

Teaching animal welfare assessment using interactive multimedia

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Animal welfare is a complex issue with implications across a range of societal concerns, including sustainable agriculture, food safety and the human-animal bond. To address this issue, it is imperative to have personnel trained in animal welfare assessment. Animal welfare also requires a multidisciplinary approach, combining zoology, biology, animal science and veterinary medicine; however this is not easily met in programs taught by isolated schools with limited expertise. The Animal Behavior and Welfare Group at Michigan State University has received a USDA Challenge Grant to develop a web-based animal welfare assessment course, using interactive media stored in the MSU Animal Welfare Digital Interactive Library (AWIDL).

Students enrolled in the course will learn concepts essential to animal welfare science, and apply them through these interactive scenarios. The scenarios include media clips and information regarding a real or hypothetical animal-care situation, spanning such topics as nutrition, medical care, housing, indicators of stress and stockpersonship. The students review the information, divided into several slides, and rate each area, as well as the overall scenario, as having Unacceptable, Poor, Fair, Good or Excellent animal welfare conditions. The scenarios are linked to the AWIDL so that the students can look up pertinent articles and animal welfare resources, if they desire more information before making an assessment. An international panel of animal welfare scientists have agreed to collaborate to form a standardized “answer key” for the scenarios, bringing consistency to the education of a science often perceived as subjective. Web-based interaction between students and instructors from many different institutions will provide an opportunity for dialogue and new ideas through collaboration.