliance associates, the lab animal community can share its knowledge with the veterinary technician community. We can help with protocols to address all aspects of welfare pertaining to the use of the animals in teaching and training.