Three Rs information – Reduce if you can’t Replace!

It must be remembered that animals used for educational purposes are not being used to discover, prove or develop new ideas or techniques, but rather to demonstrate principles and facts that are already well known. Therefore, when applying the Three Rs to the use of animals in teaching, efforts should focus first on finding a replacement alternative. According to CCAC, when no replacement alternative for teaching is available, justification is required to use animals.

In some courses it might not be possible to completely replace the use of animals. However, there might be opportunities to reduce the number of animals, or animal-derived tissues and organs.

As one example, a course at UBC offers dissection of four different species that are compared each week. To reduce the number of animals to a minimum, students are separated into groups of 8, and each pair is given one animal cadaver (each pair gets one of the four species). Each week a different body system is examined, so the same cadavers are used week after week. The best dissections are then kept for the lab exam at the end of term, so no new animal cadavers are used for the exam. This is one excellent example of how replacement was challenging due to the need for comparative study between the four species, but how reduction was skillfully implemented to use the minimum number of animals.