Canines in the Classroom: The use of a therapy dog to relieve test-taking anxiety

Test Anxiety

- According to the American Test Anxieties Association about 16-20% of students have high test anxiety, making this the most prevalent scholastic impairment in our schools today.

- Another 18% are troubled by moderately-high test anxiety.
Companion animals have been known to both physically and psychologically benefit their owners.

- Relieve stress
- Extend lifespan
- Overall calming effect

Do we need interaction or just presence?
Twice a year (during midterms and finals) we have a group on campus with therapy dogs in order for students to have a time to sit with the animals and relieve some of their stress.
Objective

- To determine the effectiveness of the presence of a therapy dog during exams to relieve test-taking anxiety in an attempt to improve students’ exam grades.
Materials and Methods

- Four sections of ANSC 2360; Animals in Society.
  - N = 25 students per section

- Prior to and during exams, a therapy dog was either allowed to roam around the room, or not present in the room.

- For each exam, two of the four sections were randomly selected to have the dog present during the exam.
Materials and Methods

- The dog was not present for more than two of the four exams in any one section.

- Grades were individually recorded for each exam.

- Grades analyzed for the main effect of the dog’s presence while taking into account differences among the four exams and course sections.
Results

Effect of Dog’s Presence - $P > 0.25$
Discussion

- The effect of the dog did not translate into grade differences in the course.

- Grades were higher than expected for all sections.
  - Was the course and exams stressful enough to illicit a response?
Conclusions

- This suggests that the simple presence of the therapy dog alone is not enough to relieve test-taking anxiety.

- The given exams were not enough of a stressor to generate test-taking anxiety in the students.
Questions?
References
