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Blogging about Service-Learning Experiences

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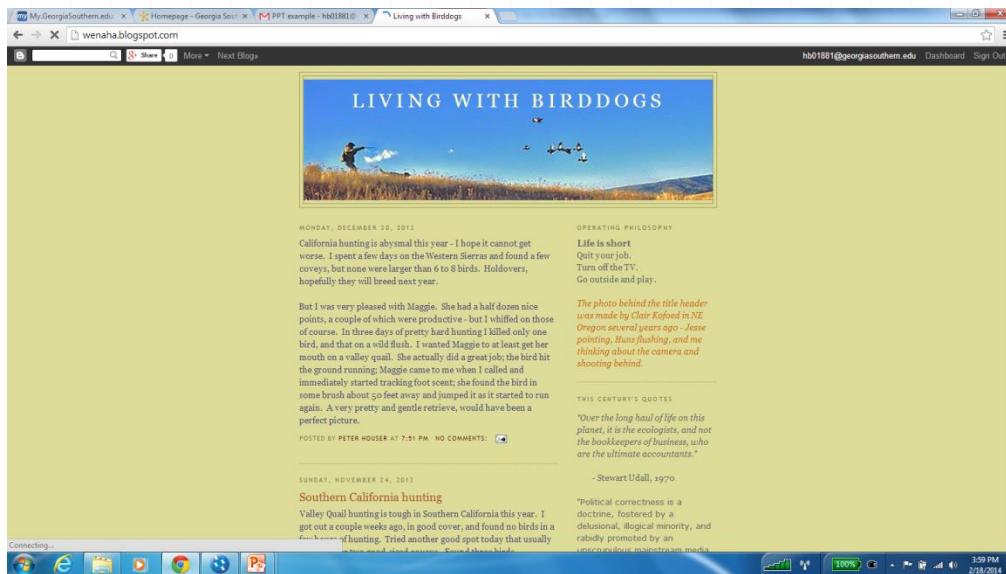
Blogging about service-learning experiences

Helen D. Barrett, Trent W. Maurer, & Jerri J. Kropp
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What is service-learning?

- o “**Service Learning** is an educational experience based upon a collaborative partnership between the college and the community. Learning through service enables students to apply academic knowledge and critical thinking skills to meet genuine community needs. Through reflection and assessment, students gain deeper knowledge of course content and the importance of civic engagement” (Berea College, 2011).

What is a blog?



- o A **blog** is a personal website devoted to the presentation of whatever the author desires, including his opinions and interests (Merriam-Webster, 2014) .

(Campbell, Houser, Pennington, Spies, & Tappero, 2008)

FYE 1220H: Animal Assisted Therapy

- o Honors course at Georgia Southern University
- o 2 days/week (1st semester); 1 day/week (2nd semester)
- o Extended orientation and seminar components
- o 25 hours of service with either therapy dogs or therapy horses required
- o 5 blog posts within 24 hours required each semester

The Questions

- **W**hat happened during the interaction?

- **H**ow did this experience relate to the class?

- **W**hat was your reaction to the experience?

- **D**o you have any questions or concerns about the experience?

The purpose of this study was to...

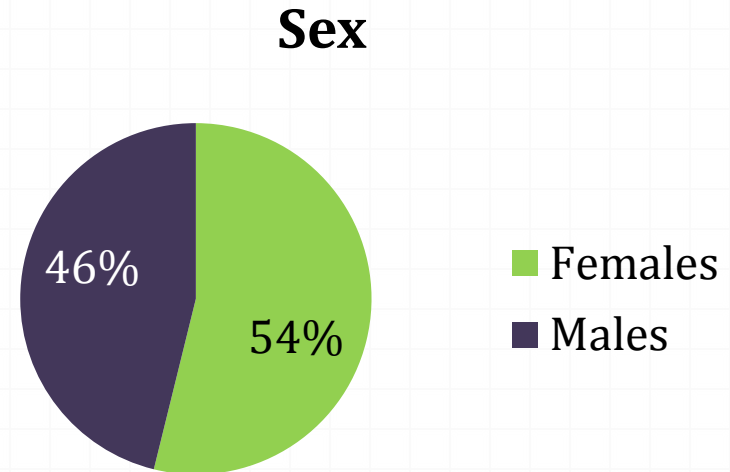
- Qualitatively analyze students' blog posts.
- Identify common themes among students' responses to specified questions.
- Explore the impact of service-learning and blog post writing on the students' learning regarding AAT (animal assisted therapy).

Sample Specifics

- o 13 students
 - 6 males
 - 7 females

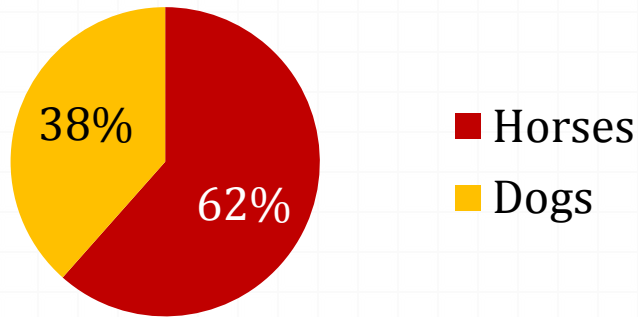
o Various majors

o All completed full year of course



Dogs or Horses?

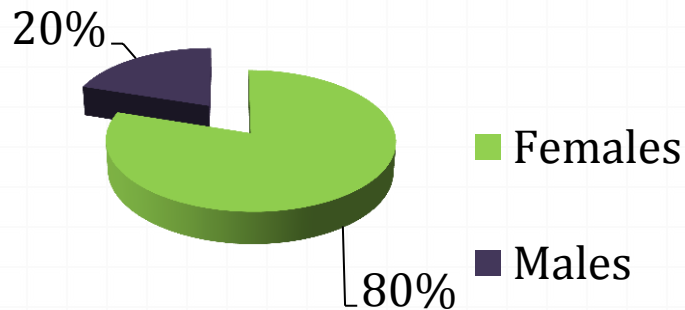
Therapy Animals



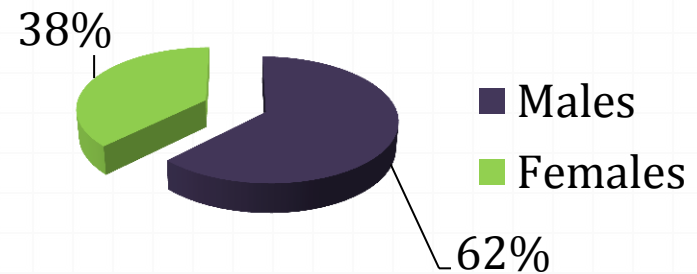
o Therapy dogs - 5 students (1 M, 4 F)

o Therapy horses - 8 students (5 M, 3 F)

% of Each Sex (Dogs)



% of Each Sex (Horses)



Methods & Materials

o Grounded Theory Approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1998)

- Open coding
 - Axial coding
- Using NVivo 10

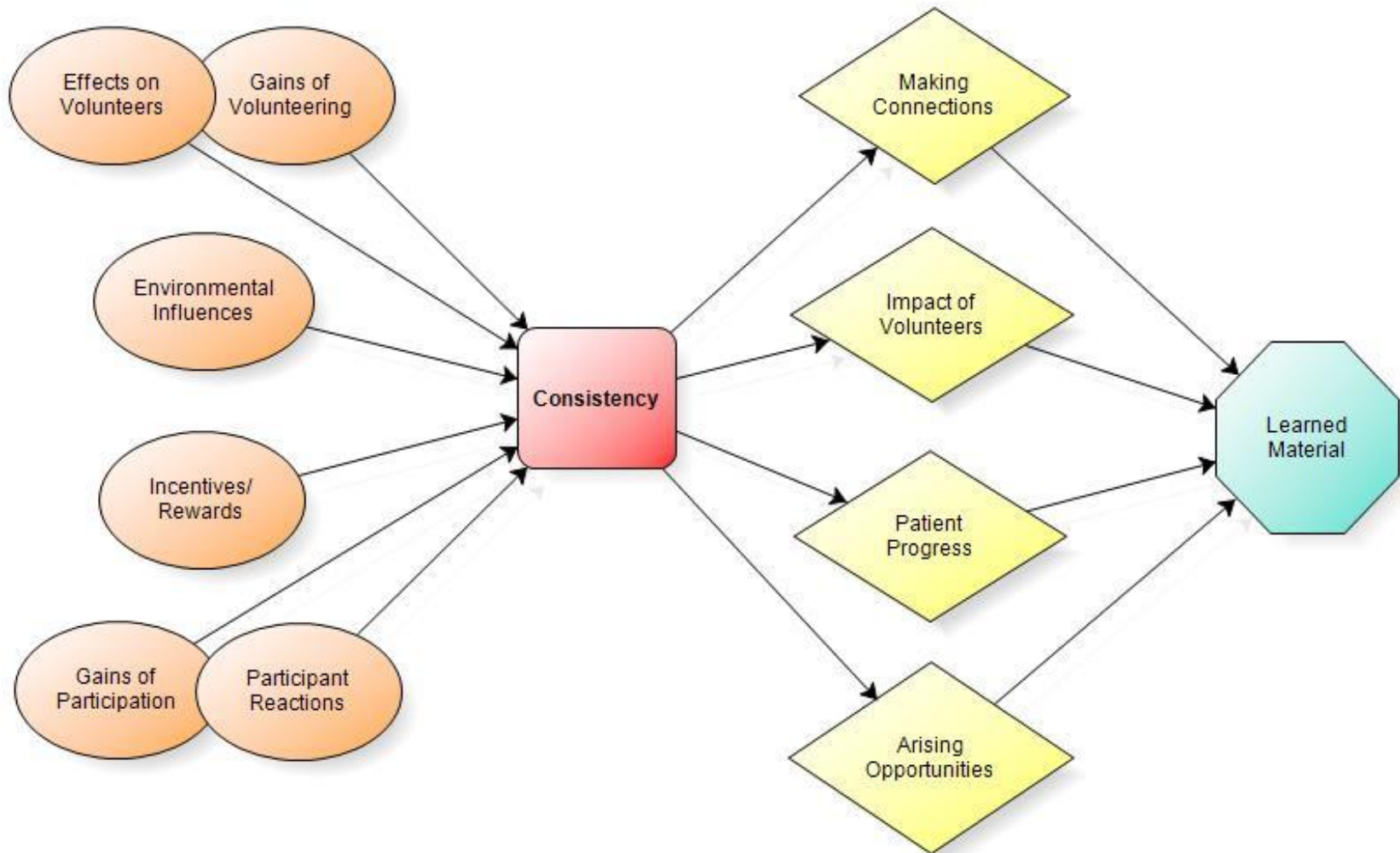


Me

The Big Three

THEMES/CENTRAL PHENOMENA

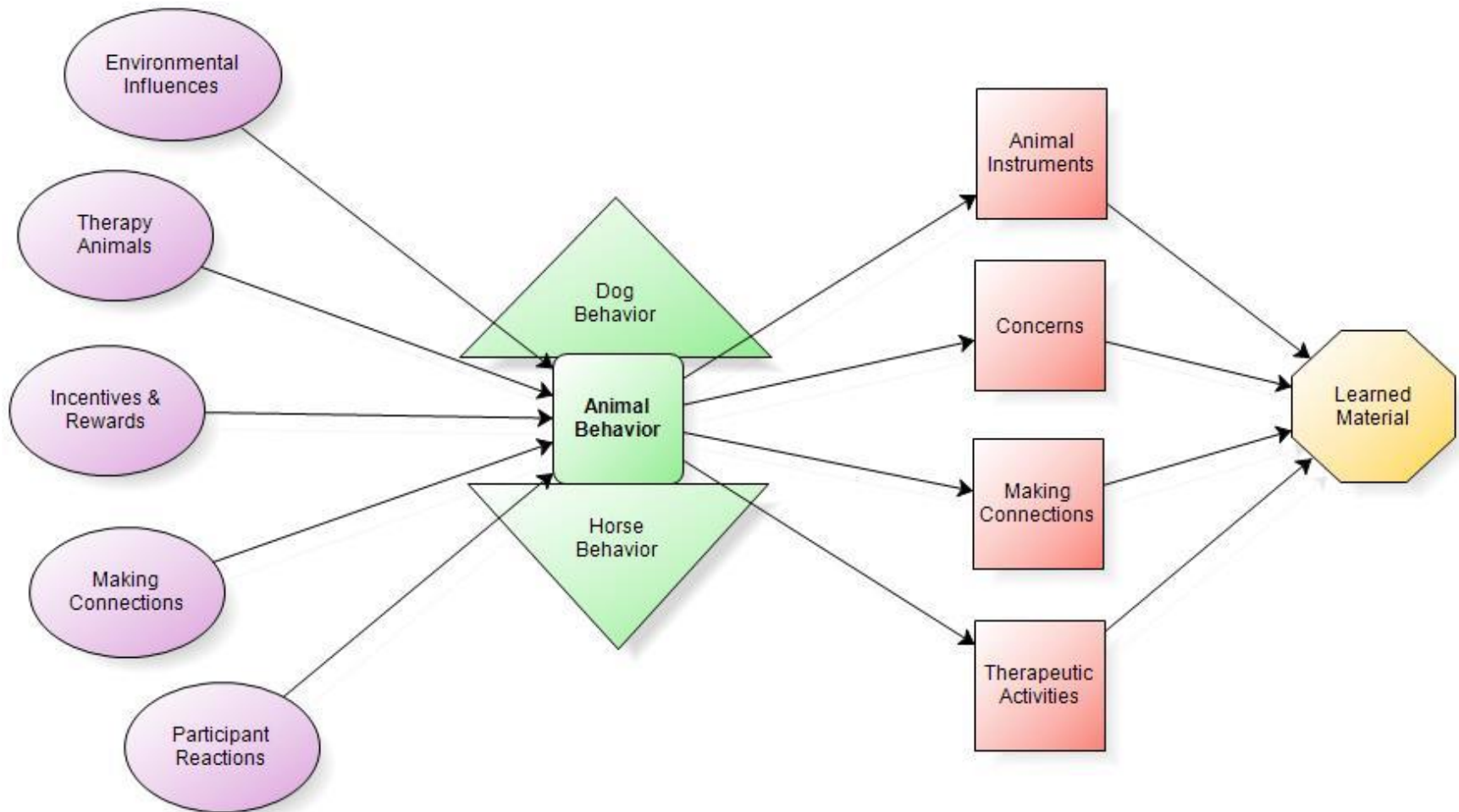
Consistency



Examples

- o “Throughout my weeks at [therapeutic horseback riding center], I feel like I developed a real bond with him.”
- o With every week, he seems to be getting stronger, being able to do just a little more than the week before.
- o “Many of the riders come back every session and therefore have a favorite horse that they enjoy spending time with building on their bond.”
- o “I didn’t expect to see improvement this quickly from one week to the next.”
- o “I loved going today and cannot wait to visit next week.”

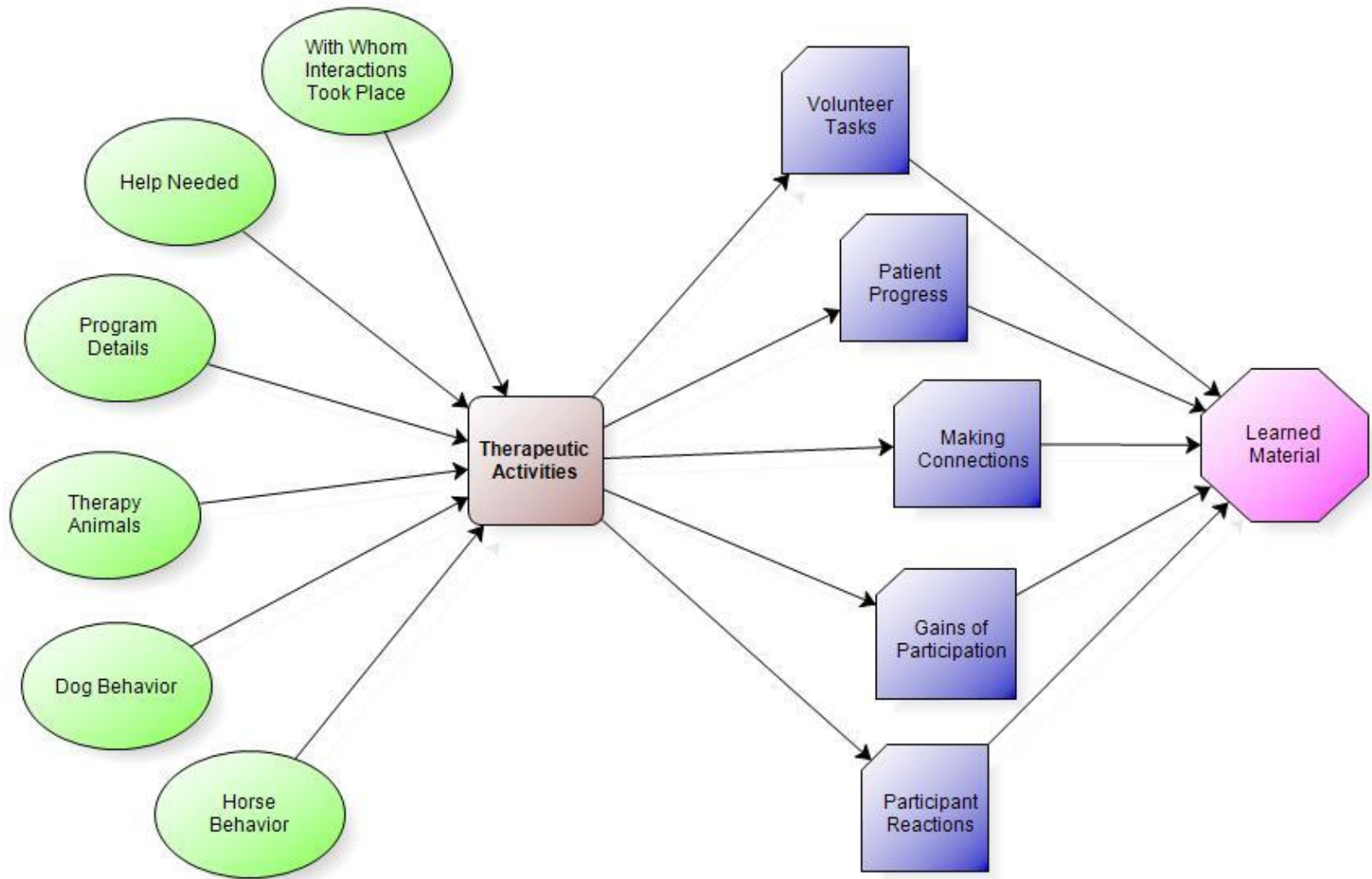
Animal Behavior



Examples

- o “I was amazed at how calm Tarrah was and how she was so patient with the patients.”
- o “Wrigley was a bit more antsy with the nursing home crowd than he is with the children at the [daycare].”
- o “The horse seemed to be acting really tired and not wanting to cooperate.”
- o “While reading, Katie put her paw on the girl’s leg and the effect on the girl was definitely noticeable; she became comfortable and confident.”
- o “While grooming the horses with one of my class mates I realized that these horses were not a temperamental as the other horses that I had been around in the past.”

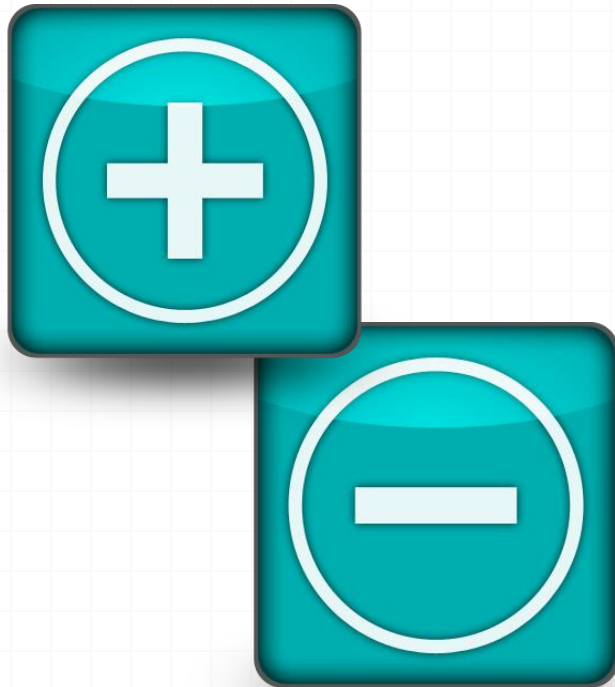
Therapeutic Activities



Examples

- o “She had short term memory loss, so the instructor tried to make her name different things, like where she is sitting (on a saddle) and where her feet go (the stirrups).”
- o “She seems to try harder with her speech when talking to Blackjack.”
- o “There was one woman who had trouble seeing, so she had to use her hands a lot to feel Katie and pet her.”
- o “I think the visits were really helpful at relieving stress in the students and helping them relax during finals week.”

Additional Results



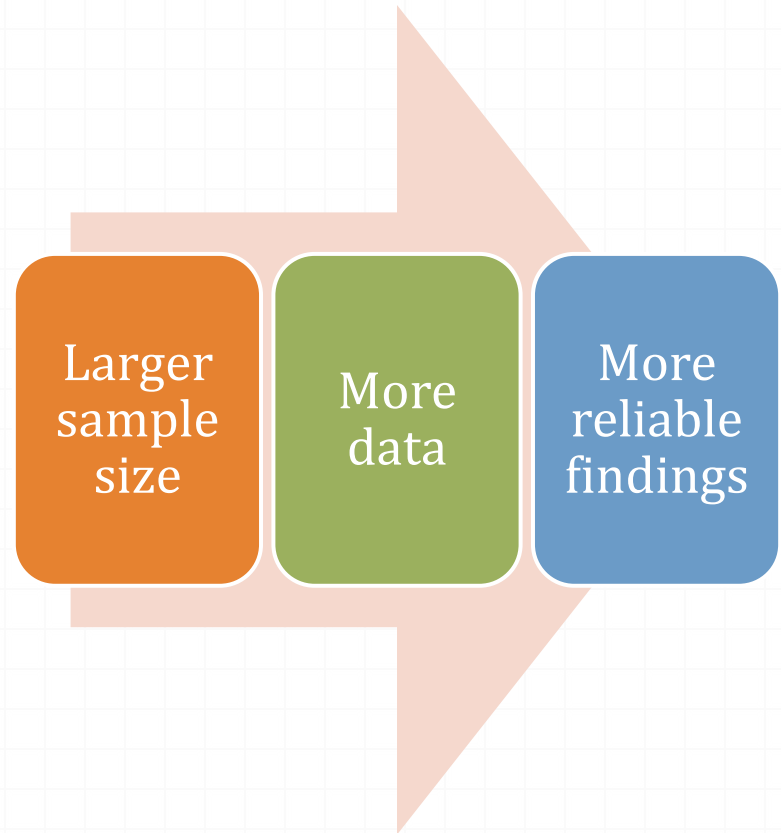
- o All of the students experiences were primarily positive.
- o Negative aspects included:
 - dreary environments
 - others' adversity
 - program details
(Kahn & Vipond, 2012)
- o A couple of students wrote more blog posts than were required.

Additional Results (Contd.)

- o Students didn't often directly state how an experience related to the class. Instead, they used the gained knowledge in their reactions.
- o Most students focused on what happened during the interactions more than any other aspect.
- o 3 students incorporated outside sources (6 total citations).

Limitations

- o Relatively small sample size
- o No control group
- o One semester vs. two or longer
- o Self-report
- o Access issues
- o Researcher bias?
 - methods to decrease



Discussion

- Due to the nature of this study and the class itself, we **cannot** definitively state that service-learning improved or hindered student learning.
 - no control group
- However, we **can** definitively state that students were able to identify the key role therapy animals can play in enhancing human rehabilitation and/or development, the purpose of the course.
- Students were forced to mentally process information through blog writing and now have blogs by which to remember their experiences.

LURKING IMPLICATION:

Can animals be used as learning instruments?

How can we implement animals into student learning?

Examples

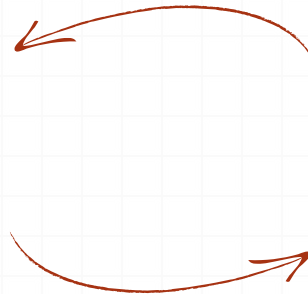
o Reading to Rover

The class had just learned about the five senses, so as they watched Wrigley, their teacher asked them questions like, "Where are his eyes?" and "Is his fur soft?"

o Animals as models

Your Ideas

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____



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