
Teaching Animal Rights at the University: Philosophy and Practice

by Julie Andrzejewski
jrandrzejewski@stcloudstate.edu

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Background and Context

Coming of age in the 1960s, my involvement with social movements taught me to seek critical views and accurate information outside of the university, since institutional education is dominated by Western, capitalist, patriarchal, white supremacist, and elitist interests (Bowles and Gintis, 1977). Over the next three decades, I re-educated myself and changed my teaching and scholarship accordingly. I came to value independent nonprofit publications where investigative reporting and social justice values take precedence over profit maximization. I also learned that, contrary to conventional wisdom, neither scientific nor scholarly publications are neutral, value-free sources of information, since they can easily be compromised by funding, cronyism, and underlying imperial values (Smith, 1999, Stauber and Rampton, 2001).

I resolved that my students would have access to critical and activist perspectives in their “normal” university education. Toward that end, I moved into the field of “human relations and multicultural education” because it was an emerging field with the most openness to alternative viewpoints in the 1970s. By the 1980s, I initiated a human relations (read: social justice) minor with a capstone course in activism, which quickly became the largest undergraduate minor in the state university system of Minnesota. In 1995, a colleague (Dr. John Alessio, professor of sociology, initiated the idea and co-developed the program) and I co-developed and fought for approval of a master’s degree program in social responsibility. These programs address issues of race, class, gender, age, disability, sexual orientation, national origin, religion, physical appearance, and the environment within a critical examination of imperialism and globalization. In addition to a critical knowledge base, these programs emphasize the development of skills in personal and collective activism. Within this context, I integrated the issue of speciesism into all my courses in the 1990s and began teaching a separate course on animal rights in 2000.

Teaching Animal Rights

There is a nascent movement among academics to address animal rights issues in their classes and on rare occasions to teach a complete course on animal rights. This article will seek to support this movement by sharing what I have learned from my personal and professional journey of teaching about social justice, environmental integrity, speciesism, and activism and focus its application on the teaching of animal rights. Every year, I work to improve my teaching *toward best practices for social responsibility*: pedagogy and methods to which students respond positively by changing their lives to work for a better world. It is my hope that this article will contribute toward the best practices of teaching animal rights.

The educational model I use for teaching animal rights is drawn from a number of theoretical traditions. Dewey (1916) proposed that democracy and social responsibility are predicated upon education grounded in experience, reflection, and awareness. Freire (1970) identified the liberatory role that education can play through the study of domination and subjugation and the critical examination of underlying assumptions and life experiences. Critical theory, critical race theory, feminist theory, multicultural education theory, and indigenous educational theory illuminate various aspects of challenging hegemony and violence through education (Adams, Bell, Griffin, 1997; Banks, 1996; Fisher, 2001; Hooks, 1994; Sleeter, 1996; Sleeter and Grant, 1994; WIPCE, 1999).

Knowing the students is a key component in teaching controversial issues, and animal rights is no exception. Some of the students enrolling in our classes are attracted to issues of social and environmental justice. Others are simply meeting a university requirement. Most students taking their first class in our department have never questioned their education, the media, science, the government, or capitalism. Thus, in our foundations classes (Non-Oppressive Relationships, Human Relations and Race, etc.), students are given the opportunity to explore materials and ideas that challenge the conventional “wisdom” promulgated by these institutions. They develop critical media analysis and investigative skills and begin to understand how various types of oppression affect life on a daily basis. Many students are shocked, depressed, and angry to discover that the “reality” they were taught to believe is not the continual “progress” of “man” based on sound “science” but is a fable fraught with vested interests, biases, myths, and falsehoods (Harding, S. 1993; Shiva, 1995). The journey in these classes is not an easy one, even though students know many fragments of information that do not fit into the happy narrative of their pre-college education. The primary objective of my teaching career has been to provide a challenging yet supportive environment in which students can explore these critical materials, learn how to investigate the veracity of information, and consider changes for making a better world. Most importantly, I give them an opportunity to *practice* active citizenship skills (activism).

Admittedly, most of the students taking an animal rights course already have some interest in the topic. However, it is a rare student who is well informed about the various aspects of animal rights. It is not unusual for some students to be opposed to one area of animal exploitation (e.g., hunting) but supportive of other components of animal exploitation (e.g., eating animals). When they begin to study and investigate, they discover that they have been misinformed about both. It is also possible to

encounter students who are hostile to animal rights who might take the course to challenge the professor and materials. In my experience, even students who come into the class as vegetarians or vegans do not necessarily have the information to support or defend their decision.

Over the years, I have developed and refined various methods to reduce defensiveness and resistance, to address difficult emotions generated by course materials, and to provide inspiration and hope through constructive actions. In my experience, it is easier to prevent teaching problems than to fix them. The following recommendations have helped my students engage with new and critical information about animal rights positively and decide to make permanent changes in their everyday lives.

1. Establish the parameters of the class immediately to give people choices.

Because the content is controversial and emotional, students should be given the chance to change classes if they decide that they do not want to study what you are proposing to teach. The very first day, I indicate that the class will expose them to ideas and information that may challenge their beliefs, their world views, and their own behaviors. Further, I indicate that I will not be presenting “both sides” because I contend, and will demonstrate, that they already know “the other side.” They have already been taught to believe that humans are superior to all other species, most specifically non-human animals. They have been taught to believe that they must eat meat to be healthy, that animal testing is beneficial, and so on. I clearly state that I will ask them to study materials that challenge these seemingly incontrovertible truths. Indeed, I suggest that by studying countervailing ideas, they will be in a better position to decide for themselves what to believe and how they want to act and live. In this way, if they decide to stay in the class, students are much less likely to complain later that I am being biased. Further, I have only had a couple students drop in my entire career, but the option gives them decision-making power over their situation.

This introduction is reinforced by a thorough and specific course description and clear objectives that describe in some detail what they will be learning, as follows:

Course Description: The content and activities of this course will work to foster global animal, human, and environmental justice. Toward that end, we will examine the interrelationships and consequences of human domination upon all other beings and the Earth, with the primary focus on non-human animals. The class will begin with an examination of how non-human animals are viewed within the dominant Western capitalist paradigm. Multidisciplinary perspectives challenging this paradigm will be studied, including indigenous and non-Western perspectives. The human use and abuse of animals for food (industrial

agriculture), research (vivisection), education (dissection), various products (fur, leather, wool, feathers, jewelry, cosmetics, etc.), entertainment (racing, rodeos, bullfights, circuses, zoos, aquariums, etc.), “sport” (hunting, fishing, target practice, etc.), “pets” (puppy mills, pet stores), replacement organs, and other activities will be critically analyzed. Other human-animal activities affecting all life on Earth (deforestation, habitat destruction, pollution, war, urban sprawl, climate alterations, etc.) will also be studied with a focus on their effects on non-human animals.

Some questions to be explored in the class:

- Through what justifications do humans argue that they have the right to use, abuse, or kill other sentient beings for their own purposes?
- What logical, data-based, and moral arguments challenge these justifications?
- What is the definition of speciesism?
- Who benefits from speciesist policies and practices?
- How is language used to obscure the consequences and responsibility for human exploitation and destruction of non-human animals?
- What are the negative consequences of these activities on non-human animals? On humans?
- Should non-human animals have the right to live natural lives?
- Should non-human animals be required to suffer and die for the purposes of humans?
- What role does animal rights play in a comprehensive framework of personal (and global) social responsibility and environmental justice?

Course Objectives

1. Critically examine the interrelationships and consequences of human domination upon all other beings and the Earth, with the primary focus upon non-human animals.
2. Critically analyze how non-human animals are viewed within the dominant Western capitalist paradigm and the consequences of profit maximization in global economic and political policies and practices.
3. Explore alternative cultural and philosophical perspectives that challenge this dominant paradigm.
4. Understand the concept of speciesism, animal rights, and related ethical issues.
5. Critically analyze the “benefits” of human exploitation of non-human animals; explore the consequences of resource extraction on the environment and non-human animals. Which humans “benefit”? Which humans lose? What are the consequences to non-human animals?
6. Explore the relationship between human cruelty and violence toward non-human animals and human cruelty and violence toward humans.

7. Deconstruct and critique the hidden values in language that serves to obscure and justify species domination.
8. Critically examine the underlying profit and/or domination patterns in the use of non-human animals by humans (in light of Objectives 1-7) for food, research, products, education, sports, entertainment, pets, replacement organs, etc.
9. Critically examine the impact of humans’ use and treatment of the natural environment and effects on “wild” animals (non-human animals living in their natural habitats).
10. Choose and practice personal actions that are congruent with new information and emerging ethical considerations of the rights of non-human animals and global social responsibility.

2. Include written ground rules on the syllabus.

Establishing ground rules so that students understand the expectations helps to alleviate some anxiety and puts potential hecklers on notice that disruption will be difficult in this class. Putting them in writing on the syllabus provides a record with which to remind students should conflict arise. I have found the following ground rules useful:

- This class will introduce perspectives and information that may contradict the widely held beliefs or prejudices about human and non-human animals promoted by education, “science,” the media, and popular culture. Participants are not expected or required to hold any particular viewpoint but are asked to be open to exploring different and challenging information. This class will take an investigative approach—participants will be asked to study new information, assess documentation, and develop skills in examining how issues of intolerance, prejudice, discrimination, and privilege affect our lives and the lives of other beings on this planet.
- Students are asked to help create a safe and supportive environment in the class. There will be disagreement among members of the class. Please interact with others with honesty, kindness, and respect. Please avoid self-righteousness, hostility, ridicule, or other disrespectful behaviors (such as eye-rolling, elbow-jabbing, whispering while another is talking, etc.).
- If you find that defensiveness, anger, frustration, sadness, guilt, shock, or other emotions are interfering with your ability to learn the materials and skills in this class, contact the professor immediately for suggestions about constructive measures you might take to alleviate this distress.
- Participants are asked to re-examine previous assumptions about human and non-human animals. Participants are expected to study and demonstrate knowledge of information pertaining to all the course objectives above.
- Participants are expected to consider and practice the development of non-oppressive decision-making and actions to help create a safe, respectful, cooperative, healthy, and peace-

ful world where all beings have the opportunity to live a natural life, as much as is possible.

3. Identify the values on which the class is based.

After the events of September 11 and the passing of the Patriot Act, the messages (“United We Stand,” etc.) promulgated by the corporate-owned media and George W. Bush and his collaborators created a jingoistic environment in which questioning and critical thinking became tantamount to treason. University faculty members were among a number of groups targeted for making comments that were critical of United States policies and practices, and animal rights activists were labeled “domestic terrorists.” In this neo-McCarthyistic environment, I decided that a statement of values might help protect my academic freedom to teach critical perspectives while placing them in the context of freedoms that the United States, the United Nations, and other respected organizations espouse. Thus, I added the following statement to my syllabi.

Class Values: No education is value-free. This class is based on fundamental values identified by the United States in various documents like the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights among others. Some of these values are democracy, liberty, human rights, dignity, equal opportunity, non-discrimination, freedom of speech and religion, and justice for all. This class also draws upon many other cultures and ways of knowing that value cooperation, sharing, compassion, and equitable distribution of resources, natural law and the environment, biodiversity, the right to life and freedom from torture, personal and global nonviolence and peace. Finally, this course draws upon the Declaration of the Rights of Animals, the Earth Charter, and tenets of international law, like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Convention for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, Convention for the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women, Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. This course encourages people to become well-informed, knowledgeable, active, respectful, non-violent, democratic citizens with a focus on working to eliminate all forms of violence and oppression for the benefit of everyone. This course encourages participants to examine our everyday lives and consider the extent to which our actions are congruent with our stated values. “Each moment of our lives we have the option to do right, do wrong, or do nothing. ... Do the least harm and the most good” (Joanne Stepaniak, 2001).

4. Teach people how to interact with kindness and respect, especially when they disagree.

In my experience, many people do not know how to disagree with others without hostility, how to explore controversial topics in constructive ways, or how to introduce new information to their friends and families without engaging in angry and

harmful arguments. Because of the volatility of animal rights issues from all sides, I find it necessary to teach students how to interact about these issues with each other, their friends and family members, and others they wish to educate. I introduce these ideas on the first day of class with the ground rules. Most importantly, as the professor, I must model these skills myself, responding with kindness even to those with whom I vehemently disagree. Readings by animal rights activists who have learned, sometimes in painful ways, how to educate others with caring and respect can illustrate the effectiveness and benefits of this approach. Instead of expressing outrage, righteous indignation, or anger, finding creative ways to share information with others is a fundamental skill of an activist working for a better world. Finally, I devote classroom time to discussing, sharing examples, and practicing how such conversations might develop. Then we use examples that emerge in class to discuss and practice these skills further.

When two students in one class revealed that they were hunters and intended to continue hunting, other members of the class reacted with anger, disgust, and self-righteousness. I asked the class to get in a circle so we could discuss our interaction. I pointed out that no one in class could claim that they have never contributed to harming animals and that it is likely that we are still behaving in ways that contribute to animal suffering. Indeed, it is almost impossible to live a life that does not. Further, I pointed out that we are all less likely to change if we are defensive. I reminded them that we are here to learn and to decide for **ourselves** what actions we want to take to work toward a peaceful, non-violent world. We cannot force others to make these changes, but we can encourage them in many supportive ways to do so. I suggested that we consider ourselves on a journey, rather than a deadline and that there is much to study and understand and thousands of ways we can change if we are really committed to eliminating the suffering and exploitation of animals. This discussion helped calm people's emotions and helped them reflect on how they would want to be treated themselves.

This was only one of several discussions about how to approach others on these touchy and emotionally charged issues. Two short articles stimulated a powerful discussion. In “The Rhetoric of Protest,” Cave (2000) explains how being an angry animal rights activist eventually made him ill and forced him to withdraw from activism to heal himself. He challenges the efficacy of angry, confrontational interactions with ignorant “troglodytes.” In “Like Animals,” Moretti (2002) shares a holiday encounter with relatives who baited her about her animal consciousness. She describes her calm and thoughtful response, which shifted the conversation to a reflection on animals as intelligent and significant beings. Examples and discussions like these inspire students to practice respectful ways of educating

others. Finding that they did not have to be belligerent in defending themselves, the “hunters” became more open to considering the arguments and information in the video “What’s Wrong With Hunting?” (1996). They were able to dig into the root causes of chronic wasting disease and consider its connections to feeding deer the rendered parts of other animals (Stauber, 2002), and the involvement of hunters in breeding the biggest bucks with the biggest racks (Irwin, 2002). By the end of the fall class, no student went hunting, and several former hunters were challenging their hunter friends.

5. Keep in touch with peoples’ reflections and feelings regularly.

Because the readings, videos, and discussions are emotionally charged and a professor cannot know how all the students are reacting, especially those who tend to be quiet, I rely upon a weekly report called “Reflections, Challenges, and Actions.” Each of the following questions helps me plan my teaching for the following week:

- **What are the key things you learned this week (include readings and all in-class activities) that helped you meet the objectives of this class?** This question helps me assess whether I am meeting my course objectives and what I might want to review, emphasize, or clarify.
- **What things, if any, did you find difficult or challenging this week? Were you confused at any point? Did you have emotional reactions to any of the materials? How can you deal with these constructively?** This question helps me understand how students are responding emotionally. Are they defensive? Are they depressed? Are they angry? If only one or two students express a particular emotional distress, I ask them to come and talk to me so that I can help them. If many students are experiencing difficulties, I may initiate a large or small group discussion.
- **Are there ways that the professor can better facilitate your learning? If so, what are they?** Asking students directly about how you can help them learn is rewarding. Many times, they say that everything is going well, but other times they make helpful suggestions. I implement them whenever possible.
- **What everyday actions can you take this week to decrease or eliminate animal suffering? How did the learning and challenges of this week help you increase active compassion and justice for all species?** This question addresses personal change and activism, giving them pause to consider and report on what changes they are practicing. I encourage them to explore their struggles as well as their successes, indicating that I may have some helpful suggestions to move them past obstacles or frustrations.

I make sure that I write supportive and encouraging comments on each paper. I may also write some challenging questions for

them to consider. I support student honesty, especially when they are critical of the class or a particular reading or assignment. If students do not feel safe to be honest in these reflections, they are useless.

6. Teach people to analyze information, including my own.

Since I am never afraid of the truth, I teach students to analyze the values in all information, corporate and independent. I introduce students to alternative, nonprofit media sources, including activist organizations. The Internet makes this skill much easier to teach, since students have more access to activist media than ever before. Students are asked to cross-check information between sources and to analyze the motivations and values that might influence the kind of information disseminated from a particular source. Most students have never questioned corporate media, are unfamiliar with alternative or independent sources, and have no experience with media analysis. A media analysis assignment asks questions to help students identify hidden biases by comparing corporate “news” with nonprofit organization information on animal rights:

- What information has been selected for presentation? More importantly, cross-check to find out what information has been omitted. Identify specific examples.
- Which side does the article present in a more favorable light? Are some viewpoints given credence while others discredited? How?
- What kind of people are presented as “experts”? Who is quoted, what reports are referenced, what institutions cited? Which side are these experts on? How can you tell?
- What impression is given by the pictures or personal descriptions presented? Who looks good and who looks bad?
- What kind of language or words are used to describe or analyze the topic? How does this language shape the “reality” being presented?
- What values or biases can you detect in the information? What evidence can you provide to illustrate these values?

Students use these questions to compare corporate media news sources with animal rights organizations’ news sources. They discover the differences in the underlying values and begin to understand the myth of objectivity and to assess credibility for themselves.

7. Use videos and materials that document the attributes of animals as well as the violence against them.

The animal rights movement has an excellent reputation for doing investigations with undercover cameras. Thus, excellent videos that document almost every type of animal abuse, torture, murder, or exploitation are readily available. “Meet Your Meat” (PETA, 2003) is a powerful and compelling tool. Even though students are horrified, shocked, disturbed, sick, and sad, these are appropriate emotions, and they almost universally state

that they are glad that they saw this video. Many decide to buy it to show their friends and family. “Life Behind Bars” (Farm Sanctuary, 2002), “The Witness” (Tribe of Heart, 2000), “Lethal Medicine” (Burgos and Davoudian, 1997), “What’s Wrong With Hunting?” (The Fund for Animals, 1996), and many others quickly eliminate the myths and disinformation promulgated by industries or governmental agencies.

Yet there is another area of study and documentation, just beginning to emerge, that is a necessary and powerful component of education on animal rights, that exposes people to the experiences, emotions, and intelligence of other beings. In order to show my students examples of these unexplored aspects of non-human animals, I had to cobble together bits and pieces of videos from a wide variety of sources. Students are amazed to see female pigs carefully building their nests and nurturing their babies in “The Pig Picture” (Humane Farm Association, 1995). Even though documentaries not created by animal rights activists are fundamentally speciesist, I was still able to use a few excerpts from “Why Dogs Smile and Chimpanzees Cry” (Fleisherfilm, Inc., 1999), “Inside the Animal Mind” (Reddish, 2000), the story of Eliza in “The Natural History of the Chicken” (Lewis, 2000), and “Extraordinary Cats” (Simon, 1999) to give students a glimpse of animal ingenuity, courage, intelligence, and emotions. Where speciesist comments were made in these excerpts, I encouraged students to analyze and critique them. Interspersed with videos of animal torture and mistreatment, videos of animal intelligence, joy, and courage deepen the meaning of the undercover footage of animal torture, abuse, and murder. Students were moved by both.

8. Help people explore their own motivations for change and examine the interrelationships between animal rights and other issues.

Although it may seem obvious, it is important to provide information emphasizing different motivations for changing behaviors. As an educator, I try to avoid making judgments about what motivates people to change. Instead, I try to model a non-hierarchical, nonjudgmental approach toward motivations. This approach helps students communicate more effectively with those who may not share the same motivations. It also helps students in their efforts to educate their own friends and family members when they realize that motivations are varied, complex, and interactive.

Self-interest is a primary motivating factor for some people. They respond to information about the dangers for humans who eat animals, their ova or milk; the lack of hygiene in factory farming or slaughterhouses; what animals are fed in factory farms; the etiology of “mad cow” disease (a.k.a. BSE or bovine spongiform encephalopathy) or chronic wasting disease (CWD) in deer. The video “Diet for a New America” (Schuman and

Pruzinsky, 1991), showing the removal of fatty deposits from the arteries of a heart, has a powerful impact on such students. They may also be moved to action when they discover the dangers of treatments for humans based on the use of laboratory experiments on animals or the consequences of mass extinctions of animals for humans. Other people may show less concern for themselves than their children (e.g., school lunches) or parents (e.g., eating animals they hunt).

Compassion inspires some people when they discover the torturous daily lives and deaths of animals on factory farms or the violence used to coerce animals to perform in circuses, rodeos, movies, and other forms of entertainment. Sometimes compassion for other humans is a factor in helping people change their behavior toward animals. The Global Hunger Campaign (www.globalhunger.net), for instance, helps people understand how an animal-based diet results in starvation for millions of people in other countries. Some people are moved to take action for animals whose habitats are being destroyed or who are threatened with extinction, as documented in the video, “Tiger Crisis” (BBC-NHU, 1996). A number of students extend their personal feelings about the animals in their own families to animals used for food or fur. Eddie Lama helps people make these connections by so eloquently stating in “The Witness” (LaVeck, 2000) that “a miracle is a change in perception.”

Still other students have a profound connection with the natural systems of the planet and will change their own behaviors for environmental reasons. For these students, understanding the effects of factory farming on water, air, soil, and biodiversity is very compelling. Yet another group may respond best to moral, ethical, or philosophical arguments like *The Dreaded Comparison: Human and Animal Slavery* (Spiegel, 1996) or *Animal Liberation* (Singer, 1975). Others may be interested in investigating spiritual or religious approaches to animals (Goodall, 1999). Most people experience multiple motivations as they explore challenging ideas and information about animals. Many animal rights resources take a multidimensional approach, like *The Food Revolution* (Robbins, 2001), but even these usually do not cover all the possible interests that students might have. I have found that using a broad range of books, articles, videos, speakers, and Web sites allows all students to be touched by materials that move them.

Fundamental to the class and encompassing all approaches, however, is the necessity of understanding the priorities of global capitalism: profit maximization and accumulation. Students are often surprised to discover that almost every aspect of animal abuse (as well as human oppression and environmental devastation) is related to huge, often hidden, industries that are intent on making money, regardless of the consequences to animals, humans, or the planet. In order to work for effective change,

students must be cognizant of the motivations of these industries and their efforts to manipulate, propagandize, and miseducate people for their own ends.

9. Help people see connections between hope and action.

Because the information about and images of animal abuse are so shocking, painful, and overwhelming, it is incumbent upon a teacher of animal rights to provide specific and powerful remedies whereby students can take immediate and long-term actions to alleviate this distress. *The Better World Handbook* (Jones, Haenfler, and Johnson, 2001) has an excellent model for moving people from the cycle of cynicism to the cycle of hope. Jones *et al.* identify and challenge nine common traps that create apathy and prevent people from acting (e.g., the ideas that one person can't make a difference, that it's too overwhelming, etc.). When people find out about a problem but see no way to help, they feel powerless and want to avoid information that brings about these uncomfortable feelings. On the other hand, taking personal actions that reflect and reinforce a person's values engenders feelings of empowerment and hope. Everyday actions are one of the most powerful forms of learning. When people transform their lives, they transform their thinking, and they educate their family and friends. The changes from one person's life begin a ripple effect.

10. Help people differentiate between solutions addressing the root causes of animal oppression and Band-Aid solutions.

People need to see that personal decisions and actions can save animals and challenge huge institutional systems like factory farming. They also need help analyzing and identifying the actions that have the most powerful impact. One useful distinction is to differentiate between actions that will address the root causes of the problem (e.g., actions that will prevent the problem from recurring) from Band-Aid actions that may relieve symptoms of the problem but leave the fundamental system unchanged. Thus, I encourage people to focus on key questions of speciesism (human supremacy) and capitalism (unbridled greed) to look for root causes of animal abuse. With this focus, any activity that uses animals for human purposes (however lofty), and especially those with a primary goal of making money, must be questioned, investigated, and challenged, in ourselves, in others, and in human institutions and systems.

This emphasis keeps the attention on radical (root) change rather than reform agendas (Band-Aids). Still, having taught courses in activism for 25 years, I believe that it is necessary to avoid rigidity and dogmatism about actions, especially to encourage people toward a journey in personal transformation. Thus, I am supportive of whatever changes a person can make at that moment. In my experience, people are able to change more dramatically and permanently with support and reinforce-

ment than through pressure and approbation. I reassure students throughout the course that they must make their own decisions about their values and their actions. People are also inspired by the actions of others to make changes in their own lives. Seeing some people make a decision to quit eating meat immediately and move toward veganism with little hesitation helps other students consider the possibility of simply reducing their animal consumption. For many, if not most people, dramatic life changes, especially habitual behaviors, take some time to accomplish.

11. Share vegan meals together in class.

Another experiential learning process is encouraged by inviting the class to share vegan meals together. I come to the first or second class with a simple homemade vegan meal for people to taste, usually hummus, pita bread, relish, tomatoes, organic apple juice, and vegan cookies. Students are surprised to have a professor bring a meal, and some are hesitant to taste unconventional food, but they also are usually pleased to have the opportunity. When invited to consider if they would like to take turns preparing vegan food for each other, no class has turned the opportunity down. These brief meals add another dimension to the learning. Students are encouraged to share and compare recipes and other information about cruelty-free products, entertainment, and clothing as part of learning to live a compassionate life. Because there is so much interest in this part of the course, I have decided to include some vegan cookbooks as supplemental texts in the future since so many students are eager to try practical, delicious recipes to use immediately.

12. Provide numerous options for practicing active citizenship skills and give students complete control over choices.

John Dewey (1916) identified that experiential education (learning by doing) is the most effective way of learning. While educators have known this for decades, we still often fail, for the most part, to implement it into our own teaching—even those of us who agree with it. In keeping with this perspective, a significant portion of the course provides students with opportunities to practice changing life habits in order to act in congruence with their own stated values. In order to facilitate an attitude toward change, I chose Newkirk’s book *You Can Save the Animals: 251 Simple Ways to Stop Thoughtless Cruelty* as one of the texts. Since my priority is to change lives and inspire activism, I purposely choose readings that do not cause students to struggle to understand the language, the evidence, or the philosophy.

As an integral component of the course, I assign a “personal citizenship project.” There are two key aspects to this assignment. First, while I provide a long list of possibilities for actions they might consider trying, they are not limited to this list, and they have total choice over the activities they decide to practice. I also

encourage students to try actions that are the least familiar to them so that they have a chance to consider changing their lives in areas that may have seemed cemented in stone before. Secondly, I use the term “practice” so students understand that the final decision about how they eventually decide to live is completely their choice. Practicing gives them the opportunity to evaluate the meaningfulness of the activity in the context of their personal philosophies and goals and to have a chance to move beyond the initial struggles or difficulties of changing entrenched life habits.

The following are just a few of the activities selected from the list of suggestions in the personal citizenship project:

Overview Projects:

- Stop participating in killing and torturing animals (eating them, buying or wearing their skins or other body parts, hunting, trapping, dissecting, using animal products, consuming animal “entertainment”).
- Do any of the 251 suggested actions in *You Can Save the Animals* (Newkirk, 1999).
- Challenge or change any activities that maintain or increase corporate domination, imperialism, and profit maximizing at the expense of animals, the environment, and humans.

Examples of Specific Activities:

- Question and change your own assumptions about the “superiority” of humans to other animals. What are the consequences of these assumptions to animals and to humans? Compare the impact of animals on the planet with the impact of humans.
- Become a vegetarian or eat substantially less “meat.” Educate others about the ecological destruction, human health hazards, and animal suffering related to meat production and consumption, factory farming, and slaughterhouse practices.
- Become a vegan or eat substantially fewer eggs and dairy products (milk, cheese, etc.). Educate yourself and others about the consequences of consuming dairy products.
- Don’t buy or consume fish or other sea animals. Educate yourself and others about the destructive practices of aquaculture and the aquarium business.
- Change your everyday language about animals. Stop using euphemisms to describe violence and exploitation of animals (e.g., “meat” for “animal flesh” or “corpse,” “pork” for “pig,” “disassembly” for “killing” and “dismemberment”, etc.) (Dunayer, 2001).
- Stop using animal names based on false stereotypes to describe humans and human activities. (e.g., “snake,” “rat,” “mouse,” “pig/hog,” “cow,” “chicken,” “fox,” etc.) Identify the negative impact on animals and humans.
- Educate yourself and others about the following issues:

- o Speciesism: Take a respectful and loving approach. Do not act superior, self-righteous, or angry.
- o Animal intelligence: Examine the power relations inherent in claiming that humans “know” what animals are capable of “knowing” and what skills they have. How have humans used similar justifications to exploit and violate other humans?
- o Animal feelings and emotions: Talk about animals’ ability to feel affection, joy, embarrassment, frustration, fear, discomfort, pain, etc. Examine the consequences of the assumption that they do not experience these feelings.
- o Environmental and global consequences: Discuss the consequences of the production and consumption of animals/animal products on land, water, ozone, other species, indigenous peoples, global starvation, global concentration of wealth, and human health.
- Locate, join, and work for animal rights organizations. Call yourself an activist, an animal rights advocate, an environmentalist, etc., and stand up for justice. Work for human rights and environmental justice, too. When humans suffer and the environment is destroyed, animals suffer, die, and/or become extinct. Address the root causes of problems rather than Band-Aid approaches.
- Challenge neglect, harassment, cruelty, and violence toward any animal, bird, fish, insect, etc. Witness, document, assertively challenge, or call authorities about illegal or immoral activities (a dog who is never taken out of the kennel, a cat who is not spayed or neutered, animals or birds who are used for target practice, etc.).
- Write letters to support justice for animals and humans. Write letters to the editor, to government officials, and to organizations of all kinds. Get others to write, too.

In my most recent class, this assignment moved the 38 students to take action. The following were among the most popular choices:

- All students worked on changing their eating habits. Ten moved to veganism, 16 became vegetarians, and the remaining 12 reduced their meat and dairy consumption, substantially in most cases. In addition, 17 students influenced others to become vegetarian.
- All students shared information from the class with friends and family members, and 21 students showed videos to others.
- Thirty-one students threw out and/or stopped buying items that were tested on animals.
- Seventeen stopped consuming speciesist entertainment.
- Sixteen stopped buying and using leather, fur, or clothing made from animals.
- Eighteen changed their language about animals, and 16 worked hard to challenge their thinking about human superiority.

- Sixteen wrote letters to stores, businesses, Congress, or the editors of newspapers.
- Ten joined national animal rights organizations, and another 10 participated in world Farm Animals Day.

A few projects constituted enormous changes for a small number of students. For instance, five students quit hunting or fishing themselves, and six students stood up to their fathers who were either avid hunters or entrenched meat-eaters.

While the numbers above give a sense of overall change, only the students’ own words can express what happened in their lives. Here are just a few of the comments from their personal citizenship projects:

- “Many things in my AR class made me sad. Others made me angry. My emotions, although valid, cannot make change. The action portion of the class allowed me to learn more about myself, non-humans, and ways that I can fight for change.”
- “I wish more people could learn just a fourth of what I learn in the two hours I am in class, but most people don’t. This is where I can make a difference. I want to let people know what the animal had to endure so you could pay \$0.49 for a piece of their body, a body and life that never got to run in the fields or enjoy the essence of motherhood. I want people to understand that humans are no more superior than a chicken or a dog.”
- “One of the hardest things I’ve learned is that the people that I love the most aren’t willing to see my views or take my self-discoveries seriously. They put up a fight against their daughter and friend in order to defend meat. This is the time when I need support and when I don’t have them to turn to, I know that I have to find strength within myself.”
- “I learned that no matter what we do, an animal is probably affected in one way or another. This holds true especially in war. People are worried about all the people that are dying, but how many animals are we putting into extinction by bombing almost the entire Middle East?”
- “Through the action component of this class, my life has changed dramatically. I have been challenged in ways I could never have imagined and have met many of those challenges. I have been encouraged to ACT to make a difference. The greatest and most significant aspect has been practicing a calm, non-intrusive, nonjudgmental way in which to interact and educate others on these issues.”

13. Discuss the ethics and effectiveness of various methods of collective action.

The power of individual actions cannot be overstated. Yet, every effective movement for justice must organize collectively to effect powerful and lasting change. Since most students do not have the opportunity to study social movements in their formal education, it is important to assist students in investigating the

various types of activist groups and the strategies they use. It is significant that many animal activist groups today recognize on some level the role that capitalism, profit-maximization, or vested interests play in animal exploitation. Yet they may apply very different methods to reach different goals. While most groups employ multiple strategies and actions, each group often has a signature style, method, or goal that drives its work. Some groups, like the Humane Society of the United States (HSUS), focus primarily on animal welfare, trying to improve the lives of animals under whatever conditions they must exist. HSUS lobbies and organizes for legislative changes as a key component of its strategy. Other groups, like People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA), focus on media exposure of shocking animal abuses to the public. They initiate creative and controversial campaigns to garner media attention for the plight of animals. Still other groups employ direct-action tactics to rescue or liberate animals from torture, cruelty, and death. Even these groups vary widely in their philosophical and tactical approaches, from strategic nonviolence and open rescues to the nonviolent civil disobedience and economic sabotage of the Animal Liberation Front (ALF) to more militant and even violent groups.

As the animal rights movement matures, excellent materials are becoming available to stimulate discussion and consideration of these varied approaches. Exposure and discussion, within the context of the nonviolent values of the class, can provide beneficial information and consideration of the role of collective action in a democracy. Best and Nocella (2003) provide an invaluable resource in *Terrorists or Freedom Fighters: Reflections on the Liberation of Animals*. This book lays a historical and philosophical foundation for examining key questions about the ethics and efficacy of different approaches, in this case a detailed multifaceted analysis of the ALF in contrast with other approaches. The video “All My Heroes Still Wear Masks: The Men and Women of the Animal Liberation Front and the Animals of Huntingdon Life Sciences” (Lee, 2001) provides some visual documentation of ALF tactics. Wicklund’s article “Strategic Nonviolence for Animal Liberation” (1998) [<http://articles.animalconcerns.org/snv/>] outlines key factors of power and nonviolent discipline for activists. The significance of people being open, respectful, and willing to accept the consequences of civil disobedience is emphasized. HSUS, PETA, and other activist organizations provide ample readings and videos to support their activities. Through these materials, students can investigate, assess, discuss, and debate their questions and concerns about the ethics and effectiveness of many different types of activism.

14. Base assignment and course evaluations on demonstrated understanding of the materials, not beliefs or specific actions.

While evaluation and grading might seem difficult in a course

that covers so many controversial issues, there are certain principles that I have learned from teaching social justice issues for many years. Although it may seem obvious, it is important not to grade based on opinions, beliefs, or actions, only on how well the students followed the assignment, the depth of the understanding of the materials, and the insights and learning they acquired from the experiential assignments. Students who do the assignments well, study and learn the materials, and practice actions of their own choice but indicate that they will not be making permanent changes in their lives must not be penalized for these decisions. Acceptance, caring, and kindness toward students regardless of their personal decisions pays off in the long run. It is not uncommon for former students to let me know that they continued to make changes after the class ended. Others have confided that the class made them aware of compassionate solutions but they continue to struggle with their own decisions.

Another evaluation decision I have found especially valuable in teaching controversial and emotionally charged courses is to allow students to revise and resubmit assignments on which they did not do well the first time. Even though this encumbers additional instructor time, it has several advantages. First, the students often learn even more from their mistakes and misunderstandings. They have an opportunity to revisit and rethink what they did not learn the first time. Finally, students will be more open to the content of the course if they are not defensive and worried about their grades. My teaching is guided by my belief that all students can master the material and skills in my classes if they are provided with the opportunity. If some students choose not to revise their assignment, they cannot blame the instructor or the course for their final evaluation. I do not care or worry about grade inflation. My interest is in providing all students with the support and opportunity to do well in the class.

Conclusion: It is difficult to summarize the myriad components of a complex activity such as teaching in a series of books, much less an article. This task is further compounded by the difficulty of teaching a course that challenges the prejudices, information, institutions, and everyday lifestyles of the students in it. I have tried to select what I consider to be some of the key aspects of the success of our teaching and programs as they have been applied to teaching an animal rights course. I expect these methods to change and become more sophisticated as the animal rights movement continues to influence, ever more powerfully, society at large. I look forward to a day when I can write or read articles on teaching advanced courses in animal rights as an accepted and core component of global social responsibility.

Dr. Julie Andrzejewski is a professor, activist scholar, and co-director of the master’s program in social responsibility at St. Cloud State

University (SCSU) in Minnesota. She was nominated the CASE Professor of the Year from SCSU in 2003. She has written numerous articles and is the editor of Oppression and Social Justice: Critical Frameworks and co-author of Why Can't Sharon Kowalski Come Home? In the 1980s, she read Animal Liberation and began changing her own life. She became a vegetarian in 1987 and began moving toward veganism and integrating animal rights and animal rights activism into all her classes in the 1990s. She says “moving toward” veganism because she came to understand that being a vegan is far more than what you do or do not eat; it is a comprehensive lifestyle committed to compassion in every area of life (Stepaniak, 2000). She has taught animal rights courses for three years. She can be reached at jrandrzejewski@stcloudstate.edu.

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TeachKind
501 Front St.
Norfolk, VA 23510
TeachKind.org
Info@teachkind.org
757-962-8248

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