



## **Veterinarian Technician Program Animal Care and Welfare Whistleblower Policy and Procedures**

This policy and procedure document governs Bellingham Technical Colleges' (BTC) teaching activities involving animals when conducted by College faculty, staff, or students when using BTC facilities and equipment.

### **Evaluation of Animal Care and Use Concerns**

To help ensure that animals receive humane care, use or treatment in accordance with the highest ethical standards, laws, regulations and policies governing animal research, the IACUC must review each concern raised by the public or BTC faculty, staff or students in a timely manner and, when necessary, take prompt, appropriate corrective actions.

### **Background**

The Animal Welfare Act of 1966 (last amended in 2007) is the only Federal law in the United States that regulates the treatment of animals in research, exhibition, transport, and by dealers. Other laws, policies, and guidelines may include additional species coverage or specifications for animal care and use, but all refer to the Animal Welfare Act as the minimum acceptable standard. The Act requires that institutions have an Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) and an attending veterinarian with laboratory animal experience.

The Whistleblower Protection Act of 1989 is a United States federal law that protects federal whistleblowers, who work for the government and report agency misconduct. A federal agency violates the Whistleblower Protection Act if agency authorities make (or threatens to take) a personnel retaliatory action with respect to any employee or applicant because of any disclosure of information by the employee or applicant. Whistleblowers may file complaints that he or she reasonably believes evidences a violation of a law, rule or regulation; gross mismanagement; gross waste of funds; an abuse of authority; or a substantial and specific danger to public health or safety.

The Washington state Whistleblower Program has helped maintain accountability and integrity in state government. During the 2008 session, the Legislature passed, and the Governor signed, SB 6776. SB 6776 gives more protections to whistleblowers and employees who allege whistleblower retaliation within state government and higher education institutions. The State Auditor's Office (SAO) enforces the whistleblower aspects of the law.

### **Methods for Reporting**

The names and phone numbers of contact persons should be readily available and will be posted in the classroom, labs and on the BTC website. Written concerns would be preferred, but if persons filing the complaint are not willing to submit the BTC Animal Welfare Concern Report, the individual who receives concerns should document them fully to ensure that the issues are clear and to prevent misunderstandings. Requests for anonymity should be honored if at all possible. This includes protecting the confidentiality of those who report concerns as well as anyone against whom allegations are directed, while allegations are under investigation.

### **Initial Evaluation and Actions**

The course of action taken by the IACUC should match the degree of the alleged situation, i.e., conditions that reportedly jeopardize the health or well-being of animals should be evaluated immediately. Allegations of other

ongoing policy or procedural matters may not require same-day attention, but should not be deferred as a matter of convenience. Emergency meetings may be necessary in these cases to ensure prompt consideration of concerns.

### **The Complaint Assessment**

Upon receipt of a concern, the IACUC Chair should convene a meeting of IACUC members. The “meeting” can be in person, or through email discussion. After initial review of the complaint, the committee will determine whether further investigation and immediate action is required, further investigation but no immediate action, or no action taken. The committee will then notify the individuals, institutional or non-institutional persons as would be required for a particular instance.

### **Investigation**

Should the IACUC determine that further investigation is required the appropriate persons and or entities will be contacted to continue the investigation and report back to the IACUC. It is important to avoid actual or perceived conflicts of interest in this process.

The IACUC will advise the designated person or group with its requirements for information gathering and a deadline for completion. The nature of the information required will vary depending on the circumstances:

- Interviewing person(s) filing report (if known), any persons against whom allegations were directed, and pertinent program officials
- Observing the animals
- Reviewing any pertinent records, e.g., protocol, and other documents

The final report will summarize:

- The concern(s),
- The results of interview(s)
- Condition of animal(s)
- Results of any records or document review
- Any supporting documentation such as correspondence, reports, and animal records
- Recommended actions, if appropriate

### **Outcomes and Final Actions**

Upon receipt and evaluation of the report, the IACUC may request further information or find that:

- The concern or complaint was valid, and as such could:
  - Implement measures to prevent recurrence
    - Advise counseling
    - Submit letters of reprimand
    - Require training aimed at preventing future incidents
  - Notify funding or regulatory agencies, as required
  - Notify the person(s) that filed the report, person(s) against whom allegations were directed and pertinent program faculty or staff (Marketing, attorneys, etc.)
  - Temporary revocation to provide animal care or to conduct training that involves animals, pending compliance
  - Permanent revocation to provide animal care or to conduct training that involves animals
- The concern or complaint was not valid, however related aspects of the animal care and use program requires further review
- There was no evidence to support the concern or complaint