

CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTION TO ANIMAL USE GUIDELINES

RELEVANT POLICY/PROCEDURE

These guidelines are made under the following policies/procedures published in the Melbourne Policy Library:

- Responsible Conduct and Expectations of Students Policy

BACKGROUND

The University of Melbourne is committed to recognising the diversity of values held by students and aims to facilitate students completing their chosen courses of study without compromising their ethical commitments wherever possible.

The use of animals for teaching and research in Victoria is defined as 'scientific procedures' and is regulated by Part 3 of the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1986* (Vic) and the *Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Regulations 1997*. The Melbourne Research Office administers a comprehensive animal ethics framework (<http://www.research.unimelb.edu.au/animalethics>) which University staff and students are required to comply with across all learning, teaching and research activities.

The University actively seeks to avoid gratuitous practice on animals by replacing learning, teaching and assessment methods involving animal use with alternatives (such as computer simulations, supervised clinical experience, ethically-sourced tissue preservation, dissection models and mannequins) where possible.

However, the University recognises that some students may, in the course of learning and teaching activities (including classes and assessment), be asked to observe or participate in forms of animal use which are in conflict with their conscientious beliefs. The University will endeavour to make reasonable accommodations for students' conscientious beliefs in this area, although it will not always be possible to excuse students from particular activities.

SCOPE

These guidelines are intended to apply to situations where a student has a conscientious belief in relation to a particular form of animal use (including the use of animal tissue and animal products) involved in teaching and learning practice. A conscientious belief is considered to be more than just a strongly held view. It does not need to have a religious basis. For the purposes of these guidelines, a conscientious belief is one which:

- is an intrinsic conviction held by an individual as to what is ethically correct;
- is genuinely held, after careful consideration of an issue; and
- is not influenced by personal advantage or disadvantage either to oneself or to others, and when put to the test must include a willingness to accept personal disadvantage or material or personal loss (the student need not incur a personal cost for their belief, but should be able to demonstrate a willingness to do so).

Subject coordinators and other staff members do not need to accept the underlying rationale for a student's conscientious belief.

GUIDELINES

1. Students are asked to make themselves aware of course and subject requirements as set out in the Handbook and other course and subject materials, and identify instances where they may be asked to participate in animal use activities to which they object. Students should note that animal use activities are essential to the development of relevant skills and attributes in some courses.
2. Students concerned they may be asked to participate in animal use activities to which they object should raise the matter with the relevant subject coordinator(s) at the earliest opportunity (usually at the start of the relevant teaching period) to increase the chances that alternative arrangements can be made. Students may request alternative arrangements but cannot demand that they take a particular form.

3. The relevant subject coordinator will determine if a student's claim constitutes a conscientious objection, and if so, whether it is possible to make alternative teaching, practice or assessment arrangements to accommodate it. Subject coordinators may ask students to provide information in writing, or supporting documentation (such as from religious, cultural or other certifying bodies), to assist with making determinations. Subject coordinators should consider conscientious objection sensitively at all times, and may seek advice from other University staff, including the relevant course coordinator, if required.
4. Students will only be excused from activities to which they object where alternative arrangements can be put in place.
5. Where alternative arrangements are made to accommodate a student's conscientious objection, they will apply only to the individual student in question, not to all the students enrolled in the course or subject.
6. Students should note that in some courses and subjects it will not be possible to make alternative arrangements to accommodate a conscientious objection to animal use activities. Factors that may be considered when determining whether alternative arrangements are possible include, but are not limited to:
 - The academic integrity of the course or subject.
 - Professional, accreditation and registration requirements and the need to certify that graduates have particular professional competencies.
 - Whether the subject in question is core or elective (for electives, a possible alternative arrangement is selecting a different subject).
 - Legal requirements (including equal opportunity and anti-discrimination legislation).
 - The cost of alternative arrangements (which may have to be borne by the student requesting them if in excess of the cost of the original activity).
 - The impact of alternative arrangements on other students.
7. Students with a conscientious objection which cannot be accommodated may consult with the relevant subject or course coordinator, or a student adviser, about the possibility of other enrolment options. If students choose to remain enrolled in the relevant subject or course they must participate in all required activities.
8. Staff should include appropriate information about animal use activities in particular subjects, especially where it is not possible to make alternative arrangements for students with conscientious objections, in course and subject Handbook descriptions and other materials.
9. Students who are dissatisfied with the application of these guidelines may appeal to the Dean (or nominee) of the relevant faculty or graduate school.

RESPONSIBLE OFFICER

The Provost is responsible for the development and review of these guidelines.

IMPLEMENTATION OFFICER

The Manager, Policy and Programs (Office of the Provost) is the contact officer who can provide further information on these guidelines.

REVIEW

These guidelines are to be reviewed by 30 April 2015.

VERSION HISTORY

Version	Authorised By	Approval Date	Effective Date	Sections Modified
1	Provost	28 May 2012	30 June 2012	New