

Activity Report - Workshop on Teaching Experimental Design for Animal Experiments

Between the 12th and 13th of September this year, I attended a workshop on the teaching of experimental design in animal experiments, hosted by the University of Porto. The workshop was led by members of the FELASA Experimental Design Working Group and was based around a “training the trainers” template. Topics ranged from how to develop quizzes/cases to assess students’ understanding of the topic to discussing the future of experimental design teaching in Europe within the FELASA framework. Dissemination ranged from more straightforward lectures and presentations, to group work. Although the workshop ended a few weeks ago, some of the work that was started in Porto is still ongoing over email.

Being able to participate in this workshop was something that I greatly value. As participants, we were able to exchange experiences, ideas, and challenges – both during and after the workshop. It was very useful to me to get an outside view of the topic; to hear other teachers’ ideas of how to effectively convey some of the importance of experimental design. In the past three years, I have developed materials on experimental design for two separate courses. Most of this work has unfortunately been conducted in a vacuum, with only some input from statisticians. Laboratory animal scientists specializing in experimental design are – although sorely needed – few and far between. To gather a number of them in one place was immensely valuable. One of the major outcomes of the workshop in Porto was the building of a network. A mailing list has been set up for communication. A shared drive has been set up for sharing resources. Connections were made.

Looking beyond my personal experience, the workshop served as a good forum for staking out a direction for improving the teaching of experimental design in animal studies. There is clearly a need for further education in experimental design among *in vivo* researchers. How to meet this need is a pressing question. The contents for a standardized experimental design course were discussed/reviewed (a rough draft already existed). Moreover, the future recommendations of the FELASA Experimental Design Working Group were discussed. What are some realistic, implementable, recommendations for improving the general level of understanding of experimental design among animal scientists? In an informal setting, in Porto, all participants had a chance of sharing their ideas.

I would finally like to reiterate my appreciation for ICLAS’s support of this workshop – valuing the topic and understanding the key role it plays in implementing the 3Rs and mitigating the current lack of reproducibility within animal studies. I hope that this was only the first of many forums dedicated to improving our field of research.

Yours sincerely,

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