DISSECTION POLICY

According to the bylaws of the university, the “…functions of the University Faculty shall be to consider questions of educational policy which concern more than one college, school or separate academic unit, or are general in nature…” In addition, the 2002 Faculty Handbook (p. 71) states that faculty have academic freedom “of expression in the classroom on matters relevant to the subject and the purpose of the course and of choice of methods in classroom teaching…”

April 21, 1999, Records, pp. 8250-8256S
May 12, 1999, Records, pp. 8263-8269S

At the April 1999 meeting, Associate Professor Martin Hatch, Music, introduced a resolution on dissection policy:

WHEREAS, all of the introductory biology courses at Cornell provide students with alternatives to performing dissection, and there exist students who choose these options based on ethical conviction, and

WHEREAS, the Faculty Senate deems it desirable that no student ever be coerced to perform, as part of a curricular exercise, an action, which that student finds morally or ethically repugnant or inadmissible,

THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED, that the Faculty Senate applauds the practice of offering alternatives to dissection in the introductory biology courses, recommends that this practice continue in future, and commends the efforts of biology instructors to investigate the relevant innovations in educational technology as these come on the market.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Faculty Senate affirms the right and responsibility of instructors to determine the content and conduct of their courses, and affirms that a Cornell education should convey and instill, among other values, a respect for the environment, for fellow human beings, and for other living beings and recommends educational practices that reflect those values.

Professor Richard Baer, Natural Resources, introduced an amendment to the second “Whereas”, suggesting the words “with respect to animal dissection” be added.

Discussion ensued on the amendment and on a vote call, it failed.
The body then proceeded to discuss the resolution. The Senate voted to send the motion to the University Faculty Committee to be brought back in May.

Professor Peter Schwartz, Textiles and Apparel, introduced a two-part resolution from the University Faculty Committee at the May 1999 meeting. He gave the rationale that this resolution in no way abrogates the agreement between faculty and students.

Professor Baer put a substitute motion forward as follows:

WHEREAS, Cornell University includes students, faculty, and staff of diverse religious and ideological beliefs, and whereas liberal societies generally try not to coerce the consciences of individuals more than is necessary to maintain a just public order and workable institutions, and

WHEREAS, faculty have made no strong case that it is necessary for students to use or dissect animals in required introductory biology courses in order to master the basic content of these courses, but nonetheless AFFIRMING the right and responsibility of instructors to determine the content and conduct of their courses and scholarly activities, therefore

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Faculty Senate urges instructors to offer students alternatives to dissection and animal use in all instances where the instructors determine that such alternatives are consistent with the basic educational goals of the course, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Faculty Senate commends the efforts of biology instructors to evaluate relevant innovations in educational technology pertaining to animal usage as these are brought to their attention.

Discussion on the substitute motion resulted in the question being moved. The substitute motion failed.

A vote was then taken on the University Faculty Committee resolution. It carried as follows:

BE IT RESOLVED, that the Faculty Senate affirms the right and responsibility of instructors to determine the content and conduct of their courses and scholarly activities, and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Faculty Senate applauds the practice of offering alternatives to dissection in all instances where the instructors determine it is consistent with the educational goals of the course and commends the efforts
of biology instructors to evaluate the relevant innovations in educational technology as these are brought to their attention.