Evaluating Welfare

10th annual animal welfare contest helps prepare students for careers working with animals.

Seventy-eight students representing nine universities and veterinary colleges from across North America converged on Michigan State University (MSU) in East Lansing Nov. 20-21 to participate in the 10th annual Animal Welfare Judging and Assessment Contest (AWJAC).

The annual event, which is divided into undergraduate, graduate and veterinary college divisions, reminds participants of the growing relevance of animal welfare issues. The students compete in events focused on increasing their understanding of welfare and care issues affecting animals used for human purposes, including food production, research and companionship.

"This contest encourages students to think critically about welfare issues and provides them with an opportunity to share their thoughts with colleagues and receive constructive feedback," says Cia Johnson of the Animal Welfare Division at the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), one of the groups that sponsors the event. "The skills the students practice at this contest will be part of a repertoire that they will use every day when making decisions in their careers."

> **Competitors work independently to evaluate three welfare scenarios and also as part of their college's team to complete one on-farm assessment, and then defend their analysis to a panel of judges.**

"The contest gives students a chance to apply scientific knowledge to make decisions about the quality of animal welfare in a given scenario as opposed to basing decisions solely on assumptions or emotions," said Camie Heleski, MSU animal science instructor and one of the founders of the contest and coach for the MSU undergraduate judging team. "They learn skills that can be used to make well-informed decisions in future careers regardless of whether they become livestock producers, animal welfare auditors or veterinarians."

Competitors work independently to evaluate three welfare scenarios and also as part of their college's team to complete one on-farm assessment, and then defend their analysis to a panel of judges. The goal is to put students in the most real-life situations possible, providing them the opportunity to evaluate animal welfare and behavior just as they would in a future career. This year, the individual contest scenarios focused on working and service dogs, broiler chickens and giraffes. The on-farm assessment involved a site visit to the MSU Beef Teaching and Research Center.

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Veterinary student division

Nine teams competed in the veterinary student division: Iowa State University (two teams), the University of Pennsylvania (two teams), Atlantic Veterinary College at the University of Prince Edward Island, the University of Missouri (MU), the Ontario Veterinary College at the University of Guelph, Michigan State University (MSU) and The Ohio State University (OSU).

Once final scores were tallied, it was the team from MSU placing first and the OSU team placing second. Dalen Agnew, MSU assistant professor in the College of Veterinary Medicine, and Carla Carleton, MSU associate professor of large animal clinical sciences, coached the winning team, composed of Chelsea Render, Chelsey Schivley, Ashley Kala, Rebecca LaDronka and LeeAnne Peasley.

Atlantic Veterinary College placed third, the Ontario Veterinary College finished fourth, and MU placed fifth.

In the individual competition, Elizabeth Homerosky from OSU placed first in the veterinary student division. Kala, MSU, placed second; Shivley placed third; and Josh Aalders from Atlantic Veterinary College placed fourth.

Undergraduate division

Five teams competed in the undergraduate division: MSU, the University of Guelph (Ontario), MU, and the University of Wisconsin (UW) with two teams.

UW's Team 2, coached by Terry Jobsis, animal science research program manager, placed first in the undergraduate division. Team members were Elyse Ahrendt, Nicole Austreng, Erin Harris, Katie Kennedy and Megan Nelson.

UW's Team 1 placed second and MSU finished third.

Individually, Harris placed first in the undergraduate division. Placing second was Sarahbeth Barlas from MSU. Dana Wagner, UW Team 1, placed third; and Erin Geary, MU, placed fourth.

Graduate division

Four colleges competed in the graduate student division. The team representing MSU — Courtney Daigle, Melissa Elischer, Marisa Erasmus and Jacquelyn Jacobs — placed first. Heleski and Janice Siegford, MSU assistant professor of animal science, coached the MSU team. The University of Guelph, Kansas State University (K-State) and OSU placed second, third and fourth, respectively.

MSU team member Elischer won the graduate student division. She was joined by teammates Jacobs and Daigle, who placed second and fourth, respectively. Jessica Zaffino from the University of Guelph finished third.

MSU earned the first-place team win for the team assessment portion of the contest conducted at the MSU Beef Teaching and Research Center in both the veterinary and graduate student divisions. UW won first place in the undergraduate student division. The high-scoring individual in the assessment contest was Kristen Sterneker from K-State.

To learn more about the MSU Animal Behavior and Welfare Group (ABWG) and the annual animal welfare judging and assessment competition, visit *www.animalwelfare.msu.edu/* or contact Heleski at heleski@msu.edu. For more information about the AVMA, please visit *www.avma.org*.

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