CONFERENCE REPORT

ECVAM Workshop on Alternatives to the Use of Animals in Higher Education

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The movement for alternatives to the use of animals in laboratories has focused primarily on testing and research and relatively little on education, yet educational use of animals is substantial—numbering annually many millions of animals worldwide. The potential for incorporation of alternative methods is great. Consequently, on May 7–9, 1998, on the island of Crete, the European Centre for the Validation of Alternative Methods (ECVAM) brought together 14 individuals.

The workshop was chaired by Jan van der Valk, director of the Netherlands Centre for Alternatives. Other participants were Jeffrey Atkinson, University Henri Poincaré, France; Jonathan Balcombe, Humane Society of the United States; Hans Braun, University of Marburg, Germany; David Dewhurst, Leeds Metropolitan University, United Kingdom; Karin Gabrielson, Swedish Fund for Alternatives to Animal Experiments; Frans Gruber, managing editor of ALTEX, Switzerland; Ian Hughes, University of Leeds, United Kingdom; Jeremy Miles, University of Portsmouth, United Kingdom; Jan Nab, University of Utrecht, Netherlands; Jason Nardi, EuroNICHE, Italy; Henk van Wilgenburg, University of Amsterdam, Netherlands; Ursula Zinko, EuroNICHE, Sweden; and Joanne Zurlo, Center for Alternatives to Animal Testing, United States.

Participants represented a broad spectrum of viewpoints toward animals, ranging from an anthropocentric utilitarian view (e.g., two participants would use more animals in an educational exercise if it meant the lesson would be
better) to a rights-based view (i.e., deliberately harming animals for an educational exercise is wrong regardless of educational considerations). Despite these differences, all participants embraced the alternatives approach and brought to the meeting a commitment to work together to iron out forward-thinking conclusions and recommendations.

The conclusions and recommendations that were made to the ECVAM will be published near the end of 1998 in the journal *Alternatives to Laboratory Animals*. The participants agreed that alternatives can meet learning objectives while saving time and money, that students always have the right to opt in or out of alternative or traditional learning methods, and that educators should always strive to avoid using methods that harm animals. The need for greater publicity for the availability and effectiveness of alternatives was a recurring theme, and it was recommended that discipline-based scientists and educators be identified and recruited to promote and demonstrate alternatives at conferences and meetings.

The need was also recognized for reliable and standardized data on usage trends for both live and dead animals and for alternatives. It was proposed that a task force be established to conduct an extensive evaluation and validation study to compare animal-free models with animal models for meeting well-defined teaching objectives. Producing alternatives is costly. Although the extent to which commercial developers would want to participate is unclear, they should be organized into an international network. Resource centers should be formed in which qualified staff can demonstrate materials, give advice, and facilitate contact between developers and teachers to help customize programs. Alternatives committees should be established on college campuses to inform researchers, teachers, and students about alternative methods, and a task force to draft guidelines for such committees was recommended.

In summary, good alternatives undoubtedly provide good learning. What appears to be most needed now are greater awareness of existing materials, a well-publicized validation study, and an organized system for developing and implementing alternatives with broad utility on an international scale.