Joy Mench, University of California, Davis

Shaping the Next Generation of Discourse
Animal welfare matters

The “next generation” of animal welfare researchers will play a critical role in deciding how animals (in all sectors) are viewed, used, treated, housed and managed in the U.S.

The people in this room who are educators will determine how well (or how poorly) those individuals are prepared to take on this responsibility

How are we doing so far?
Very small sample size!

University of Maryland and UC Davis graduate students studying animal welfare
As scarce as.....
Selecting the right students

Helping them become good researchers (and survive graduate school)

 Giving them the right toolkit to survive and assume leadership in the “real” world of animal welfare science
Selecting students

- Students sometimes selected because of opportunity/timing
- Limited selection criteria
  - Best criterion – get to know the student before acceptance
  - Grades, GRE scores, letters, statement
  - Interview
Predictors of success in graduate school (complete program)

- Motivation and persistence
- Ability to think and learn (cognitive skills)
- Knowledge of field (ability to master)

- Ability to negotiate the mentoring relationship
- Ability to deal with the challenges posed by animal welfare research
Mentoring

- Intense mentoring relationship(s)
- A match of styles
- Open communication
- Willingness to ask
- Willingness to challenge
Animal welfare research

- Primary motivator is that they like, and want to improve the lives of, animals
- Tend to be species/problem focused
  - Zoo animals > companion animals > farm animals > laboratory animals
- An important criterion for them is whether or not their work will “make a difference”
- Belief that research/science is important to address animal welfare issues
Selecting Students

- Often have to place (or observe) animals in situations where welfare is (at least potentially) poor
- For practical reasons, animals will generally have to be euthanized at the end of the study
- Ongoing conversation
Shaping the Discourse

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Postgraduate Training

**BREADTH**
- History of animal behavior research
- Key theories in animal behavior
- Evolution and behavior
- Behavioral genetics
- Behavioral ecology
- Physiology of behavior
- Statistics and experimental design
- Grant writing/methodology

**DEPTH**
- Methods and concepts in animal welfare research
- Key concepts/papers related to their own specific research project
“Lab Meeting”

- Discuss scientific papers
- Have visiting scientific speakers
- Have students present research ideas, talks, posters
- Preparation for QE
Predictors of success in graduate school (complete program)

- Motivation and persistence
- Ability to think and learn (cognitive skills)
- Knowledge of field (ability to master)
Shaping the Discourse

B  Selecting the right students (more by luck than judgment!)
A-  Helping them become good researchers (and survive graduate school)
D  Giving them the right toolkit to survive and assume leadership in the “real” world
Postgraduate Training

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Expectations

What did students expect that they would do after graduating?
What did they actually do?

- Commercial
- Teacher
- Consultants
- NGO
- Government
- Academic
Is multidisciplinary
Requires understanding own and other’s ethical values regarding animals
Is closely tied to policy-making
Is meant to be applied, and thus requires interaction and collaboration with stakeholders
Is controversial
Incomplete Toolkit?

PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE
MANAGEMENT OF CONTROVERSY
UNDERSTANDING ROLES
How I spend my days

- Research, teaching, administration
- Press interviews
- Setting animal care standards
- Developing auditing programs, auditing/certifying facilities and programs
- Meeting with producers/zookeepers/animal caretakers to talk about welfare assessment
How I spend my days

- Correlation with my training in graduate school?
How I spend my days

- Correlation with my training in graduate school?

Not zero, but not statistically impressive either! (r^2 = 0.20??)
Animal Welfare Research

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Shaping the Discourse

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A- Helping them become good researchers (and survive graduate school)
D  Giving them the right toolkit to survive and assume leadership in the “real” world
   - Practical experience
   - Management of controversy
Real World Experience

- Summer internships
  - NGOs, commercial organizations
- Auditing and certification programs
- Promote interactions with stakeholders
  - Conferences
  - Lab meetings
What do schoolteachers and sumo wrestlers have in common?
  - Hint: Both may cheat if the statistical/financial incentives are great enough

How is the Ku-Klux Clan like a group of real estate agents?
  - Hint: Both profit from information asymmetry (secrets)

What is the relationship between animal welfare research and a Clint Eastwood film?
The Good

PEOPLE CARE ABOUT YOUR RESEARCH
The Bad

PEOPLE CARE ABOUT YOUR RESEARCH
The Ugly

PEOPLE CARE ABOUT YOUR RESEARCH
Mark Bowden (Atlantic Monthly)

“Work formerly done by reporters is now routinely performed by political amateurs and ideologues... whose goal is not to educate the public, but to win”

This post-journalistic world sees democracy as “perpetual political battle”. In this world, distortions and inaccuracies, or lack of context, do not matter, because truth emerges from the “cauldron of debate” – meaning that “truth” = “winning”

The loss of the honest, disinterested voice; the seeking of truth, not power
Science has become a political weapon

- Not just animal welfare science, but any controversial area – climate change, drug approval, conservation management, reproductive health
- Discredited or censored; work taken out of context, reported inaccurately
- Recent study suggests that scientists tend to reduce research activity in areas that become controversial/polarized in this way
Swimming with the tide
The downside....
Dealing with Controversy

- What does it mean to have integrity as a researcher?
  - Does it make a difference if you work in an academic institution, government, NGO?
  - Relationship between research and advocacy
- Balancing confidentiality and transparency
- Managing conflicts of interest - financial, personal
- How do you talk to the public/press about what you do?
Animal Welfare Research

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