Starting an ethical conversation with your students

Broaching the subject of using animals in UBC classes is important. Students may have questions about where the animals used in their labs come from, or want to be offered non-animal alternatives. At the beginning of each animal-based course, it is important to have an ethical discussion with students about why you are offering animal-based labs to them, and what opportunities there are for them to opt out of hands-on animal work if they so choose.

We’ve outlined some potential steps that you might take to help facilitate this conversation with your students:

1) **Email** – before classes start, send an email to all your registered students outlining the types of animals that will be used, the ways in which the animals will be used (e.g. dissection, behavioural observation etc.), and your reasons for wanting to offer animal-based labs. In this email, include a statement that it is the right of all students to opt-out using animals if they wish.

2) **First class discussion** – invite students to participate in a brief class discussion about the animal use you have planned for them. Invite those who feel uncomfortable to share the reasons for their concerns, without judgment, and without trying persuade them to “just try it and see“ or change their mind. Offer them the option of using non-animal alternatives. If full replacement was not possible, tell them about the Three Rs, and explain how you have reduced the numbers of animals they’ll be using. Of particular importance is a discussion with the students on where the animals they will be using come from – if you do not know, find out.

3) **Check-in** – at mid-term time (if you have done animal labs), check in with your students to see how they are feeling about the use of animals, or in the case of those who opted-out, the use of non-animal alternatives.

4) **Debrief** – at the end of the course, debrief with your students about how the lab course went for them. Allow students who used non-animal alternatives to share their experience with their peers.