

Human-Animal Interaction Interdisciplinary Centers and Institutes: A Decade of Progress

Marguerite E. O’Haire & Alan M. Beck

Center for the Human-Animal Bond, Department of Comparative Pathobiology,
College of Veterinary Medicine, Purdue University, IN, USA

The field of human-animal interaction (HAI) represents the interdisciplinary study of the effects and mechanisms of the interrelationships between humans and animals. These relationships date back centuries, yet have only recently been the focus of scholastic study. The academic focus of HAI spans numerous disciplines and departments, creating the need for interdisciplinary centers of excellence to coordinate and advance this important research. Since the first center was created in 1977, the proliferation of new HAI centers and institutes has mirrored the field’s growth.

In 2006, Purdue University hosted the first Centers for Human-Animal Bond Conference. Primary topics included collaborative research, funding, and the role of HAI centers and institutes in veterinary education (Beck & Rowan, 2011). The focus of HAI centers has since broadened, with keystone funders, supporters, and academicians now covering a wide range of disciplines. Most importantly, the body of scientific research has advanced to the point that there is now a broad interdisciplinary consensus that the human-animal bond can positively impact human health and wellness. To capture the broadened scope of the field and significant advances over the past decade, Purdue University hosted a second Centers for Human-Animal Bond Conference in November 2016, which was sponsored by the Human Animal Bond Research Institute (HABRI). The conference united leadership from 14 United States centers and institutes of human-animal interaction with the belief that dialogue and coordination by these centers will further accelerate the high-quality research necessary to document the specific mechanisms and impacts of human-animal interaction and to advance the field as a whole.

The 2016 Centers for Human-Animal Bond Conference’s mission was to assess the current status and progress of the human-animal interaction field. This was accomplished through an exciting, thought-provoking two-day event, filled with presentations and pertinent discussions among field leaders. The conference focused on three major pillars – research, engagement, and education – with each area explored in depth. The key insights developed during these two days were captured and enhanced for publication in this special issue.

This special Human-Animal Interaction Interdisciplinary Centers and Institutes edition contains a set of eight articles. These articles include: (1) this introduction to the field of HAI; (2) an overview of HAI centers and institutes in the United States; (3) HAI education and core learning outcomes; (4) HAI research methodology; (5) cross-cultural perspectives on HAI; (6) HAI guidelines and protocols; (7) the promotion of humane universities with HAI and (8) university coursework in equine-assisted activities and therapies.

Together these topics provide insight into the progress of the field over the past decade, the status of academic centers in human-animal interaction and possible future trajectories. Overall, there is increased multi-disciplinary research activity in the field of human-animal interaction, with more centers of excellence emerging each year. We hope that this special edition supports this positive momentum and contributes to future growth and success in the field.

Reference:

Beck, A. M., & Rowan, A. N. (2011). The Human–Animal Bond: Essential Elements in Veterinary Education. *Journal of Veterinary Medical Education*.
<https://doi.org/10.3138/jvme.35.4.476>

Acknowledgements:

We are grateful for the generous support from the HABRI Foundation, especially Steve Feldman, Director, for the Purdue Centers for Human-Animal Bond Conference.