

Students for Ethical Science Newsletter—Summer 2010



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Alternatives to SXR270 Animal Experiments Report by Vivien Pomfrey

We are pleased to announce that we have invested in two Sheffield Bioscience programs and these are now available to SES members to borrow. It is unjust that students who have paid the same for their courses as those prepared to use animal tissue are not offered any academically-equivalent alternative to the rat and caterpillar tissue experiments.

As well as being more humane, computer simulations, after the initial investment, are cheaper to use than animals, as they can be used again and again. If students make mistakes, they can go back and try again. They can alter parameters, and obtain a more thorough understanding than is possible from the OU animal tissue experiments, which are crude and limited by comparison.

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It is therefore unsurprising that students have been found to learn at least as well - often better - using simulations such as these.

From information provided by SES, the Open University has known for years that it is possible to use plant tissue instead of animal tissue for the rat tissue experiments. Some academics still insist that it is essential for students to have experience of handling tissue from freshly-killed animals, but most SXR270 students will not be planning careers in animal experimentation. It is also discriminatory, and may fall foul of new legislation protecting vegans from discrimination.

Students borrowing the programs can practise at home and then take them to their residential course and request the use of a computer. We would not expect the University to refuse such a request. Users could demonstrate the programs to their fellow-students and tutors, and allow them to try them.

Animals are used out of habit and tradition. Shouldn't the OU be showing the way forward?

Intestinal Absorption

This simulation replaces the SXR270 experiment which uses tissue from freshly-killed caterpillars.



The experiment is in Theme 2 - Energy, and illustrates the use of ATP by cells by

investigating active transport of ions across the walls of the guts of larvae of the tobacco hornworm moth (*Manduca Sexta*).

Cellular Respiration

This simulation replaces the SXR270 experiment which uses tissue from freshly-killed rats. The experiment is in Theme 2 - Energy, and shows, using oxygen electrodes, how substrates derived from food are converted to ATP in tissues and cells.



Opting out of animal experiments

There are precedents for opting out of animal experiments at residential school and using simulations with no penalty, but you may need to speak to the course team chair.

You will need to be prepared to demand the use of alternatives in spite of the fact that the European Centre for the Validation of

Alternative Methods recommends that alternatives should be offered automatically.

It is important that you contact the appropriate member of staff as soon as possible if you are going to opt out so that they don't order the animals, as they will otherwise end up being killed anyway.

Life Sciences Course News

Compiled by Diana Isserlis

First, the good news is that SXR374, Fat - The Physiology of Adipose Tissue, has now been discontinued. As well as removing a course that was harmful to rats, this has also removed some duplication that existed between SXR374 and SXR270, Investigative Biology.

The following Life Science residential school courses are still being presented.

Level 2 course

SXR270: Investigative Biology

This is a compulsory course for the BSc (Hons) Life Sciences (B28) and the Diploma in Life Sciences (E05).

The last presentation is expected to start in May 2011.

The residential school programme consists of three themes. Each student is required to take part in all three of these themes. Theme 2 (Energy) uses material from animal tissue prepared by technical staff. This is "a small amount of rat tissue" in the study of cell respiration.

The other remaining animal experiment involves the killing of caterpillars to study the transport of substances across gut cell membranes. Computer simulations have been available for these experiments for many years. Plant material can be used for the cell respiration experiment – there is no need to kill animals.

If you take this course, you can opt out of the animal experiments and use the computer simulations. These are now available to loan to SES members. See our contact details on the back page.

Level 3 courses

If you are working towards the OU's BSc (Hons) in Life Sciences and have not yet attended a specified Level 3 residential school (see <http://www3.open.ac.uk/study/undergraduate/qualification/b28.htm>) you may have to complete both of the two Level 3 residential courses currently available. SXR375 - Plants, Pigments and Light does not involve any animal use, but SXR376 does.

SXR375: Plants, Pigments and Light

This is a specified course for the BSc (Hons) Life Sciences (B28) and the Diploma in Life Sciences (E05). The last presentation is expected to start in May 2012.

The residential week consists of a laboratory-based practical project, learning the methods and principles of investigation into the biochemistry of plant pigments and photosynthesis.

SXR376: Molecular Basis for Human Disease

This is a specified course for the BSc (Hons) Life Sciences (B28) and the Diploma in Life Sciences (E05).

The last presentation is expected to start in May 2012.

Investigation is carried out into how variation or mutation at the gene level affects protein function. From the course description it is not clear whether animal cells or tissue are used.

A query about this elicited the following response from Dr Christine Gardener:

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SXR376 is a laboratory based course investigating several aspects of infectious disease.

This course does not use living animals, or tissues isolated from living animals, either to prepare the course or during the experimental work.

During the laboratory week, protein and DNA will be extracted from cells that have been cultured in vitro using standard cell culture techniques and reagents. The cells being used are immortalised cell lines of human and non-human origin. The nutrients used to culture these cells are supplied by synthetic liquid media supplemented with commercially available growth factors that are derived from animal serum.

A number of animal-derived and bacteria-derived biological molecules (e.g. antibodies) will also be used in the experimental work.

Methods of obtaining serum and biological molecules from animals can be stressful, harmful and often lethal.



Freedom of Information enquiries have elicited more details about this from the Open University (see pages 5-7).

Please tell us your experiences

If you are, or have been involved with any life sciences or biology courses, we would like to hear from you.

Are you able to tell us more about the course content with respect to how animals or animal materials are used in the course materials or experiments?

Have you attended a residential school and made a request to opt out of harmful animal experiments and/or did you ask if you could use a non-harmful alternative? If so, what was the response and how were you treated?

Please let us know—in confidence if necessary!

The OU's Policy on Animal Use

The OU's Policy on the use of animals can be found at: <http://www.open.ac.uk/science/lifesciences/about-the-department/life-sciences-animal-statement.php>

SES's Policy on Animal Use

Our policies can be found at: www.ouses.org.uk

OUSA Policies on Animal Use

OUSA's policies can be found on page 9

Freedom of Information Requests 2009

A report by Doug Paulley

On 13th February 2009 I submitted a Freedom of Information request to the Open University asking for information relating to the use of Animals and Animal Material. Beverley Midwood, Senior Manager in Legislation and Information at the OU, gave an initial response on 18th March 2009.

Here are some of the questions, the replies and implications.

Relating to the numbers and sources of animals

The question asking for the number of animals used for a) education and b) research at the Open University for each of the past 10 years gained the following reply:

a) A spreadsheet showing the number of animals used for teaching purposes in the last 10 years is attached. (See Number of Animals used for Education)

b) The number of animals used for research purposes is information which is not recorded by the University in summary format. Project Licence holders are required to report to the Home Office and statistics are compiled by that Office. The information provided is required to be kept confidential under Home Office Regulations. It is an offence under Section 24 of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act for anyone to release this information, so we are refusing this under Section 44 of the Freedom of Information Act - Prohibition on disclosure.

The number of animals used quoted in the spreadsheet did not include the 9 rats killed to produce the course materials for SD226 Biological Psychology.

The question asking where these animals are sourced from received the reply:

Information about where animals are sourced from is being refused under Section 43 of the Freedom of Information Act - Commercial

Interests. If this information is in the public domain these organisations may be the target of activities intended to disrupt their operations and commercial activities. There is also the possibility that the health and safety of individuals employed or connected to these organisations may be at risk because of these disruptions and so there is a further refusal under Section 38 of the Act - Health and Safety. It would not be in the public interest for disruptions of this kind to take place.

This is not consistent with universities and colleges being ordered to release info about animal experiments by the Info Commissioner's Office as reported in a BBC news article on appearing on the BBC's website on 9th April 2009. Information Commissioner Richard Thomas ruled that releasing the information would not increase the risk to the health or safety of any person. **Opting out of experiments and completing named degrees**

The following questions, with the answers given, related to students' ability to opt out of experiments using animals and completing named degrees.

The question asking whether students on each courses involving experiments on animal tissue can opt out of the experiments received the reply:

Students can opt out of experiments on animal tissue.

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The question asking whether the right to opt out is clearly advertised and whether or not it is frowned upon, formally or otherwise, or students otherwise discouraged from opting out of such experiments received the reply:

Students are free to discuss their concerns with the course organisers and tutors.

A student who decides to opt out is not frowned upon and nor will he/she be discouraged from doing so.

On the face of it, this is good news, but it contradicts the advice on the OU's website in course descriptions, statements they put in their course materials and their animal policy on teaching which states:

"Courses which require work with animal tissues are clearly identified as such on the courses website, and students not wishing to do such work are advised to make alternative course choices."

The question asking what alternatives for such use of animal materials have been considered and why they have been discounted received the reply:

The consideration of alternatives for use of animal material for teaching and research purposes is a requirement of legislation (Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act). The Open University Animal Use Statement can be read online.

Computer simulation alternatives for the animal experiments in SXR270 Investigative biology have been available for years. The OU neither makes use of them, informs students about them nor develops their own.

The question asking which named degrees, if any, are impossible to complete without

students having to take part in experiments on animals received the following reply:

As students can opt out of experiments on animal tissue there are no named degrees that are impossible to complete without taking part in these experiments.

For the named Life Sciences degree, SXR270 Investigative biology is a compulsory course and there is a requirement to have taken two level 3 residential school courses out of the discontinued SXR374 Fat - The Physiology of Adipose Tissue, SXR375 Plants, Pigments and Light, SXR376 Molecular Basis for Human Disease and the residential school part of the discontinued S328 Ecology. SXR270 is also a compulsory course for the Diploma in Life Sciences.

Thus the reassurance given implies that students should be allowed to successfully complete the residential school course SXR270 by using the alternatives to the animal experiments. This would allow students to complete the Diploma in Life Sciences without having to take part in experiments on animals.

Students who have successfully completed S328 should have no problem with completing the two required level 3 residential school courses by also taking SXR375.

However, students who have not completed the discontinued level 3 residential school courses are required to complete both SXR375 and SXR376 to complete the Life Sciences degree.

There are no problems with SXR375, but there are potential issues with cruelty with SXR376.

"Students can opt out of experiments on animal tissue" but ". . . students not wishing to do such work are advised to make alternative course choices."

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The question in relation to SXR376 asking whether synthetic liquid media are supplemented with commercially available growth factors derived from animal serum; which types of growth factor are used received the following reply:

We purchase a serum that is designed to support the growth of human cells in culture dishes. It is not broken down into its constituents and the exact nature of the growth factors within it are likely to vary from batch to batch and are also only known to the manufacturers.

Animal serum for cell culture is usually foetal calf serum (FCS). Bovine foetuses are extracted from slaughtered cows, and blood is taken direct from the calf's heart without anaesthesia, although it is likely to be still alive.

In relation to SXR376: animal-derived biological molecules, such as antibodies, are used. The question asking which antibodies and other biological molecules are used received the following reply:

We use antibodies that recognise the key proteins that the SXR376 course is focussed upon, these being the human CCR5 protein, the human CD4 protein and the human CCL3L1 protein. In addition we use several

secondary antibodies that recognise the 3 primary antibodies, one of which is linked chemically to a molecule called biotin and the other is linked to an enzyme called horse-radish peroxidase.

The only other animal derived biological molecules are used as blocking agents during various immuno-analysis stages; bovine serum albumin (BSA), serum and (cows') milk-derived proteins.

All these products are sourced commercially.

Methods of obtaining antibodies and other biological molecules from non-human animals can be stressful, harmful and often lethal. They include injecting animals with substances which cause harm, and using harmful blood-sampling methods.

Further Information

As much of the information supplied was incomplete, I appealed, first to the Open University Secretary, then to the Information Commissioner. The appeal is ongoing.

For full details of the Freedom of Information request, replies and appeals, see the news section of our website at www.ouses.org.uk

Your support is important to us!

SES is a Society affiliated to the Open University Students' Association [OUSA] and our aim, using peaceful means, is to stop the University using animals and/or animal-derived materials that are not ethically sourced.

We also aim to provide information and support to students who wish to study Life Sciences without harming animals.

In order to maintain our status as an OUSA Society we have to ensure that our membership numbers remain above a certain level so, if your membership is due for renewal, we do urge you to return the enclosed membership renewal form, and please do let us know if you have a change of address.

We do not release any personal details outside SES.

Conference 2010

A report by Samantha Covington

I have been SES's delegate to Conference on seven occasions over the past eight years. This year, as I have done for six previous years, I prepared posters and leaflets about the work we do and our motions to Conference for our display stand, and I gathered together external material such as that produced by Animal Aid and BUAV.

We had six motions this year (mainly to improve existing policy), plus one to re-affirm two existing policies that were due to expire.

I am sorry to say it was with the re-affirmation that I made my first mistake. I had not noticed that the Executive Committee [EC] had submitted an amendment to the motion to delete the first part i.e. to radically change the motion by deleting our wish to re-affirm one of the policies. With hindsight I should have asked for that amendment to be removed from the order paper because if the EC wished not to re-affirm that particular policy the motion should have been split and each part debated separately at Conference. I am afraid that I view their amendment as not being in the spirit of the submission of amendments, but it is too late now to do anything about it. I shall be more watchful in future.

My second mistake was not to have the motion relating to the cessation of the use of animals in research unlinked from the ones about educational use of animals and/or animal materials. This has happened before and I am afraid I had forgotten about this method of linking motions so that they

can be debated together and randomly – which makes for a very confusing session.

As to Conference itself, some of you may already know what took place concerning a leaflet that I had produced, and it was not at all pleasant. I was accused very publicly and aggressively of breaking rules (about which I knew nothing, and subsequently found I could not have been expected to know about because they don't exist). Consequently there were calls for our motions to be removed from the Order Paper and I was completely out-manoeuvred and unable to even voice my right to reply.

Following the debacle, all our motions were defeated, including the re-affirmations and I apologise unreservedly for not preventing it. OUSA does still have policy on the use of animals, and it is set out on the following page.

After Conference I wrote to the General Manager of OUSA with a two-part complaint about the rude and aggressive behaviour to which I had been subjected, and that the accusation of rule-breaking had been unfounded. This accusation had undermined my standing as a delegate, and ruined my reputation as an honourable person by portraying me a cheat.

I have since received a letter apologising for the behaviour of Vice President Constitutions and a second communication from the General Manager in which she explains the position of Steering Committee, and says:

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Current OUSA policy on the OU's use of animals and animal tissue

2007/75 Annual Report *

This Association asks the Open University to provide the General Manager of OUSA and OUSA Vice President Education with an annual report giving a detailed breakdown of its use of animals in research and education for onward transmission to those OUSA members who request it.

The report should include:

- numbers of animals and/or animal tissue ordered and used on each course or presentation thereof, and:
- the number of students on each course presentation in each year
- the 2007 report should include the figures for 2006, and subsequent reports should include the figures for the year before's report until the data for 5 years is shown. Thereafter the figures for the current year and the preceding 4 years should be shown.

2003/34 (R 2008) Ethically Sourced Tissue

This Association recognises that the University may wish to continue to provide experiments using animal tissue.

It calls upon the University to ensure that any such tissue is ethically sourced, e.g. not from purpose-bred or purpose killed animals.

2006/112 Harmful use of Animals

This Association urges the Open University to encourage research students to discover and implement methods that do not entail the harmful use of animals.

2007/74 Teaching Methods

This Association urges the Open University to seek out and implement teaching methods that do not include the harmful use of animals.

2007/72 Introducing Courses

This Association urges the Open University not to introduce courses that cause harm to animals.

2006/111 Representation on University Boards or Committees

This Association urges the Open University to explore ways in which the student body can have representation on university boards or committees where discussion on animal experimentation or research is tabled.

* On our request, the University provided us with reports, but they did not include the figures for animals used in research.

SES's Constitution

NAME

The society shall be called Students For Ethical Science (referred to hereinafter as the 'Society').

The name may be abbreviated to SES

AIMS

- (i) To urge the university to stop all use of animals for teaching and research;
- (ii) To encourage the university to take a lead in finding alternatives to animals for teaching and demonstrating known facts;
- (iii) To encourage the exchange of ideas between members and all aspects of living with compassion and respect for animals and all other species.

MEMBERSHIP

- (i) Full membership shall be open to all students, former students and staff at the Open University
- (ii) Membership may be refused to persons who are opposed to the aims of the society.

GOVERNMENT

- (i) The governing body and sole policy making body of the society shall be the General Meeting consisting of all members of the Society who choose to attend. The quorum for General Meetings shall be seven 7 (seven) members of the Society's full and Associate membership.
- (ii) The affairs of the Society shall be administered between General Meetings by the Committee.
- (iii) Notice of General Meetings shall be given to all full and associate members no less than 21 days in advance of such meetings. Publications in SESAME or in a newsletter or other publications of the Society sent at an appropriate time to all full and associate members shall be regarded as notice. The notice shall include the name and telephone number of a member from whom details of the meetings business can be obtained.
- (iv) Any full or associate member of the Society shall be entitled to speak or vote on any matter before a General Meeting; except where specifically excluded by the provisions of this constitution.
- (v) Minutes of all General Meetings shall be kept by the secretary and shall be available upon reasonable notice for inspection by any full or associate member.
- (vi) There shall be an Annual General Meeting (AGM) which shall be called no less than 11 months and not more than 15 months after the immediate previous AGM, subject to clause (ii), (iii) and (iv) of this section of this constitution.
- (vii) The committee may call Ordinary General Meetings subject to clause (ii) to (v) inclusive of this section of the constitution.
- (viii) An Extra-Ordinary General Meeting (EGM) may be called by the committee or at the request of not less than 33% of the full member of the Society made in writing to the secretary. Such requests shall specify the business for which the meeting is to be called. Upon receipt of such a request the secretary shall with 1 calendar month give notice of the meeting to the Society. EGMs shall be subject to clause (ii) to (v) inclusive of this section of the constitution. The agenda for an EGM shall comprise only the business for which the meeting has been called.

OFFICERS AND COMMITTEE

- (i) The committee of the Society shall consist of the Officers and not more than 4 ordinary Committee members. The quorum for Committee Meetings shall be 5 members of which at least one member shall be an officer.
- (ii) The officers of the Society shall be: Chair, Secretary and Treasurer
- (iii) The Officers and ordinary committee members shall normally be elected at one AGM and shall hold office until the end of the succeeding AGM.
- (iv) Only full members of the society may nominate or be nominated for officer posts or ordinary committee membership. Elections shall be secret ballot, using the transferable vote system. Nominations which have a proposer and a seconder shall be accepted up to the time of election.
- (v) No member shall be eligible to be nominated for the same post more than 3 (three) consecutive years. No member shall be eligible to be nominated for membership of the committee (either as an officer or an ordinary member) for a total of more than 6 (six) years whether consecutive or separate. The provisions of this clause may be waived in whole or in part for periods of one year at a time at the discretion of an AGM if insufficient eligible members are nominated for officer posts or committee membership.

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- (vi) In the event of any casual vacancies either of the officers or ordinary committee members, the committee may in its absolute discretion leave the vacancy unfilled, co-opt from amongst the full members of the society or call an ordinary general meeting for the purpose of the election. Not more than 3 (three) co-options shall be made between General Meetings.

FINANCE

- (i) The society's financial year shall run from the 1st of January to the 31st of December.
- (ii) The society shall levy subscriptions on its members. Such subscriptions shall fall due on the 1st of January of each year and shall be determined by the immediately preceding AGM.
- (iii) The treasurer shall be responsible for the conduct of all financial matters and shall maintain the accounts of the society. The accounts shall be available upon reasonable notice for inspection by any full member of the society.
- (iv) The accounts of the society shall be subject to annual audit by two auditors who are not members of the committee and shall be presented to the AGM.
- (v) All expenditure shall be in connection with the AIMS of the society. The treasurer shall have the authority to spend sums in total not exceeding £50 between committee meeting. The committee may authorize the expenditure of sums up to £200 and not exceeding in total £500 between General Meetings. Any expenditure in excess of these sums must be authorised by a General Meeting.
- (vi) The treasurer and one other officer will sign cheques or make bank withdrawals on behalf of the society, subject to clause (v) of this section of this constitution.
- (vii) In the event of the society being dissolved or wound up, its assets shall be realised and any sum remaining after the settlement of all outstanding liabilities shall be donated to the Open University Students' Educational Trust or other charitable body where aims are to assist students of the Open University.

CHANGES TO THE CONSTITUTION

- (i) This constitution may be changed only by a resolution supported by at least two-thirds of the full members present and voting at an AGM of the society. All full members are entitled to vote by proxy in writing (through the secretary) if they are unable to attend the meeting and wish to vote at the AGM. These must be received by the secretary one full week beforehand.
- (ii) Proposed changes to the constitution must be notified in writing to the secretary not less than 10 (ten) full weeks before the AGM at which they will be discussed.
- (iii) Changes in the constitution shall be notified in writing to all full and associate members of the society. Each notification may be by publication in a newsletter and other publications sent out to all full and associated members.

This constitution was adopted by a postal ballot of all members.

Approved by Vice President Constitution on behalf of the National Executive Committee

Signed.....(Susan D Fountain)

Date.....(6.12.1992)

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" . . . we want to apologise unreservedly on behalf of all of us on Steering Committee that we handled this situation badly and clearly caused you distress. We are really sorry for this." and "we agree that you did not break any rules and sincerely apologise that we did not respond to the situation in a much more measured manner - which would have been to all our benefit".

Apparently I have been infringing an OUSA 'convention' of which I was unaware, whilst creating my own!

We should continue to raise awareness at OUSA Conference of the alternatives available, and to bring about the changes we need—even in the face of strong opposition.

Can you help by distributing SES information?

We have created a series of factsheets and leaflets which can be downloaded to print out from our website at:

www.ouses.org.uk/resources.html

If you are attending a residential school, revision weekend, open event or OU Students Association event, please could you distribute this information to people who may be interested?

Find us online

Please visit our website at: www.ouses.org.uk

In common with other Open University Societies we have an OU Students Association FirstClass Forum associated with us. You can access this either from your Student Home Page (“Your OU mailbox and discussion forums”), or via the FirstClass Client. Then follow these links:

1. Select the Open University (blue shield).
2. Select O U Students Association (green logo).
3. Select O U S A Live (ear).
4. Select O U S A Societies (A B C symbol).
5. Select the sub-forum for O U S A Ethical Science.

For more information about FirstClass see the Members' Forum page of the OUSA South West region website at: www.ousasw.org.uk/members.html#online

Email groups

Vivien Pomfrey, our scientific advisor, maintains four email groups to which she sends information on animal-related topics. These are for people interested in:

1. Animal experimentation and alternatives
2. Animals generally (especially animal welfare issues)
3. Veganism
4. Vegetarianism

If you are not already in any of these groups (or are not sure!) and would like to be included, you can ask to be added to whatever groups interest you by email to: membership@ouses.org.uk
You can leave a group at any time by emailing the same address.

How to contact us

You can contact the SES Secretary and Membership Secretary by email at membership@ouses.org.uk

Alternatively you can write to the SES Secretary, 54 Sunningdale, Yate, Bristol BS37 4JA. For more contact details see www.ouses.org.uk/contacts.html
