Tackling the Challenge of Tracking & Training Students Involved in Animal Activities

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Introduction

The Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals states that all personnel using animals, including students, should be appropriately trained and apprised of risks involved with using animals.

Most institutions have a process for tracking and training laboratory personnel, however there is more of a challenge in tracking and training students involved in such activities as surgical training classes, university courses, or as participants in animal demonstration activities.

- Are these students listed on the protocol as personnel or are rosters simply kept and, if so, where?
- How does the institution ensure students receive appropriate training with respect to animal care and use, as well as information pertaining to the species and zoonosis or hazards risk?
- Is enrollment in the institution's occupational health animal handler program required?

It can be difficult to satisfy the regulatory requirements for ensuring that animal handlers, in this case students in teaching courses or participants in demonstrations, are appropriately trained and protected from risks without overburdening the PI.

In order to tackle this issue, the University of Michigan IACUC implemented a new policy that outlines specific requirements for students and demonstration participants based on level of involvement with the animals.

Methods

A small survey was conducted of 11 peer institutions that use animals for teaching or demonstration purposes in order to obtain a baseline of information regarding how different institutions handle the challenge of efficiently documenting students and participants involved in these types of activities, and ensuring they are appropriately trained and notified of any risks inherent in the activity. This information was then used as a guide for the development of a new U-M policy on the requirements for students and demonstration participants.

Results

We found that most institutions do not have a specific policy regarding requirements for teaching or demonstration courses. None of them require that the students be listed as personnel on the associated animal use protocols, however all of them require instructors and teaching assistants to be listed. Most do not require students to take formal training courses or to enroll in an occupational health animal handler program. In most cases, training for students on animal use and occupational risks is given by the instructor and varies from course to course.

Specific Policy or Protocol Form Used

- Listed as Personnel on Associated Protocol
  - Instructors (100%)
  - Students (0%)

- Specific Protocol
  - Instructors (10%)
  - Students (0%)

- Neither
  - Instructors (30%)
  - Students (18%)

- Specific Protocol
  - Instructors (46%)
  - Students (18%)

Required Orientation/Training

- Instructors & Students (90%)
- Instructors Only (60%)
- Students Only (80%)
- None (10%)

Required Occupational Health Training/Program Enrollment

- Instructors & Students (80%)
- Instructors Only (60%)
- Students Only (80%)
- None (10%)

- Specific Protocol
- Neither

Conclusion

Teaching and demonstration activities comprise a significant part of the U-M Animal Care & Use Program. The U-M IACUC implemented a new Policy on Learning Activities Involving Live Vertebrate Animals in January 2015 in order to standardize how these personnel are handled.

In addition to the policy, the U-M's Unit for Laboratory Animal Medicine (ULAM) Training Core created species-specific orientation handouts that include regulatory information, zoonoses and other hazards, PPE requirements, and other important information that the instructors can use to train their students.

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The Policy

Requirements for personnel under the Policy on Learning Activities Involving Live Vertebrate Animals are summarized below.

Observers

- Do not handle animals or perform procedures
- Not listed on protocol
- Not enrolled in the U-M Occupational Safety & Environmental Health (OSEH) animal handler program
- No required training

Short-Term Participants

- Fewer than 30 consecutive days of animal use or 15 total days of animal use over a 6-month period
- Not listed on protocol
- Not enrolled in OSEH animal handler program
- PI must submit list of participants to IACUC office to be attached to the protocol
- Must undergo orientation session given by PI or ULAM Training Core staff
- PI must apprise participant of PPE requirements, hazards, zoonoses, and other occupational health risks

Long-Term Participants

- Must be listed on protocol
- Must be enrolled in OSEH animal handler program
- PI must submit list of participants to IACUC office to be attached to the protocol
- Must undergo mandatory training by ULAM Training Core

Minors

- Participants under the age of 18
- PI must comply with all U-M policies & standards of practice involving minors
- Must not work with hazards
- Must not perform major procedures

Conclusion

Implementing the Policy on Learning Activities Involving Live Vertebrate Animals has given the U-M Animal Care & Use Program a standardized and efficient method of handling students and demonstration participants, while satisfying regulatory requirements and reducing PI burden.