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As an animal lover with a belief in protecting the environment, biology seemed like a natural choice of study for me. In my early studies at the University of South Florida (USF), I was told I would have to participate in dissections. A vegetarian since 15 and a long time animal-rights activist, I ran to my professor, panicked, begging for some alternative, but luckily, I didn't need to worry. He told me alternatives were just fine, and I used them and completed the class with an A. I had no idea that soon I would meet a great amount of opposition due to my moral beliefs.

Upon entering my senior year, a course required was animal physiology, which required the killing of live animals as well as dissection of live animals. When I inquired about alternatives, one professor who taught the class slammed the door in my face and said he would not discuss them. The class's only other professor, whom I knew from previously studying under him, told me over the phone he would speak to me about it, but wasn't sure "you could be a biologist without dissecting animals."

In the meantime, I contacted AAVS and was armed with computer alternatives, which completely mimicked everything we would do in class, along with information about many undergraduate, medical, and veterinary schools, including ivy-league colleges that allow students to use alternatives proving that I could become a biologist without killing animals. However, when I called him back to schedule a time to meet, he said he had decided he would not meet with me.

I later received USF's new policy on undergraduate dissection, which stated that it was up to the professor to decide whether the alternatives were feasible. However, my professor had made a decision without even taking the time to view the alternatives I had provided. The head of the biology department told me that I would have to pursue a microbiology course of study, effectively adding another year to my graduation date and making me pursue a field I was not interested in. Between a rock and a hard place, I contacted a wonderful animal-rights attorney who represented me pro-bono. Shortly after my attorney issued a letter to the school, they responded, saying that they had created a plant physiology class, which would serve as an option for me to graduate with a biology degree. I would not have to dissect or kill animals, but the victory was bittersweet. Not only does the University continue to look callously on an animal's life and the moral beliefs of a student, but also students who want to study animals without hurting them are prevented from doing so.

My attorney reassured me that when my generation is in charge, we will be the ones to make change. In the meantime, a local animal rights group has extended their protests of USF's animal medical labs to the undergraduate buildings. We also handed in 1,000 student signatures to the Dean of USF asking for computer or model alternatives to dissection.

As draining as this experience was, it opened my eyes to the difficulty that students face, and I hope to work at the government level to make change so that no student will have to

feel threatened because of his/her moral belief that animals are sentient beings, as deserving of rights as we are.