

Should We Bring an Employee-Owned Cat to a University Campus?

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ABSTRACT

Campus cats, i.e. cats who spend time on campus and interact with students and personnel, are gaining attention over the world. At least twenty-one campus cats have been identified to date. These include freely roaming cats – either stray cats or owned cats living nearby – who deliberately spend time on campus. The effects of these cats on students and personnel are anecdotally documented and seem to align with hypothesized effects of human-animal interaction, such as facilitated interaction between students or employees, positive physical human-cat contact, stress-relieving breaks and improved atmosphere.

One particular campus cat is, to our knowledge, the first one worldwide that was intentionally introduced onto campus by his owner – a campus employee – to improve student moral and campus atmosphere. Contrary to other campus cats, this cat does not roam around freely, but is always accompanied by his owner. Based on findings from business economics about beneficial effects of owner-accompanying office dogs for employee well-being and work atmosphere, bringing a cat to campus served as a pilot experiment to study the equivalence of a campus cat. Surveys, qualitative behavior analysis, cortisol analysis and smart device (i.e. smartwatch and smartcollar) data analysis are used to study effects on humans and cat.

Important questions about the potential drawbacks of an owner-accompanying campus cat should be asked. From a human well-being perspective, the presence of a campus cat may cause problems due to cat allergies – which are twice as common as and often more severe than dog allergies – or phobias. From an animal welfare perspective, repeated territory relocation and frequent interaction with humans may cause stress. From both perspectives, lack of choice, of predictability and of need fulfillment – important stressors – may occur. Given the rising popularity of campus cats, it is crucial that both pros and cons for humans and cats are discussed.

PRESENTATION TYPE

Hot Topic Discussion

PROGRAMME TRACKS

Animal Welfare in Animal Therapy/Assistance/Service
Cats/Felines-Human Interaction
Human Health
Animals in Education
Quantitative Research
Qualitative Research

PERMISSION TO PUBLISH

Yes

AUTHOR WILL ATTEND

Yes

AUTHOR APPROVAL

Yes