College and Animal Abandonment

College students abandon their pets at the end of the school year due to financial hardship or inability to bring them home.

Tag words: college, university, pets, animal abandonment, owners

Authors: Kelly Hoagland, Kevin Maus, Julia Susan and Kristene Welch with Julie M. Fagan, Ph.D.

Summary

Some college students take on the responsibility of being a pet owner by either adopting or purchasing a pet. All is well and good until the student realizes that the responsibilities of college and pet ownership are too much for them to handle or they realize they cannot bring their animal back home with them when the end of spring semester arrives. What do they do? Their options are to find the animal a new home, bring it to a shelter, or abandon the animal to the streets. Our group is tackling the issue that many college students will abandon their pets at the end of the school term because they do not fully consider the commitment that they are making to the animal. Our group went out to the Rutgers University student centers and tried to inform students about the requirements of being a good pet owner and asking them whether they were prepared for pet ownership. We handed out and left informational pamphlets at student centers as well. In addition, we e-mailed editorials to over 75 college newspapers from such major institutions as Dartmouth and Cornell, in order to try and spread awareness across the country. (Julia Susan & Kelly Hoagland)

Video Link

College and Animal Abandonment: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JmMlqGthb4c
The Issue: Animal Abandonment

Why Do We Have Pets?
Have you ever thought about owning a pet? There are a number of reasons why people, around the world, may choose to adopt or purchase a pet. One of the main reasons is companionship. Modern life is becoming more and more solitary. People often live by themselves and families are much smaller than they were in the past. With a pet you not only get companionship but also unconditional love. That animal is always pleased to see you when you walk through the door and they will never complain. Pets also provide an easy way to meet new people. It is almost impossible to take a dog for a walk without someone stopping you to pet the dog and say hello to you. Additionally, there are countless pet clubs or dog walking parks across the nation. (Kristene Welch)

Another major benefit of owning a pet is stress reduction. Playing, walking, petting and laughing are all simple ways to reduce stress and these are all actions that naturally go along with pet ownership. This is true whether your pet is a dog, cat or any small animal. Additionally, owning a pet can help teach adults and children many valuable life lessons such as responsibility, gentleness and compassion. These are especially important skills to learn for children and so taking care of a pet as a child can be a very valuable experience. Owning a pet can also serve as a good test to determine if a couple is capable of providing for a child. Obviously, there is a huge difference between owning a pet and caring for a child, but it can be a step in the right direction. Pets can also help their owners keep a sense of perspective in their lives. After a stressful day at the office you come home to find the cat rolling around the floor playing with a piece of string. This can serve as a reminder that life is more than just work. Life is about having fun and animals know how to have fun! (Kristene Welch)

Living with a pet can also provide many medical benefits. For example, people who have been diagnosed with epilepsy can benefit from owning a dog, because their sense of smell is so good that they can detect chemical changes that signal the onset of a seizure in their owner. These dogs can signal the owner that a seizure may be coming on, so that they can take preventative medicine that will ward off the seizure. Pets can also help people with disabilities, such as Seeing Eye dogs that lead the blind, enabling them to live far more independent lives than would otherwise be possible. Additionally, having a Monkey Helper allows quadriplegics and other people with severe spinal cord injuries or mobility-impairments by providing assistance with common ever day activities. These monkeys are trained to act as live-in companions who provide the gifts of independence, companionship, dignity and hope to the people they help. Monkey Helpers aid their owner with a variety of tasks such as scratching an itch, repositioning a hand or a foot, using the telephone and computer, turning on or off lights, or washing their face. This allows the patient to rely less on live-in help and thus become more independent. (Kristene Welch & Kelly Hoagland)

Finally, pets also provide therapeutic benefits and pet therapy is a well recognized healing practice in the medical field. The therapeutic use of pets as companions has gained increasing attention in recent years for a wide variety of patients including, those with AIDS or cancer, the elderly, and the mentally ill. Unlike people, with whom interactions may be quite complex and unpredictable, animals provide a constant source of comfort and focus for attention. Animals
bring out a patient's nurturing instinct and make them feel safe and unconditionally accepted. As you can see, owning a pet is associated with a wide variety of benefits and so there are numerous reasons why people may contemplate getting a pet for themselves. However, along with these benefits come many associated costs of owning a pet, both financial and otherwise and these responsibilities should not be overlooked or forgotten when considering adding a pet to one's family. (Kristene Welch)

Causes for Abandonment
Many of the animals commonly seen roaming around the urban landscape do not belong there. Feral cats and dogs are domestic animals that have either escaped from captivity or have been deliberately abandoned. People often see baby animals in pet shops and decide to buy them on a whim. However, they don't realize that the cute puppy might grow into a boisterous dog and the pretty little kitten might scratch the furniture. Often buying a dog on impulse or the gift of an animal as a present leads to a dog that is left indoors all day on their own or a rabbit forgotten in a cramped hutch or a goldfish swimming in a bowl of filthy water once the novelty has worn off. Health, old age or behavioral problems can cause pets to become time-consuming and expensive to look after. These are some of the various reasons, in addition to financial costs associated with pet ownership, that many animals are abandoned. Young animals will often be adopted by a new owner, but far too many abandoned animals will live out their days at the rescue center, or worse, thousands of healthy animals will be euthanized because there is not enough room for them at the shelter. (Kristene Welch)

Pet abandonment has become an increasing problem within the United States. There are a variety of reasons why animals are abandoned, as mentioned in the previous paragraph, but in most cases it is due to financial hardships. Family's with houses being foreclosed upon often leave animals behind because they are not allowed in their new home, or they can't afford the pet anymore or even as a form of revenge against the bank when the pet urinates and defecates all over the empty house. More commonly, pets are abandoned not due to bank foreclosure but because the owner decides the financial burden is not worth it anymore. According to Time Magazine, the average, healthy dog costs its owners roughly $1,350 per year. Bearing in mind that the average household income in the United States is roughly $50,000 this may not seem significant. However when you take into account the recent economic hardships plaguing our country it is easy to see that every family could use an extra $1,350 per year. (Kristene Welch)

An enormous subset of the animal abandonment issue is the problem of abandonment among college student communities. Considering the average college student’s income is $3,000, if the student even has a job, $1,350 is a considerable amount money. Thus, finances are a big reason why college students abandon their animals. Another reason for college pet abandonment is far simpler. According to The Tails Humane Society’s president, more strays were found during the spring months in college areas. This is because the academic year has just finished and, faced with the problem of what to do with the adorable kitten or puppy that they adopted back in October, many students make the wrong decision. (Kristene Welch)

In an article entitled “Local Authorities Discourage Summer Pet Abandonment,” a student of Miami University discusses the issue of animal abandonment in the college setting. She says that many students who adopt pets later realize they cannot take care of them when they go home
for the summer or relocate for a job and this leaves them with a problem: What do I do with my pet? Students in this situation have several options for legally relinquishing ownership of their pet, but many students choose the free and illegal option of abandoning or dumping them. Pet dumping is illegal in many states including: Ohio, Texas and Oregon. However, there are many other options for giving up your pet without resorting to abandonment. (Kristene Welch)

Giving a pet to a friend or neighbor is one option for relinquishing ownership. Some paperwork needs to be filled out, but the process is simple. Other options include trying to sell the pet or taking it to a shelter. The Humane Society runs many shelters nationwide that receive unwanted pets. The executive director of Animal Friends Humane Society in Hamilton, FL, Meg Stephenson, says that the “don't allow undergraduate students to adopt because it's not a stagnant lifestyle” and it’s also “a lot of responsibility.” It is because of this huge increase in abandoned animals at the end of each spring semester that caused this particular shelter in Florida to instate this policy. (Kristene Welch)

The issue of abandonment in the college setting is also in part due to the fact that pets are not allowed in the living areas on campus. Students are being forced to give up their pets, because they cannot bring them to live at school and/or because their parent/guardian cannot take care of the animal. In response to this problem colleges should consider developing animal friendly college housing. There are high amounts of stress and anxiety associated with being in college and especially with living on campus. Colleges already provide numerous services to help aid in stress management; however, according to the pet therapy organization, The Delta Society, “better coping skills, improved adjustment to change, less loneliness, and decreased anxiety and depression,” are just a few of the benefits of living with a pet. In this aspect of pet abandonment, financial responsibility does not come into play. It is simply a question of whether or not a student can keep their beloved pet with them. This can also lead to unintentional neglect, because students decide to try and keep their pet hidden from the college authorities. This confines the animal and limits socialization opportunities. (Kelly Hoagland)

If a student’s family is allergic, or their parents have forbidden them from having a pet, then the student is faced with the problem of getting rid of the animal. Sadly, many people go about this the wrong way by giving the animals away as “free to a good home” or worse, just letting the animal loose outside and leaving it behind. Dumped pets may suffer from the inability to find food or water. They are attacked by other animals, and are at risk for being hit by cars and left suffering for hours without care. In many states, abandoning an animal is a criminal offense known as “Animal Abandonment”. The right solution to this problem is to take your pet to the local shelter and donate it. (Kelly Hoagland)

Consequences of Abandonment
According to animal shelters, an increasing number of people are abandoning unwanted companion animals - either in the countryside, mistakenly assuming they can survive on their own there, or in the city, imagining they’ll find food and shelter among thousands of people. Only a very few of these abandoned animals, however, are found by people who will care for them or take them to a shelter. Most are doomed to a cruel and tragic end. During the warm months, abandoned animals may suffer from dehydration; in cold months, from hypothermia. In all weathers they are likely to starve and are at the mercy of predators. Dogs and cats that have
been fed by their owners for the majority of their lives become used to simply being given their food. Thus, there are not many pets that still know how to hunt or that would even recognize another animal as food if it ran in front of their face. Instead, they just wait for their owner to return or, more likely, they wait for death. (Kristene Welch)

The issue of animal abandonment, especially in large cities, has led to an even larger problem associated with the number of strays roaming the city. As previously mentioned, one major cause for pet abandonment is financial burden. What goes along with this is the fact that many owners opt not to have their pet spayed or neutered because of cost. Thus, if these unneutered/un-spayed animals are abandoned they are also increasing the population of animals being born stray. Cats for instance can begin to reproduce at around 4-12 months old. Each female cat can have up to 5 liters per year containing an average of 4-6 kittens per litter. This means that a single un-spayed female cat that is abandoned can produce up to 30 kittens per year. Consequently, these kittens with produce their own kittens, leading to exponential growth of the stray population just from one cat. According to the ASPCA it costs, from $50-200 (depending on the size of the animal) to spay a female and from $35-115 to neuter a male. In addition to reducing the risk of pregnancies, spaying/neutering pets also has many added health benefits such as reduced risk of certain cancers and reduced risk of injury due to intact male fights. (Julia Susan)

A College-Specific Abandonment Study
A 2003 study attempted to estimate the population of stray cats in Alchua County, where University of Florida is located, by conducting a random survey among residents of the area. They were able to estimate that roughly 44% of the entire cat population in the county consisted of strays, an astonishingly high number. In addition to the problem of college students in the area abandoning their animals at the end of the academic year, an estimated 70% of households in the county feed stray cats. Feeding these stray cats only perpetuates the problem as it allows the stray population to either remain stable or grow. This is also likely to perpetuate the cycle that occurs when stray kittens are subsequently adopted by college students only to be abandoned again at the end of the school year. Feeding one or two cats can eventually lead to hundreds more cats after only a few years. A cat population out of control leaves a community more susceptible to wild animal attacks. This could also lead to a spread of serious pathogens because cats are capable of spreading over 9 different zoonotic diseases to humans. This list includes at least two different kinds of influenza, rabies, ringworm, and salmonella. These diseases are almost entirely controlled in an animal that is well cared for, but are more difficult to control in stray animals. (Kevin Maus)

Options Other Than Pet Abandonment
With no-kill animal shelters as an option, abandoning an animal should never even be considered. All shelters accept animals that can no longer be cared for - regardless of the reason. There are several different kinds of shelters at which one could relinquish responsibility for an animal. Many animal shelters in New Jersey either have a small relinquishment fee, around $6 to $18, however this can often be waived in cases of financial hardship. It has been noted that most people that go to these shelters often end up paying more than the requested fee, with several even doubling it. Most other shelters simply request donations, which are often happily
given by those surrendering an animal. However, the shelter coordinates acceptance of new animals, this should always be seen as a better option than abandonment. (Kevin Maus)

Ensuring Students Make an Informed Decision About Owning a Pet

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHECKLIST FOR SOMEONE CONSIDERING BECOMING A PET OWNER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>□ Do you have money to afford the animal? For things such as getting the animal fixed, food, toys, grooming needs, and medical care (vaccinations, heartworm prevention, emergency situations).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Do you have the time to care for the animal? For activities such as walking, playing, grooming, socializing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Do you have the proper habitat for the animal to live in? Is your home a place where the animal will be an feel safe and sound?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Finally and the most important, are you making a life long commitment to this animal (which can be 10+ years)?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Many college students cannot check off a single one of the items listed on the checklist above. With the average dog costing $1300 and the average cat costing $500, a majority of students do not even make enough money to support themselves let alone a pet. The cost of appropriate animal food, bedding, toys, emergency medical bills, regular medical bills can all add up to a very steep price. With the average cost of books and supplies for the average four year college student being $1,137, for personal expenses $1,989, for transportation expenses $1,073. This is over $4000 and does not include tuition, which can range from under $9,000 per year to over $35,000 a year. To throw the costs of an animal into the mix would be pushing the limits for most students. Those students that do still choose to own a pet may be forced to skimp on the necessities of their animals to ease the financial burden, which is an unacceptable sacrifice. (Julia Susan)

College students also have little time available to spend with the animal because they spend the majority of their time in class, studying, socializing and sleeping. These animals then end up having serious behavioral issues due to lack of proper attention that can include depression or separation anxiety, aggression towards other humans or other animals, or destructive behavior (i.e. chewing furniture or marking territory within the house). These behaviors can be remedied of course with proper training, but with many students lacking in the time required to make a proper meal for themselves, where will they find the time to train their pet? Hiring a trainer to
work with the pet is out of the question due to the idea mentioned previously that college students cannot afford a pet. (Julia Susan)

Most off-campus housing options are barely suitable for the people living in them let alone for an animal. Additionally, most students move off-campus in order to have the chance to throw parties or have social events. Such an intense environment would be less that suitable for an animal. This can also lead to the behavioral issues mentioned previously such as aggression, anxiety and depression. (Julia Susan)

Statistics

Over $2 billion is spent annually by local governments to shelter and ultimately destroy 8-10 million adoptable dogs and cats due to a shortage of homes. Source: Business Wire Features.

An estimated 6 to 8 million dogs and cats are euthanized in shelters each year. Millions more are abandoned, only to suffer from illness or injury before dying. Source: Doris Day Animal League.

While prices vary considerably, many humane societies and municipal animal control departments offer low-cost spay/neuter services. And while the cost of surgery may seem high initially, it's a real bargain when compared with the cost of raising a litter of puppies or kittens. Spaying and neutering also saves taxpayer dollars. On average, it costs approximately $100 to capture, house, feed and eventually kill a homeless animal - a cost that ultimately comes out of all our pockets. Source: Doris Day Animal League.

Seven dogs and cats are born every day for each person born in the US. Of those, only 1 in 5 puppies and kittens stay in their original home for his/her natural lifetime. The remaining 4 are abandoned to the streets or end up at a shelter. Source: The Humane Society of the United States.

A reduction in pet overpopulation will mean a reduction in animals running loose, causing traffic hazards, quarantines, bites, fighting and yowling complaints.

Consider this: While our world consists of interests outside our pets, we are their ENTIRE world and they depend on us exclusively for their socialization and well-being.

An unspayed female cat, her mate and all of their offspring, producing 2 liters per year, with 2.8 surviving kittens per year can total 11,606,077 cats in 9 years. Source: Spay USA.

In 6 years one unspayed female dog and her offspring, can produce 67,000 dogs. Source: Spay USA.

More than 12 million dogs and cats are euthanized in shelters each year. Millions more are abandoned in rural and urban areas.

(Kristene Welch, Kelly Hoagland, Kevin Maus, Julia Susan)
The Service Project: Survey

Overview
Our group tried to inform the college students at Rutgers University that owning a pet is supposed to be a lifelong commitment to that animal. We decided to distribute a survey asking students about their knowledge of being a pet owner in college. Once we gathered that information we created an informative pamphlet (pictures below) including data gathered from the survey as well as information on the requirements of being a responsible pet owner as compared to the available time and money of the average college student. We then went to all five of the Rutgers University student centers (Cook, Douglass, Livingston, Busch and College Ave) and spoke with students, instructing them on the things college students should think about before contemplating becoming a pet owner. We also wanted to let them know that if they do find themselves in the situation where they are unable to keep their animal at the end of the school term that there are options. They can bring the animal to the local shelters in their area rather than resorting to abandoning it to the street. At the end of each campus center info session we placed a handful of pamphlets in each student center so that interested people could take one if they please. (Kevin Maus)

In addition, to campus information sessions, which promoted campus-wide awareness, our group also wanted to tackle the issue of national awareness of college pet abandonment. To do this, we e-mailed four editorials written by our group members (found at the end of this document) to over 75 college newspapers nationwide. These editorials were sent to major institutions such as Dartmouth and Cornell, in the hopes that the notoriety of the schools would further aid in the expansion of awareness on this issue across the country. (Kristene Welch)

Survey Questions

1. On average how many stray animals do you see in a week:
2. Do you or anyone you know have a pet in an on campus or off campus apartment?
3. Are you considering ever getting a pet during your college term (if you do not have one already)? And will you get that pet spayed or neutered?
4. Do you think that Rutgers should offer a pet friendly dorm, or a pet friendly section of a dorm?
5. Would it surprise you that students will abandon pets at the end of the school year?

Survey Results

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number of Strays Seen in an Average Week Around Campus

- 0
- 1 to 2
- 3 to 4
- 5 to 6
- 10+

but I would get fixed: 13 No:3
Yes, and they are (will be) fixed: 19

4: YES: 23  NO: 12
5: YES: 13  NO: 22

Consider this: While our world consists of interests outside our pets, we are their ENTIRE world and depend on us exclusively for their socialization and well-being.

Local Area Shelters

New Jersey SPCA
1119 Livingston Avenue, New Brunswick
Phone: (732) 247-0411

Municipal Animal Shelter
123 Municipal Boulevard, Edison
Phone: (732) 241-7271

Franklin Animal Shelter
813 Demott Lane, Iselin
Phone: (732) 873-2500

References
www.njspca.org/overpopulation.html
www.miraclekennel.com/lowpawprint.html

(Julia Susan)
The Responsible Pet Owner:

- Has time to care for the animal, whether that means time for walking, playing, grooming, socializing, etc.
- Has the money to afford the continous cost of owning an animal (food, vaccinations, unexpected health emergencies).
- Has the proper living conditions where the animal can feel safe and sound.
- Is making a lifelong commitment to the animal (which can be from 10 years and up).

Are the Majority of College Students Ready to be Pet owners?

- College students spend the majority of their time, in class, studying, socializing and sleeping. Where are they going to find time for the animal?
- The average college student has an income of around $3000 a year. With the average healthy dog costing around $1300 and the average healthy cat costing around $500, where will they find the money?
- Most students return home in the summer, and parents may not want the pet in the house. Or students relocate to non-pet friendly living conditions.

So what happens to the animal...

Things to Think About:

- There is over $2 billion dollars spent by local governments to shelter 8-10 million adoptable dogs and cats (source: American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals).
- 5-8 million dogs and cats are estimated to be euthanized every year (source: Daws Day Animal League).
- Millions more are abandoned by owners only to suffer illness or injury before dying.
- Seven dogs and cats are born every day for each person born in the US. Of those, only 1 in 5 puppies and kittens stay in their original homes for his/her natural lifespan. The remaining 4 are abandoned to the streets or end up at a shelter (source: The Humane Society of the United States).
- In 6 years one unspayed female dog and her offspring can reproduce 87,000 dogs.
- One female cat and her offspring can produce 420,000 cats in 7 years.

RUTGERS SURVEY:

- 4. People were asked the following questions:
  1. If you see stray animals on campus, on average how many do you see in a week?

  ![Number of Strays Seen in an Average Week Around Campus](chart)

  - YES: 26
  - NO: 9

  2. Do you know of anyone who has a pet in an on or off-campus apartment?

  Yes: 26
  No: 9

  3. Are you considering ever getting a pet during your college career (if you do not already have one)? And would you plan to have that animal fixed?

  Yes, and we are (will be) fixed: 19
  No: 6

  4. Do you think Rutgers should offer a pet friendly dorm or a pet friendly section of a dorm?

  Yes: 28
  No: 12

  5. Would it surprise you if college students were abandoning their pets at the end of the year?

  Yes: 13
  No: 22

(Julia Susan)

(Kristene Welch)
Resources

5) http://therealowner.com/pets/how-to-get-rid-of-an-unwanted-pet/
6) http://www.peteducation.com/article.cfm?c=1+1362&aid=922
7) http://www.aspca.org/pet-care/cat-care/spay-neuter.html
10) http://www.sniksnak.com/overpopulation.html
11) http://www.animalworldnetwork.com/bsurpetstat.html

Editorials

Khris Welch – Submitted to the Farmington Valley Press
To the Editor,
Recently, in Richmond, BC, Canada a ban on puppy sales was placed on local pet shops. This means that pet stores in this Richmond are no longer legally allowed to sell puppies. This is following a similar law put into place in Richmond earlier this year banning the sale of rabbits. Both of these laws were unanimously approved by the city council in response to the city being overrun with abandoned pets.

Many argue that banning the sale of an animal in only one town will have no effect because residents can simply go to a neighboring town to purchase pets. However, I argue that this is simply the first step in the right direction towards ending animal abandonment. By forcing people to work more to purchase a pet, for example by making them find a pet store in a neighboring town and then travel to it, this should reduce the number of pets that are bought on impulse. Thus leading to a higher percentage of pets being purchased by owners who have thoughtfully considered what exactly it means to be a pet owner, thereby reducing the number of abandoned animals. Hopefully, Richmond's example will lead other towns to follow suit. I personally am wondering when the bans on the sale of other animals, especially kittens, will be put into effect.
Kelly Hoagland- Submitted to the Record
To the editor:
I am writing in regards to the topic of animal abandonment, because it is an issue that affects multiple communities and would be non-existent if more people acted responsible pet owners. I am a college student and a proud owner of three dogs and two cats. I could never imagine letting them loose because I was incapable of giving them a home. People need to realize that there are alternatives that do not need to be negative, such as letting their animal loose into the community or kill shelters. There are non-kill shelters, animal sanctuaries and rescue groups that can be turned to as a safe haven for the pet that can no longer be taken care of. The biggest reason people abandon their beloved pets, as far as I can see, is financial. They cannot afford to feed another mouth or cannot afford the medical expenses that come along with the responsibility they have taken on as a pet owner. Being a college student, I am concerned with people in my generation and educational situation adopting/acquiring animals and then abandoning them. College students particularly can have problems with taking care of animals, because they do not have a steady income and do not realize the amount of money a pet may cost. I know college students that have animals that complain about the financial burdens that they have because of his/her dog/cat/hamster. If finances are an issue and the student cannot provide for themselves, then the individual should not get an animal of any kind. It seems as though college areas also have issues with abandonment because students cannot have pets in their living areas, which should be changed because animals provide benefit for people of all ages. This should also only be an option if the student provides evidence of being financially capable of supporting an animal. In college, specifically, there is a high level of stress which can be reduced by companionship. Therefore, students should not have to abandon their animals simply because there are no animal friendly living areas. Rather, they should have an option of animal friendly dorms. I feel that this would lead to an increase in responsibility and a decrease in stress as well as loneliness and the feeling of being homesick.
Kelly Hoagland

Julia Susan – Submitted to the Trenton Times
When a college student moves off campus, they enjoy a number of luxuries that they did not have during dorm life; the chance to have their own room, to be able to throw parties, to have a driveway to park their car. One luxury that many students take advantage of is the ability to own a pet. The question is, even though the students are mature enough to be on their own and live in an unsupervised dwelling, are they mature enough to be a pet owner? In my opinion the majority are not. Very few students seem to understand the lifelong commitment that they should be making to the animal when they become its owner. The expenses for food, proper grooming and medical care, the need to set aside time for playing with the animal and keeping it company. With students normally not making a salary during the year and not even having time to get 8 hours of sleep a night, how are they going to care for an animal?
Another issue with college students becoming pet owners is that when the spring semester comes to an end and they need to move back home or travel cross country for a job, is it possible for them to bring the animal along with them? Many parents are probably unknowing that their child has purchased an animal, and do not want it coming into their house when their son or daughter moves back in for the summer. So the student is left with the decision of what to do with their pet. While some go the correct path of finding a good home for the animal, or even giving it up to a shelter. There are still students out there that will just release the pet out onto the streets fend for itself in a world that it has never known to either starve or freeze to death, fight with other feral animals, increase the population of strays already out there, or eventually be hit by a car. So if you were to ask me, college students should not be allowed to become pet owners.

Kevin Maus–Submitted to Westfield Leader

Dear Westfield Leader,

It’s happened to everyone who has ever walked into a pet store. Those adorable, innocent eyes look from behind the glass and you fall in love. The problem is that people are often unprepared to care for a pet – they buy it on an impulse. An immediate consequence of this is that these animals are often abandoned when the owners realize how much of a responsibility a pet is. This is an even bigger problem in college towns. Studies at University of Florida have shown that roughly 44% of the entire cat population in the county was stray. This number is alarmingly high. Another factor for why this is such an issue in the county is that besides college students abandoning their animals at the end of the academic year, an estimated 70% of households in the county have fed stray cats. Feeding these stray cats only perpetuates the problem as it allows the stray population to either remain stable or even grow. Besides being more dangerous to the animal, a cat population out of control leaves a community more susceptible to wild animal attacks, which could lead to even more serious rabies risks.

Money is a big reason why college students abandon their animals. According to Time Magazine, the average healthy dog costs its owners roughly $1,350 per year. Another reason for college pet abandonment is far simpler. At the end of the academic year, students are faced with the problem of what to do with the adorable kitten they adopted in September. Sometimes the student cannot take the pet home because the family doesn’t even know about it, or there could be a family member that is allergic.

There are several organizations on the internet that are willing to provide help with spay and neuter costs, basic veterinary costs, and emergencies. This should only be seen as a crutch, not exclusively. The reality is that the problem needs to be prevented with awareness. People who do not have the time or resources for a pet simply should not be adopting an animal in the first place. Spreading awareness may be the most effective way to combat this problem that will not stop itself.