

## **Introduction to Animal Care and Use at the University of Virginia**

The purpose of this document is to outline key elements of the Animal Care and Use policy at University of Virginia (UVA), and how it meets federal law. This synopsis is for use by research personnel, instructors and students on grounds or at UVA run field stations. It is a component of training and orientation information required by federal law to insure that all individuals working with *any vertebrate species* in any capacity that might affect the survival, well-being, or breeding success of that species is properly trained, is adequately supervised during training, and knows their rights and obligations under the law.

### **Introduction**

Two agencies provide oversight and guidance in the care and use of vertebrate animals in teaching and research. These are the U. S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), and the Public Health Service (PHS) in the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS). The DHHS has an enforcement branch called Office of Laboratory Welfare (OLAW), and uses accreditation, by the independent American Assurance Association of Lab Animal Compliance (AAALAC) to certify that institutions have met their regulatory responsibilities. AAALAC site visits and inspects the University of Virginia tri-annually. USDA uses its own enforcement vehicle, as represented by regional inspectors. USDA inspectors can site visit at any time, but typically visit at least once a year. Also under the law, the institutional animal care and use committee (IACUC), a standing committee at the University of Virginia (required at all institutions using animals for teaching or research) is required to visit all active animal use facilities twice yearly. Severe deficiencies recognized by any of these oversight bodies must be reported to OLAW and USDA, whereas minor deficiencies require remediation in a timely fashion to avoid legal action (USDA), or federal funding suspension (PHS).

In aggregate, these laws set up certain safeguards for the care of animals, insure the preservation of their well-being, and guarantee their humane care and use. Overall, these laws reflect the deep respect society has for animals, and for their responsible use. As a result, and the policies generated from these laws limit animal use only to legitimate purposes, such as for teaching and productive research that cannot be accomplished in any other way. Likewise, the validity of research depends on normal, representative and healthy animals that do not skew findings. Thus undue stress, duress or disease would make research findings from research on these animals suspect. Animals in this setting would be wasted, and the use would be illegitimate.

### **These laws assure certain other safeguards:**

1. You as an animal user are expected to gain the training needed under appropriate supervision to use animals efficiently while employing humane methods.
2. The law provides that animals are used only after adequate justification that they are required and superior to non-animal alternatives, that minimal numbers are used, and that humane care and veterinary treatment are available at all times during the research or teaching period, or while in captivity.
3. Certain minor stresses (for example, handling, collection, receiving shots, taking blood) may be accepted as a part of animal or even human experience without significantly altering

survival, well-being or breeding success. Whereas, more severe or unmitigated environmental, dietary, or procedure-induced pain, disease or suffering without rigorous scientific justification is not acceptable, and would impact these parameters, and the intended outcome of scientific endeavors as well. Where involved interventions are required and justified, anesthetics can be used to remove the pain from procedures such as surgery, and analgesics (pain-killers) and related agents can be used to control pain/distress over time. Likewise, species-specific (correct) diets, housing, appropriate intra-species social interaction and environmental attributes, (and in some cases environmental enrichment) prevent unrelieved pain and distress from occurring. At times humanely performed euthanasia is more humane than to perpetuate animal suffering or to allow them to languish until death.

4. The law and guidelines create the IACUC, which reviews all animal uses at UVA in the form of submitted protocols. The IACUC committee by law must have independent lay community members, non-UVA scientists, veterinarians and UVA scientists review each requested use and vote in majority agreement that the use is acceptable and justifiable. Thus, only projects reviewed and approved by the IACUC, whether in the context of teaching or research can be performed, and violations (rare) are adjudicated accordingly, with real consequences for noncompliance. The IACUC also semi-annually inspects the sites personnel, and procedures as detailed in each approved IACUC under the aegis of the university, to insure that all animals are cared for as expected.

5. If at any time you do not understand or agree with a use of animals, how they are cared for, or the way procedures are performed involving them, you are encouraged to discuss your concerns with the course instructor. If this is insufficient, you may wish to confidentially contact the field station director or the Director's designee. Anonymously, as deemed appropriate, you can also contact the following in the strictest of confidence: the IACUC Office: 434-924-0405, the campus veterinarians in the Center for Comparative Medicine (Dr. Feldman, Director: 434-924-5058), the Vice President for Research Dr. R. Ariel Gomez: 434-924-3606, or OLAW.

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