



Academic Centres for Animal Welfare

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Animal protection and animal studies have progressed and expanded on several important social fronts within both recent and contemporary history. The creation of this journal provides one obvious example which has significantly helped stimulate the progression of the developing discipline of animal law within Australia.

Another particularly important example of this international trend has been the establishment of academic centres for animal welfare. The first professorial post in animal welfare was created at Cambridge Veterinary School in 1986, and was occupied by Donald Broom.

In 2005, Broom said there were 19 professors of animal welfare in the world. However, he noted that, *“At least 45 other active scientists teach and carry out research on animal welfare, and many philosophers teach courses on ethics of animal usage, particularly in the United States.”* Of the 31 of these professors he examined, Broom said only 10 had been appointed in the previous two decades, while twice that number (21) had been appointed during the subsequent decade. Having occupied such an academic post since 2013, in my opinion this upward curve has continued since Broom’s 2005 observations, and is set to continue, driven by increasing social interest and concern about animal welfare issues.

Academic centres for animal welfare have been established at a number of universities, or independently of them, in recent years. Within Australia, for example, the Animal Welfare Science Centre was established as a joint collaboration between The University of Melbourne, Monash University, and the Victorian Department of Primary Industries, in 1997 (some of the organizations have since changed), and the Centre for Animal Welfare and Ethics was established at the University of Queensland School of Veterinary Science in 2005. These are university-based centres, with significant input from government departments of primary industry, or from private agricultural organisations (such as the Cattleman’s Union, in the case of the Centre for Animal Welfare and Ethics).

Numerous similar centres now exist internationally, particularly within North America and the UK. Some of the best known in the U.S. are the Center for Animals and Public Policy at the Tufts University Cummings School of Veterinary Medicine, and the University of California (Davis) Center for Animal Welfare. And, within the UK, the Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics (OCAE), the Universities Federation for Animal Welfare (UFAW), and the Jeanne Marchig International Centre for Animal Welfare Education (JMICAWE) at the University of Edinburgh Royal (Dick) School of Veterinary Studies. There are now perhaps 20-30 such centres worldwide. While many are located within universities, and particularly veterinary schools, some, such as the OCAE and UFAW, are independent academic centres, but nevertheless retain strong collaborative links with academia.

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Such centres typically engage in a range of activities aimed at progressing the discipline of animal welfare science, ethics and law, and at advancing animal welfare within society. The OCAE, for example, is “dedicated to pioneering ethical perspectives on animals through academic research, teaching, and publication” (OCAE, n.d.). Most or all of these centres seek to advance animal welfare through research, associated publication, and teaching. Their areas of focus and activity naturally vary. Some (such as UFAW and the OCAE) produce authoritative book series, or (in the case of UFAW and the University of Queensland Centre for Animal Welfare and Ethics) journals, although such exemplary cases are rare. However all conduct research and publish academic papers on a range of animal welfare topics. Some host seminars, and most offer courses, whether on campus or, for more global audiences such as in the case of the JMICAWE, online.

Through research, teaching, and the provision of expertise on animal welfare issues, such academic centres offer great potential to advance animal welfare within society at large. However, the extent to which this potential is realised depends largely on whether a centre is prepared to move beyond the walls of academia, and to engage in important social debates on current issues involving the use of animals. Sometimes this may involve proffering evidence, opinion and expertise to policy-makers; on other occasions the use of more popular channels may be warranted.

One centre that will aim to maximize its potential to positively impact animal welfare is the centre we are currently establishing in England at the University of Winchester. We will research, publish, educate and offer associated qualifications in animal welfare, and we very much look forward to contributing to the advancement of animal welfare and protection within society at large.

Driven by multiple factors, interest in animal welfare appears set to rise for the foreseeable future. Accordingly, universities with relevant faculties are encouraged to consider the establishment of academic centres for animal welfare.

References

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