How Shelter Animals Can Be Used to Help Lower the Stress Levels of College Students

Tag Words

College Student, Stress, Stress Relief, Shelter Animals, Therapy Dogs

Authors

Jeffrey Pilla, Cynthia Austin with Julie M. Fagan, Ph.D

Summary

Every college student will at one point or another have to deal with stress. College student stress levels can come in all sorts of shapes and sizes. While some college students will face minimal stress that is easy to overcome during their collegiate years, others will face a tremendous amount of stress that can cause devastating health problems. There are multiple techniques used to help lower stress. One such way to help conquer this stress is with the aid of animals. Tests have shown that therapy dogs and all other sorts of animals all can have beneficial effects on humans just through simple interaction. So what would happen if you brought animals to a university campus during a period of high stress levels such as a finals week? Our plan is to bring in sheltered animals to our own university campus in order to attempt to lower the stress levels of college students during the very stressful finals week.

Video Link

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vM_aNQKuezI&feature=youtu.be

College Students Are Experiencing High Stress Levels:

The Causes of Stress on College Students (JP)

For anyone who attends college, it will mark a major checkpoint in the life of the individual. Some people might find the transition into college exciting because they will have the opportunity to accomplish whatever goals they might have while also being able to make their own independent person. This transition into college is not always so simple and can be very stressful. With such independence and responsibility, certain hardships must be faced and are almost unavoidable sources of stress. These hardships include (but are not limited to) separation from finding time for social activities, adjusting to increased academic difficulty, and trying to reach high expectations.

Cause 1: Social Factors (JP)

One thing most college students want when attending college is the ability to have a social life. This can include meeting new people, hanging out with friends, and just having fun with other
college students. Once these students transition into college, they find that this is not as easy of a task as they originally thought. College freshman face noticeable social obstacles. They must leave their home, a place of comfort and support, for a new environment where they must create a new social network, thus creating social stress for the student. (Scott 2012) Such social stress includes “finding and living with a roommate, balancing friends with school work (and often part-time jobs), and dealing with the dynamics of young adult relationships.” (Scott 2012). With all of the responsibilities one has when they are enrolled in college, they might find that having that perfect social life they thought they would have is impossible to obtain. Not being able to have the social life one wants can cause an individual to take on large amounts of stress.

Cause 2: Academic Challenges (JP)

The academic workload of a college student goes above and beyond the workload of a high school student. When one enrolls in college, they must be prepared to take on the extensive amount of work that comes with it. The amount of work in college is much more complex and strenuous compared to the work in high school, and it involves less aid from parents and professors. (Scott 2012) With difficult classes and exams combined with an independent learning structure, college students find themselves needing to study their material longer and harder, thus causing more stress to the individual. (Scott 2012) College is not academically easy. Students come in to college expecting to apply the academic techniques they used in high school. Those high school techniques generally do not work, and this can cause stress to an individual because they don’t know of any other techniques to utilize.

Cause 3: High Expectations (JP)

When an individual applies to college, they begin to envision what attending college may be like and what sort of goals and accomplishments they will want to get out of it. Most of the people who come into college bring along high expectations. These high expectations are prime causes of stress. A common source of stress for college students is the unrealistic or unrealized expectations they might have. (Kreig, Dana, Balsink 2013) Being unable to meet these idealistic expectations can lead to “academic ambivalence, failure, and early withdrawal from college.” (Kreig, Dana, Balsink 2013) For most students in college, academic failure is something they have never experienced. Failing to reach one’s academic or social goals can cause stress for an individual who has never experienced failure before.

What is Stress and Its Effects? (JP)

What is Stress? (JP)

Before we can begin to talk about the effects of stress, one must understand what stress actually is. North Idaho College defines stress as “how our bodies react to demands and change. Stress is an automatic physical reaction to a danger or demand (whether real or perceived).” (North Idaho College) Being that it can drive and encourage an individual to accomplish their goal, stress can be beneficial when it is a response to a short-term physiological or psychological problem. (North Idaho College) Although short-term stress can be harmless, stress that is left unchecked and lasts longer can induce destructive consequences on an individual. (North Idaho College)
**What can Stress Do? (JP)**

Acute stress responses for individuals who are young and healthy may be harmless and usually do not cause any health problems. However, if stress is consistent, mostly in relatively older or unhealthy individuals, the long-term effects of stressors can be very harmful and dangerous to one’s health. After an acute stressful event has occurred, the body begins to experience changes in the nervous, cardiovascular, endocrine, and immune systems. (Schneiderman, Ironson, Siegel 2005) These changes establish an adaptive stress response in the short term. Over time though, the acute stress response can cease to adapt if it is activated over long periods of time. (Schneiderman, Ironson, Siegel 2005) Chronic SNS stimulation of the cardiovascular system caused by stress can lead to an increase in blood pressure and vascular hypertrophy. (Schniederman, Ironson, Seigel 2005) In other words, the muscles that constrict the vasculature increase in thickness, which causes an rise in resting blood pressure and response stereotypy. (Schneiderman, Ironson, Siegel 2005) The heart is forced to work harder when blood pressure is chronically elevated, which, over time, can lead to damaged arteries, plaque formation, and hypertrophy of the left ventricle. (Schneiderman, Ironson, Siegel 2005) When stress is left unattended to, the chronic response to stress can cause many different diseases and health problems.

**Where does Stress Come From? (JP)**

So where does stress come from? Stressors in our environment are the things that make us experience the feeling of stress. (North Idaho College) From something as simple as an annoying background noise to something complex such as social situations, stressors can be anything found in our personal environments. (North Idaho College) Stressors can affect one’s health as well as their emotions and behavior. The tie between stressors and disease can be determined by the type, amount, and consistency of the stressors. Stressors that come in large quantities for large periods of time could very well be detrimental to one’s health.

**Final Exams are When College Students May Feel the Most Stressed (JP)**

Most college students tend to feel a tremendous amount of stress during examination times. For many college students, exam stress is an obstacle that must be faced. Students preparing for exams usually experience increased amounts of pressure, which can lead to nervousness, anxiety, and depression. Sometimes, a student needs a little amount of stress to help push them towards preparing for an exam. Although this can be beneficial, if left unchecked, exam stress can cause an individual to break down and feel overwhelmed. This feeling of being overwhelmed with college stress has left students dropping out of school. In the past two decades, the amount of college students that have dropped out of school has increased above 40%, meaning that more than 40% of all college students are expected to drop out before earning their degree. (Kreig, Dana, Balsink 2013) More data has shown that 46% of the students who enter a 4 year college fail to complete their degree program six years later. (Kreig, Dana, Balsink 2013). Also, stress levels of college students that have been reported have elevated. The amount of college freshmen who have said to feel overwhelmed and stressed has doubled in size, while psychological and counseling services have increased by a third. (Kreig, Ironson, Seigel) Some
college students are just not able to deal with the large amounts of stress placed on them when preparing for examinations.

So where does this stress felt by students during examinations stem from? Students may feel stress due to the pressure of expectations from those who are close to them such as teachers, friends, and family. The students want to be able to please their supporting cast without feeling as though they have disappointed them. (Examrare) This high pedestal that the students place themselves on can cause exam stress on the students. If a college student is attempting to obtain a higher level degree or reach another goal, achieving a high grade on an examination could possibly mean everything for that individual’s future. (Examrare) In today’s day and age, students must compete with their classmates in order to separate themselves from the herd and show some sort of superiority, thus increasing the pressure experienced.

A major source of exam stress comes from within the student. College students will create and enforce their own pressures on themselves to do well. The pressure to succeed does not just come from the people around the individual. Most college level students have never experienced any sort of academic failure before. This will create a fear of failure for the individual. Student’s will increase their stress levels by dwelling on this fear of this worst case scenario happening. For someone who has never experienced failure before, if the student receives a bad grade on an exam, they will experience what they have always feared.

Coping With Stress (JP)

Coping with stress can be a healthy or unhealthy way of moderating the effects of stress involved outcomes. Many coping techniques have been developed and documented over the years. These techniques “include both healthy and unhealthy strategies such as self-distraction, active coping, denial, substance use, use of emotional support, use of instrumental support, disengagement, venting, positive reframing, planning, humor, acceptance, religion, and self-blame.”(King, Singh, Bernard, Merianos & Vidourek 2012) Coping with stress involves learning how to tolerate the given stress of a situation and finding a way to deal with it.

There are two techniques involved in coping. One such technique involved in stress relief is problem-focused coping. Problem-focused coping deals with stress by attempting to reduce or eliminate the problem, or in other words the stressor. Such examples of problem-focused coping are “information seeking, planning, direct action, and seeking instrumental help.” (King, Singh, Bernard, Merianos & Vidourek 2012). One major problem involved in stress is uncertainty. By gathering as much information as possible, an individual is able to clear up any uncertainty they had before, thus reducing the amount of stress experienced.

Another coping strategy used in stress relief is emotion-focused coping. Emotion-focused coping deals with stress by applying changes to an individual’s attitude and emotional reaction toward stressful situations. As far as emotion-focused coping goes, the objective “involves dealing with emotional responses to stressors such as self-blame, blaming others, focusing on emotions, controlling emotions, venting emotional support, and avoidance.”(King, Singh, Bernard, Merianos & Vidourek 2012). Stress will attack an individual’s emotions when present. This will cause the individual’s emotions to increasingly fluctuate. By managing one’s
emotions and/or expressing one’s emotions in an effective manor, an individual is able to free themselves of the heavy burden caused by stress. By taking away what stress attacks, stress can be defeated.

The Effect of Animals on People – Biological and Physiological Benefits (CA)

There has been a very large range of evidence over the past 30 years that has proven that interacting with animals contributes to better self-esteem, health, psychological well-being, and even recovery from serious health conditions (Walsh, 2009). Friedmann and Tsai stated that, overall, a large range of research have found that interactions with animals reduce anxiety, depression, and loneliness while enhancing social support and general well-being (2006). A specific example comes from a study that shows pet ownership correlating with lower blood pressure, serum triglycerides, and cholesterol levels (Walsh. 2009). Mental health disorders such as schizophrenia, ADHD, anxiety, and depression are also positively influences by pets. They have been shown to “influence the course and optimal functioning with pervasive and developmental disabilities” (Martin & Farnum, 2002).

Pets have a way of making people less focused on the negative aspects of themselves. There are multiple studies that have shown the positive influence pets have given to patients coping with chronic conditions such as cancer, heart disease, and dementia. In regards to reducing the cardiovascular effects of stress, pets were found to be more effective than a spouse or friend. Neurochemicals associates with relaxation and bonding are increased while someone is interacting with an animal. These neurochemicals improve human immune system functioning. Animals have also been found to aid in the recovery of children in the hospital. They also ameliorate depression in AID patients. Companion animals also ease the suffering of people’s lives in hospice and palliative care during the end of their lives (Walsh, 2009).

Longitudinal research over two decades in Germany and Australia found that people who have had a pet before were the healthiest group and those who no longer had a pet or never had one were least healthy (Headley & Grabka, 2007). These are all examples of studies that have been done to show the positive effect of animals on people with a variety of health problems. More generally speaking, animals reduce loneliness and isolation. They provide people with companionship and can even serve people socially as a conversation starter. From personal experience, after getting a dog my neighbors became more friendly towards me and started making conversation and coming over whenever I would take my dog for a walk. For the most part, animals have a way of putting people at ease.

Which Animals are Most Beneficial (CA)

In American households dogs are the most common pets, followed by cats, horses, and birds. Having a bird was found to alleviate depression, loneliness, and low morale of older adults in skilled rehabilitation units (Jessen, Cardiello, & Baun, 1996). People feel like they can communicate effectively with their pet because they believe that their pets express human emotions. For instance, 81% report that their dog acts ‘‘jealous,’’ when they pay attention to another person or dog (Morris, Coe, & Godsell, 2007). I am sure that any pet owner can attest to this statement!

Patients with pets had a significantly higher 1-year survival after having a heart attack than those without pets. The patients with dogs were 8.6 times more likely to still be alive. Blood pressure is significantly reduced in humans and animals by simply stroking a dog. It was found that “dogs
have complex thinking and feelings and have acute sensory perception” (Walsh, 2009). Although we are more closely related to primates, biological anthropologists have found that dogs are better reading human cues and behavior. Dogs have the ability to correctly understand subtle hand movements and looks (Katz, 2003). There have been studies that compared the brain structure and the workings of nerve cells in dogs and humans. The electrical activity patterns in neurons are identical while their chemical compositions are also very similar. “Recent genetic studies find over 75% overlap between the genetic code of humans and canines” (Kirkness, Bafna, & Halpern et al., 2003). Social interactions are very important to dogs therefore it is not surprising that they respond to the feelings of their human owners (Walsh, 2009). Although pets do not speak our language, they definitely understand what we are saying and effectively communicate with us in a multitude of ways.

**Benefits of Therapy Dogs (CA)**

The use of therapeutic animals for biological and mental health benefits is a rapidly growing field. Scott stated that, “animal-assisted activities provide opportunities for motivational, educational, recreational, and/or therapeutic benefits for optimal recovery and functioning, positive development, and enhanced quality of life” (2013). Because humans are relational beings, pets have the ability to enrich our lives by providing loyalty and affection. These relationships bring joy and comfort to people of all ages and contribute to healthier, happier, and longer lives (Walsh, 2009). Although dogs are not for everyone, most people enjoy coming home to a loving, affectionate dog after having a stressful day at work or school. Some people believe that humans who have a need for animal attachment have some sort of psychological void in their life but Kurdek (2008) found that college students with a high level of attachment to their dogs were also highly attached to their mothers, siblings, and best friends. They did not show high levels of anxiety or avoidance, they were just people with a large capacity for affection. There was a study that showed that while people were undergoing a stressful task, they experienced less stress when their pet was near them as compared to their spouse or best friend being present (Scott, 2013). Therapeutic animals can significantly ameliorate depression, anxiety, pain, and fatigue in people with a variety of health problems; they also help people in non-medical settings deal with anxiety and stress.

Therapy dogs are calm and obedient; they can reduce anxiety by lowering the blood pressure and heart rate of people around them. They also reduce levels of epinephrine and norepinephrine which affects heart rate, glucose level, blood pressure, and other factors that relate to proper bodily functioning. There was a scientific study that revealed lower levels of these neurotransmitters in patients who received visits from therapy dogs compared to patients who only received visits from volunteers (Therapy Dog Certification). Therapy dogs also increase the level of endorphins, which is a neurotransmitter that works like a natural opiate by manipulating the perceptions of pain and stress. The site stated that, “petting a therapy dog brings happiness and a feeling of euphoria; such conditions promote better immune response, sexual life, and reduce bad effects of stress” (Therapy Dog Certification). Lastly, interaction with therapy dogs increases the level of oxytocin in humans. This promotes a happier life by improving empathy and stimulating better pair bonding (Therapy Dog Certification).

**What Universities Have Done Using Therapy Dogs (CA)**
The University of Wisconsin, Tufts University in Massachusetts, University of California-San Diego, University of Pennsylvania, University of Texas, Oberlin College and Yale Law School have all used therapy dogs to relieve stress in their students. All of these schools believe that petting and playing with dogs can be relaxing. For some students, simply having the dog around them can make them feel at ease. A lot of students miss their pets back home and having an opportunity to be around an affectionate animal can provide greatly-needed stress relief especially during finals week (Howe). At the Yale University Law School, for three days in March, students were allowed to go to the library and 'check out' Monty, a Jack Russell-border terrier mix, for half-hour sessions. This is such a convenient way to allow students to have private sessions with Monty, it’s as simple as checking out a textbook! The National Technical Institute for the Deaf of Rochester Institute of Technology had fourteen therapy dogs on campus to provide comfort to stressed students. Because this event was so successful, they plan on making this happen again. In May, the University of Wisconsin had dogs come in from Dogs on Call, a nonprofit organization with therapy dogs typically used at hospitals and nursing homes, to provide stress relief for their students during finals (Howe).

Harvard University Medical School registered Cooper, a four-year-old Shih-Tzu, as their own therapy dog. He arrives at the Countway Library every Tuesday and Thursday. He has his own furnished room in the library with a bowl of water, comfortable couch, chair, and an assortment of toys. He underwent training at “Caring Canines” and he provides students much needed stress relief. The students are allowed to reserve 30 minute sessions with the dog by just presenting their student ID. Cooper even has an official entry in the catalogue saying that he is an antidepressive agent, and anti-anxiety agent, and animal assisted therapy (Jungee & MacDonald, 2011). He even has his own blog! Although there is no research on how these animals have affected the students, there has only been positive feedback, no students have complained about having these dogs available to them.

What Rutgers has Done to Help Relieve Stress (CA)

Rutgers has a program called “De-stress At The Zone” which took place at the RutgersZone on Livingston campus and provided activities for stressed-out students including coloring, jewelry making, Play-Doh sculpting, and free five minute massages. There are also counseling services available for when students feel overwhelmed. There is also an organization called StressBusters that go to residence halls or university events to provide free stress relief and five to seven minute backrubs along with wellness information and backrubs. There have been drumming events, yoga activities, make-your-own-stress-balls, and even painting. Rutgers also always provides midnight breakfast at all the dining halls which give students a chance to take a break from studying and unwind a little with their friends. During my freshman year RUPA brought in 1-2 therapy dogs for students to pet in the Yorba Lounge in Tillet with other relaxing activities going on during reading days. Students were enjoying themselves and used this event as a much-needed study break. They plan different activities every semester to try and alleviate the stress of students during finals week.

Utilizing Therapeutic Effects of Animals to Reduce Stress Experienced by College Students:
Our Idea: The Use of Shelter Animals to Provide Stress Relief for College Students (JP)

With the end of the spring of 2014 semester on the horizon, students of Rutgers University will begin to feel an onslaught of stress as they prepare for their final examinations. The stress they will experience can be catastrophic to their health, academic grades, and well-being. This wave of stress in essentially unavoidable, but it is possible to reduce. As a service project for the students of Rutgers University, we would like to help lower the stress levels of the students as they prepare for their final examinations.

In order to reduce the stress felt by these students of Rutgers University, our plan is to utilize the therapeutic effects of dogs. Dogs have been proven to have a beneficial effect on the reduction of stress in individuals. The students of Rutgers University will interact with the available dogs on a scheduled date near the time of final examinations in order to feel relief from the feelings of stress they have been experiencing. Interactions may include (but are not limited to) petting, playing, and walking the dogs.

In order to have dogs for the event, we hope to partner up with a local animal shelter that can donate their dogs for the day. The shelter would be in charge of supplying us with the dogs and transporting them to the event. Volunteers from either the animal shelter or various clubs around will be able to work the event in order to ensure a smooth and stress free environment. One of the best ways to produce a stress free environment would be to schedule the event on a day where everything can occur outdoors during a sunny day where everyone (the dogs included) can enjoy the fresh air and warm weather.

Getting the Shelter Animals Adopted (JP)

In addition to providing a service to the students of Rutgers University, we will also be attempting to provide a service to the animals themselves. Animals that are kept in shelter are fated to either one of two possibilities. One of the possibilities is a pleasant one for the animal. An individual will come to the shelter and adopt the animal, thus giving the animal a chance at a blissful life with a warm home and a constant source of food and love. This is the fate that all shelter animals want. The problem is that not enough people come to animal shelters to adopt a pet. This is where the gloomy alternative possibility can occur. Animals that are not adopted out of the shelter unfortunately have their chance at life taken away from them and are euthanized.

Euthanizing animals at an animal shelter is a common practice. Although it may seem cruel and unusual to take away the life of an animal, animal shelters essentially do not have a choice. Animal shelters have a consistent rate of animals that are brought into the shelter. With limited resources such as food, living space, workers/caretakers, and medication, the animal shelter cannot afford to take care of all the animals that are brought in. Getting animals adopted by people is a great and effective way to clear up resources for other animals still at the shelter to use. If an animal though is unable to get adopted in a certain period of time, the animal shelter will be unable to provide it with any more resources that other needy animals need as well. Being unable to just release the animal into the streets, the animal shelter will have no choice but to euthanize the animal.
In an attempt to save these animals from being euthanized, our project will incorporate a plan that involves getting the animals that we use as a service to Rutgers students adopted. The student’s that attend our stress relief service event will be able to adopt their favorite animal at the event. If a student becomes attached to the animal that is providing him/her with stress relief, they will have the ability to reserve the animal for a later adoption time. The student will go on to complete the rest of their colligate agenda for the semester. Once the student is all completed with whatever sort of responsibilities they had, then they will be able to complete the adoption process of the animal they had reserved at an earlier date. The animal, that once belonged to the shelter wondering if it would ever be adopted, will then have a warm home and loving environment to go to.

**Animal Shelters in the Area (JP)**

In order for our project to become a reality, we need the full support and partnership of one of the local animal shelters near Rutgers University. Of the given animal shelters found in New Jersey, the animal shelter found in Edison, NJ would be our prime candidate to work with. The Edison Animal Shelter always has a great selection of companions to choose from. They have a large variety of cats and dogs to please anyone’s needs. The animal shelter is also located relatively close to Rutgers University. Bringing the animals from the shelter to Rutgers University may be an obstacle that we must face. By utilizing a shelter that is closer to the campus, we can effectively reduce the travel time and distance required for transporting the animals, thus reducing the obstacle.

**Precautions to using Shelter Animals (CA)**

Adopting a shelter dog is very rewarding because what you’re essentially doing is saving a life. Many dogs end up in a shelter for a variety of reasons that are not their fault. They are the victims in all situations; maybe their owner could no longer take care of them for financial or physical reasons. Most shelter dogs are healthy and affectionate and of course we would work with the animal shelter to make sure only the most well-behaved dogs come to campus. Most shelter dogs are spayed or neutered and they all go through a thorough physical examination and receive all the necessary vaccinations (ASPCA). Furthermore, the history of all of the dogs are not known so it would be advisable for students to be more cautious when interacting with these animals. They may have had a rough past, which could cause them to be slightly aggressive or paranoid. As long as the students are gentle and affectionate there should be no problems but they should avoid overcrowding the animals or being too rough.

**Volunteers (CA)**

We would ask workers from the shelter to stay with the animals after transporting them to Rutgers. In addition to the shelter workers, student organizations on campus could also volunteer to watch the animals. The Seeing Eye Puppy Raising Club has a lot of experience with dogs so they would be very helpful. The Scarlet Paws Animal Welfare Network is a non-profit organization dedicated to the promotion of the humane treatment of both domestic animals and wildlife found living at Rutgers. They are a collaboration of Rutgers staff, faculty, students, and
community volunteers. If we could have around 10 volunteers from these organizations our project would be successful.

**Time and Place (CA)**

Our goal is to partner with Edison Animal Shelters to bring their sheltered dogs to the field on the Cook Douglass Campus for one day at the end of the spring semester. May 6th is the first reading day and would be an ideal day for this to occur. We could set this up for a couple of hours from 12-4pm. Students wishing to take home a sheltered animal could reserve their adoption when they finish the semester and prior to going home for the summer.

**The Results: Attempting to Contact Rutgers University and Edison Animal Shelter (JP)**

In order for our project to work, the main objectives we needed to tackle were getting the dogs from the Edison Animal Shelter, finding a group willing to volunteer for our event, and finally reserving a location where students could come to us.

**Edison Animal Shelter: Getting The Dogs and Volunteers (JP)**

We contacted the people at Edison Animal Shelter asking them for their help in our project. An email was sent to the animal shelter explaining our cause.

To Edison Animal Shelter,

I am currently a student at Rutgers University and attempting to conduct a service project here on campus. My partner (Cynthia Austin) and I (Jeffrey Pilla) have an idea to bring in dogs from a local animal shelter during finals week here to provide stress relief for the students. We are also striving to get the dogs adopted by students who would like to take them home at the end of the semester. We were hoping that we could work with you shelter to come up with more details and make this happen. Please let us know if you are interested in helping with our project or if you have any questions or concerns. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Jeffrey Pilla
Cynthia Austin

We ended up calling the shelter when we did not receive any sort of reply back from Edison Animal Shelter. When talking on the phone with their head supervisor, we pleaded our case and also explained how our project could benefit the animal shelter. The head supervisor agreed to supply the dogs needed for our project with a few conditions. His first condition was that his own people handle the dogs at our event in order to ensure proper handling of the animals, thus minimizing any chance at something going wrong. This condition was gladly accepted due to the fact that we needed volunteers to work at our event anyway. Another condition the head supervisor of Edison Animal Shelter required was that he needed to see the location of our event in order to grasp the idea of how many dogs he was willing to donate. This condition needed to wait due to the fact that we did not have a location reserved at the time. We told him we would contact him as soon as we found a location for our event.
Rutgers University: Setting Up a Location (JP)

Mary Ann Cancio

In order to set up a location for our project, many different Rutgers University staff members were contacted. The first staff member we had contacted was Mary Ann Cancio. Mary Ann is the president of the Scarlet Paws Animal Welfare Network. According to their homepage, “The Scarlet Paws Animal Welfare Network is a non-profit organization dedicated to the promotion of the humane treatment of both domestic animals and wildlife found living on the New Brunswick campuses of Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey as a result of abandonment, having become lost, or by birth to the aforementioned, and—in the case of wildlife—having become sick, injured, or displaced from their natural habitat.” We figured if anyone knew exactly what was needed to hold an event such as ours, Mary Ann would be able to lend us a hand. We sent her an email stating the following.

Dear, Mary Anne

I am currently a student in Dr. Julie Fagan’s "Ethics in Science" course. She suggested that my partner (Cynthia Austin) and I (Jeffrey Pilla) reach out to you to possibly help us with our project. Our idea for a service project is to bring local animal shelter dogs to Rutgers University during reading days to provide stress relief for the students during a very stressful time in their lives. A possible added bonus to our project is to have students adopt the shelter dogs if they find one that they truly like. Any sort of help that you can provide us, whether it be information on who to contact from Rutgers for permission or a possible suggestions on where to find the shelter dogs, would be greatly appreciated. We plan on contacting the Edison Animal Shelter, but if you could maybe give us any other suggestions that would be helpful. Thank you for your time and help. We hope to hear back from you soon.

Jeffrey Pilla
Cynthia Austin

In talking to Mary Ann in person, she suggested that a location such as a Student Center would include too much permission from Rutgers University, and that we should have contacted Rutgers University earlier in the semester in order to reserve such a location. She suggested that instead of trying to reserve a Student Center location, we should try to reserve the Round House located on College Farm Road. The Round House is a part of the Cook Farms located on Cook Campus at Rutgers University. This area is known to house animals, so having animals inside of it wouldn’t be a problem. Also, it was possible that all we would need to do is contact the head of the farm in order to reserve the location.

Karyn Malinowski
Once we were done talking to Mary Ann, she suggested contacting Karyn Malinowski for more information about reserving the Round House location. Karyn Malinowski is the Director of the Rutgers Equine Science Center. Her horses utilize the Round House on a constant basis. If anyone could give us an idea on how to reserve the location, it would be Karyn. After sending Karyn an email pleading our case, Karyn redirected me to Clint Burgher, director of animal care.

**Clint Burgher**

Clint Burgher is the director of animal care. Seeing as how the Round House is located on Cook Farms, Clint Burgher works in and around the Round House consistently. The following email conversation was had between Clint and us.

Email 1:

Hello Clint,

My name is Jeff Pilla. I am a student in Dr. Julie Fagan's Ethics in Science course, and I along with my partner, Cynthia Austin, are trying to provide a service for the students of Rutgers University though said course. I was talking to Karyn Malinowski, the Director of the Rutgers Equine Science Center, and she suggested that I may ask you for help. Our idea is to help students lower their stress levels during finals week by interaction with animals from the Edison Animal Shelter. An added bonus to this project is allowing the students to adopt the animals that they really enjoy being around, so in essence we are also trying to provide a service to the shelter animals. A location we were looking at to hold our event is the Round House located at the Cook Farms on College Farm Rd. Any information on how to possibly reserve the location or who I should talk to about reserving the space would be greatly appreciated. Thank you for your time and help.

Jeff Pilla
Cynthia Austin

Email 2:

Hi Jeff and Cynthia,

I have some questions. If this is a project that is actually going to use animals on campus, it will need an Animal Use Protocol approved by the Animal Care and Facilities Committee. I can provide you with more details of how to do that if you DO plan on actually using animals. If this is a conceptual project that you need the Round House for a demonstration to the class (without animals), than I am the person to contact to reserve the Round House.

Thanks,
Clint

Email 3:

Clint,
We actually do plan on using animals for our project. We have talked to Edison Animal Shelter already and they agreed to supply us with a few of their animals. How exactly can I go about getting an Animal Use Protocol approved?

Jeff Pilla
Cynthia Austin

Email 4:

Jeff and Cynthia,

You would need to go to the link https://acfc.rutgers.edu. I would suggest contacting the University Veterinarian, Dr. Robert Harris at rlharris@las.rutgers.edu first to see if you can/need to submit a protocol. The committee meets one time per month and the deadline for application is the 10th of the month.

Clint

The information regarding reserving the Round House given by Clint was very informative and helpful. We decided that before we submit an Animal Use Protocol, we should contact Dr. Robert Harris beforehand in order to get his take on the situation.

Dr. Robert Harris

Dr. Robert Harris is Rutgers University’s Veterinarian. He, along with other committee members, are in charge of deciding whether animals outside of Rutgers University are allowed to be brought onto the campus. The following is an email conversation between Dr. Harris and us.

Email 1:

Hello Bob,

My name is Jeff Pilla. I am a student in Dr. Julie Fagan's Ethics in Science course, and I along with my partner, Cynthia Austin, are trying to provide a service for the students of Rutgers University through said course. I was talking to Clint Burgher and he suggested that I may ask you for help. Our idea is to help students lower their stress levels during finals week by interaction with animals from the Edison Animal Shelter. An added bonus to this project is allowing the students to adopt the animals that they really enjoy being around, so in essence we are also trying to provide a service to the shelter animals. A location we were looking at to hold our event is the Round House located at the Cook Farms on College Farm Rd. Clint told us that we may need to submit an Animal Use Protocol before we can reserve the location for our project. Edison Animal Shelter has already agreed to supply us with a few of their animals, and we planned on trying to hold our event on either May 6th or 7th. Any information you can give us regarding the Animal Use Protocol would be greatly appreciated. Thank you for your time and help.

Jeff Pilla
Cynthia Austin
Email 2:

Jeff and Cynthia,

Thanks for contacting me about your proposed project. You did the right thing by contacting me.

A project like this raises several issues. Does it require animal care committee approval? Human subjects approval? There are concerns about human safety and legal risks. I consulted responsible authorities in areas of animal use, human subjects use, occupational health and safety, and risk management. The consensus is that although well-intentioned, the negatives outweigh the positives.

I am supportive of people adopting shelter animals. I had a dog for 17 years I adopted from St. Huberts. I don’t think, however, that adoption should be an impulse activity. Students in particular are not at a good stage in their lives to be adopting dogs. Shelter dogs have an unknown history and often don’t have the best health status. Rabies is just one example of a disease that can result from an exposure prior to being in the shelter, but become clinical and infectious weeks to months later. While the likelihood is low, it is not a risk Rutgers cannot accept.

I know you will be disappointed by this decision. I hope you can find an alternative project.

Dr. Harris

After the disapproval by Dr. Harris, we came to the conclusion that we could not complete our project in the amount of time left. Two weeks is not enough time to assemble such a project. With the base of the idea firm though, it is possible to return to the project (with some minor adjustments) in the following semester. All required permissions and reservations can be attended to earlier on in the semester of Fall 2014.

References


Letter to the Editor:

Sent to http://www.thedailyjournal.com/section/CUSTOMERSERVICE03

Published at http://www.thedailyjournal.com/article/20140403/OPINION03/304030008/Animals-can-relieve-stress-during-finals-Sue-Barber-won-t-seek-re-election-Buena-Vista-Twp-

To The Editor of The Daily Journal:

Below you will find my requested letter for publication in your newspaper. Please consider my letter in hopes that I may share the dangers of stress in college students during finals week and my personal plan to relieve that stress with the help of shelter dogs. You may email me at (email) or call me at (phone #) if you have any questions or concerns. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Stress can highly affect one’s mood, sense of well-being, behavior, and health. Studies have shown that there is a link between stress and emotional impairment, diseases such as heart disease, premature aging, and obesity. College students especially feel stress during finals week, where they must prepare for possibly multiple final exams within the same time period. To add to that stress, some exams may even be cumulative, which requires students to remember all information covered throughout the semester. This is the experience many college students face, and it is indeed very stressful. No one wants to see America’s future decline in academic achievement simply due to overload of stress.

This is where my project at Rutgers University begins. I am currently attempting to provide a stress relief service to Rutgers University of New Brunswick students. My plan is to bring shelter dogs to my university during finals week in order to theoretically lower stress levels students are facing. Animals have been proven to aid in lowering stress levels in people. Other universities such as University of Pennsylvania, University of Wisconsin, and Yale Law School have already used therapy dogs to help relieve their students of stress. Why not introduce that idea to Rutgers University? An added bonus to using shelter dogs in my project is the opportunity to get shelter dogs adopted by students who may become attached and would like to give them a home at the end of the semester. Students will be able to reserve a dog that they like and will be able to adopt them as soon as they are finished with their finals and are able to head home.

This service project is not limited to what I am trying to conduct at Rutgers University. I would be glad to see the possibility of schools in the area who would like to follow in my footsteps, and
attempt to conduct a similar project of their own. College students are not the only ones who experience stress. High school students as well as middle school students and elementary students experience stress in one way or another. I truly believe that utilizing the therapeutic effect that animals provide is a great way to lower stress levels in any individual. I urge others to try to attempt a similar project since the greater achievement of America’s future depends on it.

Sincerely,
Jeffrey Pilla
Rutgers University Student, Biological Science Major

Sent to the Editor-in-Chief of the Targum: Alexandra R. Meier at eic@dailytargum.com

Dear Alexandra R. Meier,

Please consider my post below for publication in your online newsletter and newspaper. If you would like to contact me, please email me at <Redacted> or call me at <Redacted>. Thank you for your time and consideration, Cynthia Austin

Throughout the years Rutgers has been effectively trying to provide stress relief for students during finals. I have gone to multiple events in the past, which included activities such as making stress balls, friendship bracelets and even receiving quick massages. They have also brought in therapy dogs that the students could interact with.

It has been proven that simply stroking a dog for a few minutes significantly reduces blood pressure. Being around animals has a way of putting people in a better mood! I think it would be a great idea for Rutgers to focus on bringing dogs on campus during reading days. My goal is to be able to bring in dogs from the Edison Animal Shelter. These dogs would be making connections with students, which would give them a better chance of being adopted by someone from Rutgers.

Reading days are coming up, so don’t miss your chance to unwind with these amazing dogs!

Cynthia Austin