



BRAD founder, Logan France (second from left) with Jack, Leila, and Briza (left to right), students from the School for Science and Math at Vanderbilt.

BRAD Builds the Research Advocacy Community

BRAD celebrations highlight animal roles in biomedical research.

By Logan France, DVM, DACLAM

Despite overwhelming evidence highlighting the critical role of animals in understanding physiology, developing drugs and procedures, optimizing treatment protocols, and more, research community silence has fostered distrust among the public. The silence has allowed anti-research organizations to promulgate several false narratives aimed at portraying animal research as outdated and unnecessary. In response, the research community is becoming more vocal about the incredible discoveries made possible through research with animals.

Biomedical Research Awareness Day (BRAD), an international outreach program led by Americans for Medical Progress, can help. BRAD seeks to increase public awareness about animal roles in biomedical research and the resulting medical advancements that benefit both humans and animals. BRAD highlights the importance of animal studies and research organizations' commitment to providing excellent animal care. It also builds a research advocate community and highlights biomedical research and laboratory animal care and medicine careers.

Since its April 2016 inaugural celebration, BRAD participation has skyrocketed. From 20 events in the U.S. the first year, in 2019 BRAD featured 200 celebrations across 9 countries. Beyond educating the public, BRAD can increase community engagement, unite an institution's research community, boost employee morale, and allow individuals to discuss their biomedical research roles. BRAD continues to build a unified foundation of research advocates throughout the country and around the globe.

Peer-to-Peer Education: K-12

In early 2019, I worked with three high school students, Leila, Jack, and Briza, from the School for Science and Math at Vanderbilt (SSMV). Seniors in the program complete a community-engaged research project. I mentored these students as they used BRAD to educate their peers on the critical role of animals in biomedical research and medical advancements. The students began the semester learning about animal research. They explored various sources and websites, including those of animal rights organizations, and familiarized themselves with BRAD, the program's goals, and the available resources. The students visited Vanderbilt University Medical Center, where they toured the animal facilities, spoke with neuroscientists, attended a lab meeting, and observed a surgical procedure.

"Before my involvement with BRAD, I knew very little

about the realities of animal research," Jack said. "The opportunity to visit the animal facilities was quite an incredible one, and through the tour, I was able to understand how animal research is conducted. Learning about animal research through my experiences working with BRAD was extremely eye-opening and gave me a more informed perspective on animal research."

Later in the semester, the students developed presentations and activities to communicate the facts about and importance of animal research to middle and high school students. They tailored their message to the target audience and brought their program to local middle and high schools. In candid conversations as the semester ended, each student revealed they had hesitations and reservations about animal research before beginning the project. It was incredibly powerful to watch them transform into animal research advocates through BRAD. A new group of students will work on BRAD 2020.



A BRAD event was held at Vanderbilt University Medical Center.



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- Jack, BRAD participant

Peer-to-peer education is an important BRAD component. Middle school students participated in a Day of Discovery including BRAD events.

Undergraduate Outreach

Another peer education opportunity enabled BRAD to include veterinary technician students. This new audience was reached through a partnership with the Society for Laboratory Animal Veterinary Technicians (SLAVT). One SLAVT member, Mandy Bedwell, attended the Association for Veterinary Technician Educators conference. At the conference Mandy shared the program as well as careers in laboratory animal medicine. Ten veterinary technician schools participated in 2019.

BRAD Regional Champion Program

The BRAD Regional Champion Program is for exceptional individuals seeking to advance animal research education. Created last year, the program is launching for BRAD 2020. Champions will organize BRAD events at their home institutions and bring the program to other institutions, organizations, veterinary clinics, and schools in the region. BRAD Champions, Dr. Rachelle Stammen, Dr. Sherrie Jean, and Robbie Champion piloted the program.

"During my first year as a BRAD Champion, I reached out to numerous institutions and businesses throughout the state of Georgia. I shared information about BRAD and animal research in hopes they would want to host their own BRAD event," Dr. Stammen said. "I was able to recruit one large well-known university, one high school, and two veterinary clinics around Atlanta. My level of involvement ranged from simply providing them resources and information to hosting an event or a lunch-n-learn at their institution or business."

BRAD Regional Champions are responsible for contacting other institutions, organizations, and businesses to share information about BRAD. Champions also serve as a regional BRAD consultant to assist others in hosting events. The goal for the BRAD Regional Champion program is to reach new audiences in hopes that every institution that conducts, supports, or has benefited from research with animals celebrates BRAD annually. Those who are interested in becoming a BRAD Regional Champion can email BRAD@amprogress.org.

BRAD Fellow

BRAD Fellows have been integral to growing the program. After BRAD was developed through the AMP Michael D. Hayre Fellowship in Public Outreach, AMP added four additional fellows in 2017 and 2018. A 2018 partnership with the American College of Neuropsychopharmacology (ACNP) funded an ACNP-AMP BRAD Fellow. This fellowship sought to increase the number of scientists, physicians, and other American College of Neuropsychopharmacology (ACNP) members who participated in BRAD and highlight animal roles in neuroscience and brain/behavior research.

"I hope to promote community outreach and public education about the role of animals in research, help individuals in the ACNP community learn how to communicate their research with non-scientists, and provide the ACNP community with a blueprint to easily host a BRAD event at their home institutions," said Dr. Katie Serafine, the second AMP-ACNP BRAD Fellow.

As a scientist at the University of Texas El Paso, Dr. Serafine's research is focused on understanding the overlap between substance use disorders and metabolic syndrome. She is also passionate about educating others on the important role of animals in her research.

A partnership with Americans for Medical Progress through a BRAD Fellow is open to any organizations with the goal of supporting their members in raising awareness about the role of animal studies in their work.

Onward and Upward

BRAD has demonstrated that the research community is extremely passionate about the care that research animals receive. It has highlighted the necessity of animal studies, and the need to increase openness about our work. For everyone who has embraced BRAD, planned and executed events, and shown your support for animal research – thank you! This program would not be possible without your involvement and influence, and each event is making an impact. To learn more, visit our website, BRADglobal.org.

Logan France, DVM, DACLAM is an Assistant Professor and Clinical Veterinarian at the Vanderbilt University Medical Center in Nashville, TN. She also serves as the Vice-Chair for the AALAS Government Relations Committee.



BRAD champions (left to right) Sherrie Jean and Rachelle Stammen will organize events at their home institutions and other facilities in their regions.

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