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Before starting my degree course in zoology, I already had very strong views about dissection. Not having had an interview before entry, I was not aware of the university's policy and decided to broach the subject very soon after commencing the course.

At the end of one of my first practical classes, I approached the lecturer to discuss my wish not to carry out dissection classes. This was immediately met with hostility. "What was I taking a zoology degree for if I did not wish to dissect?" "How could I expect anyone to employ me if I had no experience of dissection?" After a long discussion I was advised, along with a fellow student, to go away and think about whether we felt a zoology degree was for us, or whether it would be better to change to a different course. Not all the lecturers, however, were unsympathetic. In fact, some were quite supportive of the right to our views.

Feeling that my view on dissection was not unreasonable, and not due to me being 'squeamish,' I discussed the dissection classes with third year students who had taken part before to assess their relevance. Most felt that they had not gained anything in particular from actually taking part in the dissections and that they would have benefited more from watching a video of a 'professionally performed' dissection.

I then decided to follow up on the 'fact' that nobody would employ me if I had no experience with dissection. I wrote to between 30 and 40 different organizations explaining that I was a university student under pressure to dissect and asking whether they as an organization would consider employing a graduate who had not dissected whilst at university.

Each organization, including the Institute of Zoology in London, replied that, although they did not want to encourage me to go against the wishes of the university, they would definitely consider employing such a student. I decided to stay with the course I had chosen.

On presenting the above information to the lecturer, it was decided that we would not need to dissect after all, although no alternative was made available. This was not a problem in my first year as there was no dissection. However, in the second and third years there were practicals involving some kind of dissection or experimentation on live animals (e.g., chick embryos). During dissection practicals the students opting out had to write an essay.

During the experiments on live animals, it was decided that we would observe the set up of the experiment and as the instruction booklets were so precise, we should then use the results and write up the experiments as if we had attended the class.

Although it's a shame we weren't offered alternatives, I am still glad that I stuck to my principles, and to my decision to stay on the course. I certainly didn't miss out on part of my education by opting out of the animal practicals. Colleagues who did participate confirmed what students from previous years had said: they didn't really know what they

were doing and had learned little or nothing from the experience. Dissecting an animal corpse is certainly nothing like the work in the field I do now in my career. I believe that as students we deserved a better teaching approach.