

## **ENSURING EFFECTIVE ANIMAL CARE AND WELFARE AT THE UNIVERSITY OF NORTH FLORIDA – BACKGROUND**

Virtually all universities recognize that there are significant benefits for both instruction and research which derive from ability to work with live animals. To achieve these benefits, however, we must accept significant responsibilities in terms of limiting the type and number of animals used, and otherwise ensuring the welfare of the animals involved.

At the University of North Florida (UNF) there are several important reasons why we might want to work with live animals on the campus.

1. Work with animals makes a valuable contribution to some undergraduate courses. As hands-on work and experiential learning become more important in high quality undergraduate programs, we run the risk of leaving our students at a disadvantage in some areas if they do not have exposure to the learning and to the responsibilities of working with animals. This includes learning to work with animals in a research setting.
2. If we are to offer graduate degrees in certain areas and ensure that they meet acceptable standards we may need, from time to time, to provide opportunities for these graduate students to work with animals whether in conduct of research or in research methods training. Failing to allow for this component in their education may reduce their ability to perform on the job and compete for future opportunities.
3. Faculty in certain areas find it virtually essential to use limited numbers of animals for some research activity. Professional development for some of our faculty is based significantly on research strategies which involve animals from time to time. We cannot expect to attract and retain high-quality faculty who work in these areas if we cannot assure them a working environment which facilitates at least some limited scale and scope of work with animals.

There are, however, well-recognized problems and responsibilities which must be fully and carefully addressed if animal work is to be carried out particularly in research. Faculty and administrator time must be devoted to these issues and facility costs incurred to allow for responsible involvement of animals in our work. Some institutions can justify major commitments of time, effort and funds to facilitate a higher level of animal involvement in their campus programs. UNF is clearly not in that position. We do, however, have the opportunity to carefully structure a University strategy which allows for limited involvement of minimal numbers of carefully restricted kinds of animals in our programs and which then ensures a responsible and effective approach to ensuring the welfare and care of those animals. As is true throughout our programs, we should limit what we decide to do but then carry out very well what we take on.

UNF has demonstrated commitment to ensuring that it complies with federal guidelines on the care and treatment of animals which may be used in instructional and research programs at the University. An animal care committee has been formed to that end. Another important aspect of our commitment is to ensure that animal use occurs only to the extent necessary and with minimal numbers of animals. As this University does not conduct significant amounts of research involving animals, an additional component of our effort to assure proper animal care and treatment, is to strictly limit the animals used to those species which we have facilities and capabilities to care for effectively.

We have in the past provided good care for the limited numbers of animals on the campus. As we continue this we must strengthen our policy and procedure regulating animal use in research. Addressing these needs now will enable us to meet the needs of faculty and students in the years ahead while assuring full compliance with all appropriate guidelines and regulations.

The following steps will help us reach that objective.

1. It is critical to limit the species and types of animals which would be permitted on campus if we are to ensure that we have a sustainable animal care and welfare program. It is proposed that we strictly limit work with animals on the UNF campus for research and any other use subject to governmental oversight, to that using rats and mice, specifically those of the *Rattus* and *Mus* genera which are specifically bred for laboratory use, and cold-blooded animals such as lizards, frogs, etc. This is an important step as these specific animals are exempted from the provisions of the [Animal Welfare Act \(AWA\)](#) which is administered by the USDA. The (AWA) applies a considerable set of reporting, record keeping and inspection requirements as appropriate to animal dealers, large scale research facilities and others, which are not pertinent to the very limited scope of animal work appropriate for this University. Strictly limiting the animals with which we work would facilitate our ability to follow the procedures for animal care and welfare as defined by the [Public Health Service](#) and the [National Research Council](#). We would be able to ensure a fully acceptable climate for animal use within these limited types, and meet the simplified administrative, reporting and other compliance procedures of these regulations. Cost of large scale facilities and other issues which come into play with larger mammals and which are not appropriate for this campus would be avoided. We would therefore eliminate the risk that we would end up with animals on the campus whose welfare we could not properly assure.
2. It is important for both current work and future work that we have a properly constituted and functional Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC). While we have a committee in place, its members, authority and function need to be reviewed and enhanced to enable it to fully carry out its responsibilities. We need to ensure that it has an outside member and a veterinarian member.
3. With the limited scope of animals which would be acceptable for lab use at UNF provided for in #1, an “attending veterinarian” would not be required (Ref. IACUC Guidebook B-2-5). Projects should however be able to call upon a veterinarian as needed for individual services to deal with health issues beyond the scope of our staff.
4. In order to ensure that we live up to the responsibilities we have already accepted and prepare ourselves for effective management of this issue in the future the two steps listed above need to be accompanied by adoption of a policy statement by the University.
5. Once our policy statement is in place, we can negotiate the assurance needed for the work covered by current grants, and extend our compliance steps as needed and appropriate to ensure that we are providing for effective animal care and welfare.
6. A limited commitment of funds will need to be made available for future improvements in space and facilities for animal care. This should be related to and derived from the additional funds made available to the University as we take on externally funded research programs. With the attached policy in place it should be easier to review and monitor future proposed projects to ensure that commitments are made to properly care for any animals on the campus.