

# Infusing Fear Free<sup>SM</sup> and Low Stress Handling<sup>TM</sup> Techniques in a Veterinary Technician Program

Ginny Price, MS, CVT, VTS (Behavior)  
St Petersburg College  
College of Veterinary Technology



# Learning Objectives

Learn about Fear Free<sup>SM</sup> techniques

Learn about Low Stress Handling<sup>®</sup> techniques

Learn how to use a step-by-step procedure to change beliefs and practices of veterinary technician educators.

Learn how St Petersburg College, College of Veterinary Technology infused their program with Fear Free<sup>SM</sup> and Low Stress Handling<sup>®</sup> techniques.



# Veterinary Technician Oath

“I solemnly dedicate myself to aiding animals and society by providing excellent care and services for animals, by alleviating animal suffering, and by promoting public health.

I accept my obligations to practice my profession conscientiously and with sensitivity, adhering to the profession’s Code of Ethics, and furthering my knowledge and competence through a commitment to lifelong learning.”



# Importance of Mental Health

“Animal well-being and, thus, the veterinary profession’s duties to animals center on mental states and, more specifically, feeling states. Feeling states are the pleasant and unpleasant mental experiences elicited by specific stimuli and events in an animal’s life.”

McMillan & Rollin, 2001





*Certified*

**CO**  **MPASSION.**

**YOUR PETS WILL FIND IT HERE.**



# Fear Free Overview

As a Fear Free Certified Professional, you will:

Reduce or remove anxiety triggers that can cause pets to become fearful at home, in transport, and at the veterinary hospital

Help owners deliver calm pets to your hospital

Enhance the quality of medicine in your practice

Increase compliance

Improve safety for the veterinary team



# FF: Veterinary Professional Certificate

Module 1: FF behavior modification basics

Module 2: FF transport of cats/dogs to/from veterinary hospital

Module 3: FF reception & waiting area

Module 4: FF exam room

Module 5: FF in hospital care

Module 6: FF procedures

Module 7a: FF pre-visit protocols: therapeutics, products, & pharm

Module 7b: In hospital protocol: sedation, anesthesia, & analgesia



# Fear Free Focus

Effects of FAS

Sensory perception of your patients

Body language - recognizing FAS

Learning theory and behavior modification

## CAT WARD

### Body Language and signs of FAS in Cats



| Relaxed  | Anatomy       | Stressed  |
|--|---------------|---|
| Normal pupils  | Eyes          | Dilated pupils  |
| Forward  | Ears          | Out to the side; back against head                      |
| Caudal higher than shoulders; back flat  | Spine/posture | Back arched; crouched; legs under body                  |
| Above topline; inverted U; soft curve below topline; gentle, back and forth movement | Tail          | Tucked; curled around body; forceful movement; thumping |
| Closed   | Mouth         | Open; panting; hissing, growling, spitting              |





# Fear Free Goals and Techniques

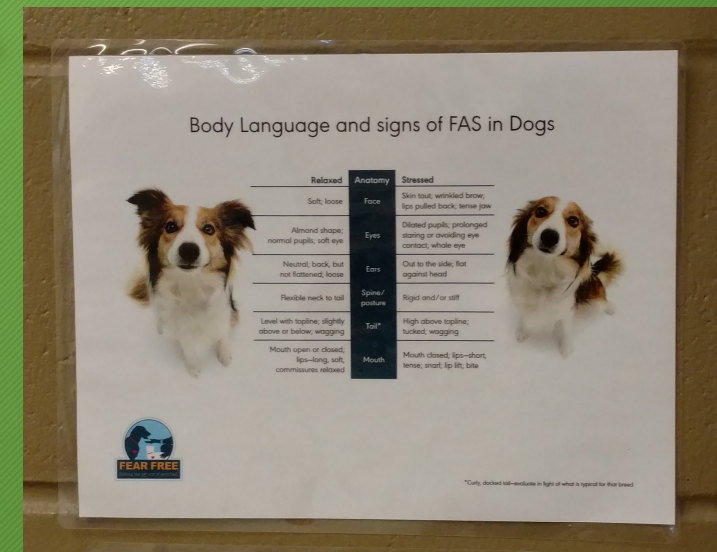
Reduce FAS to strengthen HAB and enable diagnostics, procedures, and treatments.

Communicate well with patients, co-workers and clients.

Open-ended questions

Reflective listening

Empathetic statements





# Fear Free Goals and Techniques

Environmental guidelines

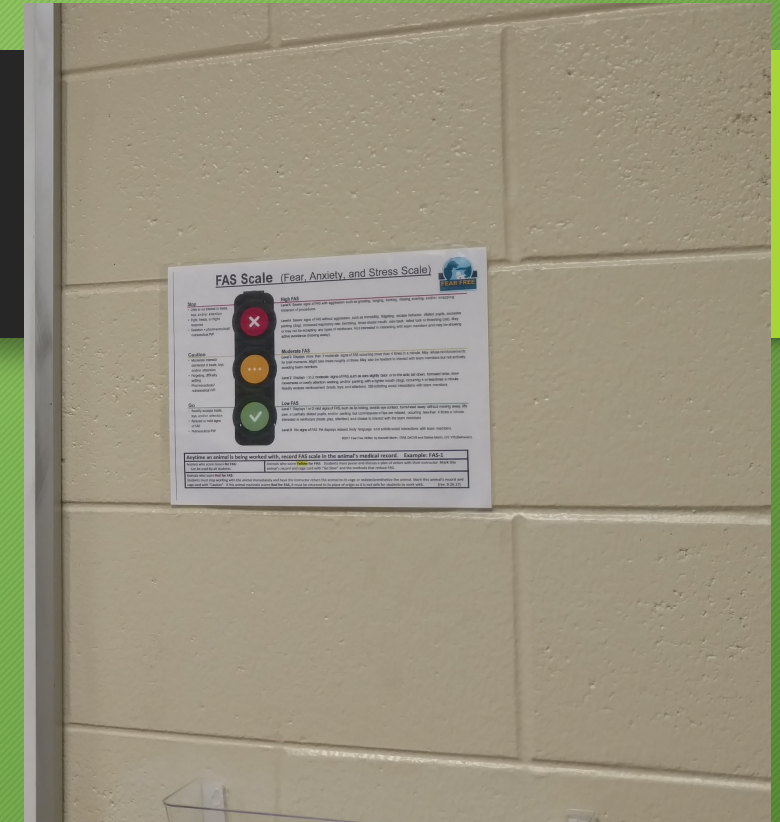
Considerate approach

Gentle control

Touch gradient

Pre-visit protocols - therapeutics, products, pharmaceuticals

In hospital protocols - sedation, analgesia, anesthesia







# LOW STRESS HANDLING<sup>®</sup> UNIVERSITY

[Home](#) » [Low Stress Handling<sup>®</sup>](#) » [Certification Levels](#)

## Certification Levels

**LOW STRESS HANDLING<sup>®</sup> UNIVERSITY WILL BE OFFERING THREE LEVELS OF CERTIFICATION IN LOW STRESS HANDLING<sup>®</sup>.**

### **Silver-Level Certification: Coursework & Online Testing**

Individual Certification at this level demonstrates to clients and employers the individual's dedicated interest in Low Stress Handling<sup>®</sup>.

Hospital Certification at this level demonstrates to clients and staff the hospital's commitment to appropriately training staff in Low Stress Handling<sup>®</sup> methods.

#### **Requirements:**

#### ***Individual Certification Requirements***

Certification requires that each individual take all 10 lecture and lab courses in the pre-determined order. The classes are taken online, via an easy-to-use portal. After each lecture, the individual takes an online multiple-choice examination. Grades will be displayed as soon as each





# Low Stress Handling University Overview

Improvements to the hospital's design

Preparation of and for the patient prior to a visit

Use of tools and sedative agents

A large portion of Low Stress Handling relies on the development of important hands-on skills





# Low Stress Handling Silver Certificate

Recognizing fear/aggression in dogs/cats

Rapid reversal of fear/aggression in dogs/cats

LS handling/restraint of difficult dogs/cats

Training techniques for all animals



Dr. Sophia Yin, DVM, MS

[www.lowstresshandling.com](http://www.lowstresshandling.com)



# Low Stress Handling Silver Certificate



Towel wrapping cats

Kitten Kindergarten

Handling/restraint  
medium/large dogs

Handling/restraint  
fearful/aggressive/difficult dogs

Desensitization

Counterconditioning



# St Petersburg College, College of Veterinary Technology

How we infused our animal interactions with Fear Free and Low Stress Handling



# Step One: Add Yin's Low Stress Textbook

## **Low Stress Handling, Restraint and Behavior Modification of Dogs & Cats**

by veterinarian and animal behaviorist, Dr. Sophia Yin



Available at:

[amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)

[Dogwise.com](https://www.dogwise.com)

**AAHA**  
[aahanet.org](https://www.aahanet.org)

[lowstresshandling.com](https://www.lowstresshandling.com)

Required textbook for two courses: behavior/nursing lab

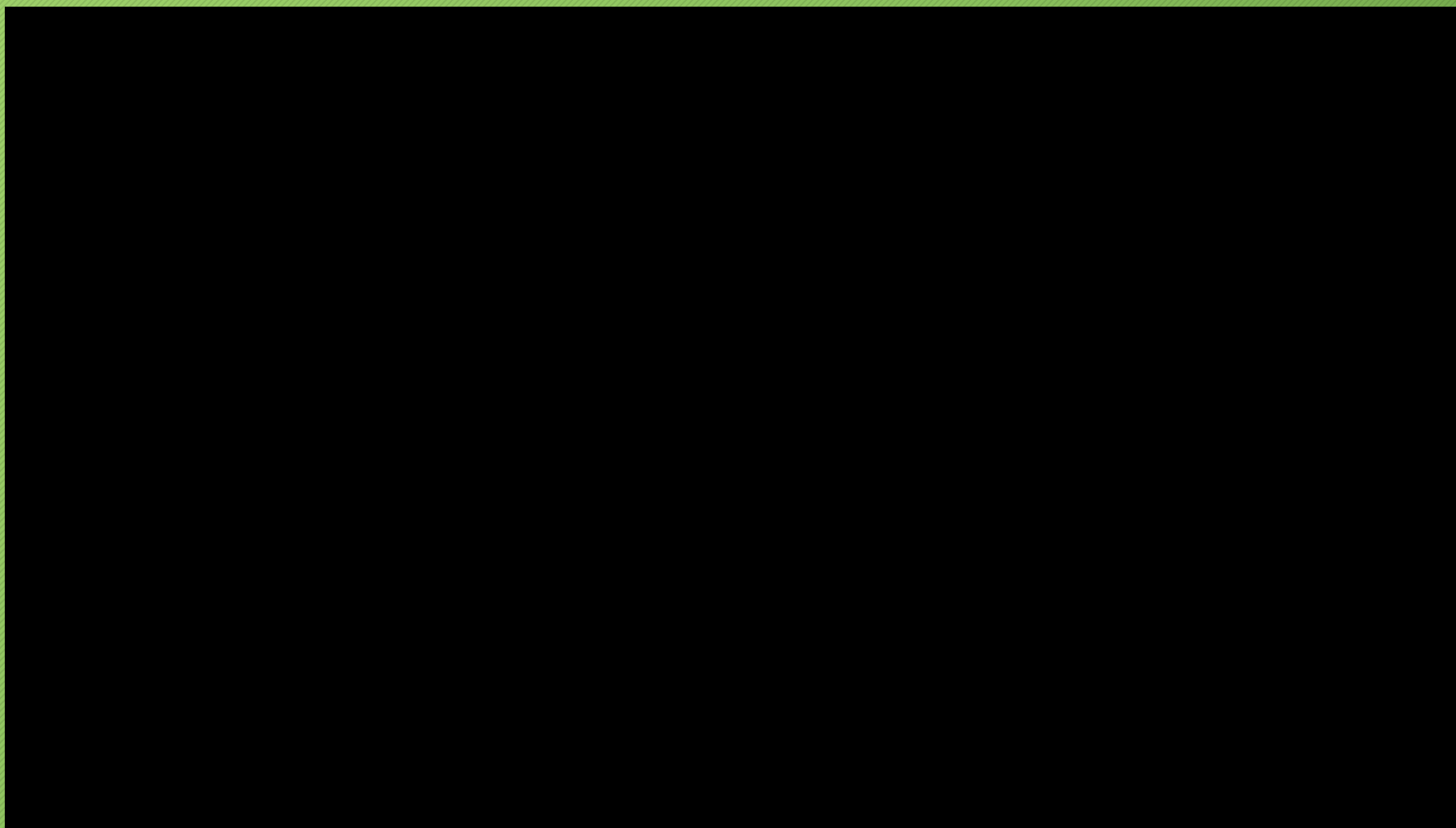
Required behavior class

Teach low stress handling/restraint

Use low stress handling/restraint in all classes

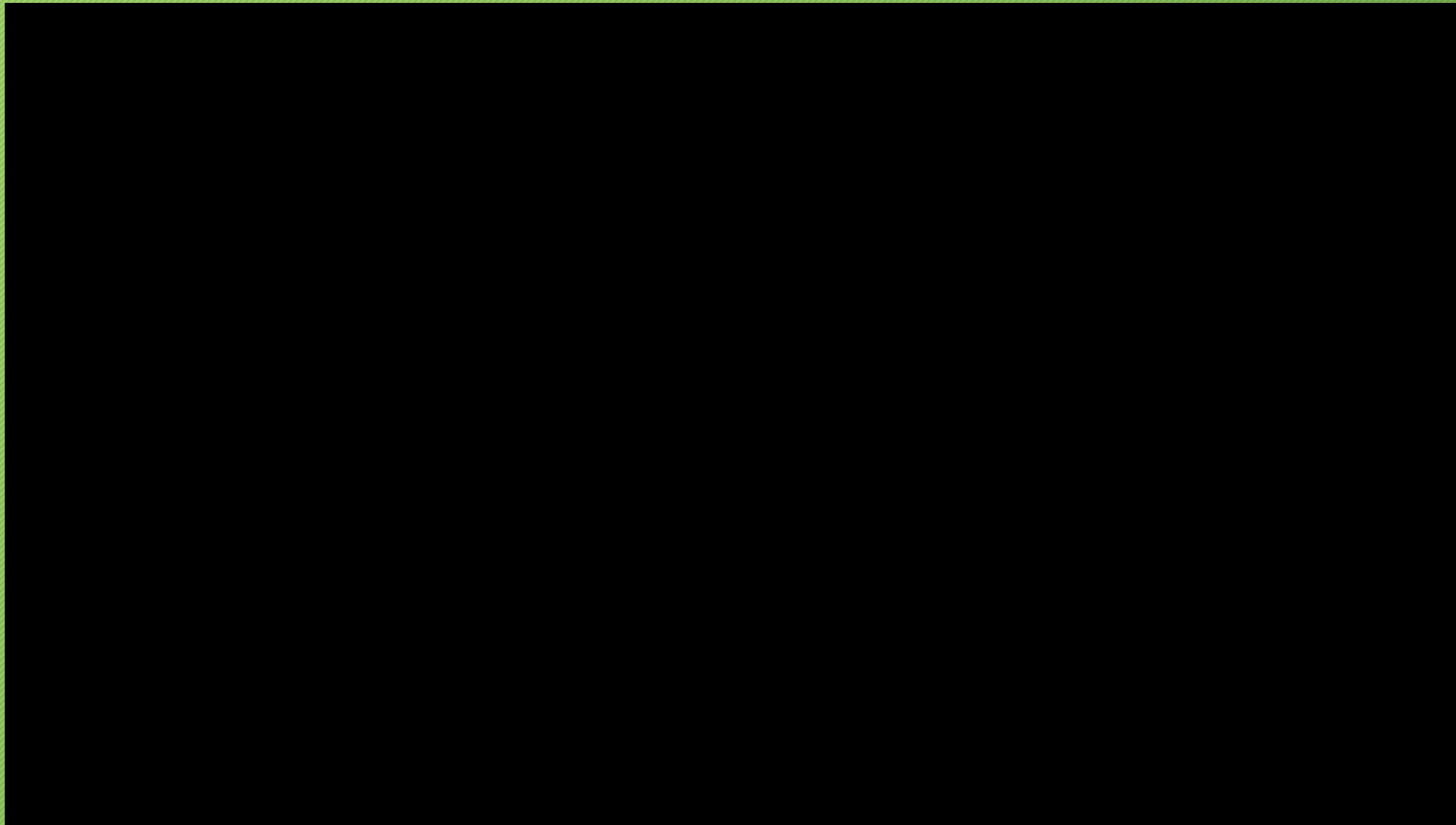


# Teach a Cat to Walk into their Carrier





# Teaching a Dog to Walk on a Loose Lead





# Step Two: Getting Everyone Onboard


Model wanted behavior  
Share what works  
Discuss effects of using  
techniques  
Be patient  
Support each other






# Step Three: Add Fear Free

Train faculty/staff on concepts  
Record FAS on medical records  
Use animal's body language



## FAS Scale



|  |   |
|--|---|
| <b>Stop</b>  | <b>High FAS</b>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Little to no interest in treats, toys, and/or attention</li><li>• Fight, freeze, or flight response</li><li>• Sedation+ pharmaceutical/nutraceutical PVP</li></ul> | <p><b>Level 5</b> Severe signs of FAS with aggression, such as growling, lunging, barking, hissing, snarling, and/or snapping. Intolerant of procedures.</p> <p><b>Level 4</b> Severe signs of FAS without aggression, such as immobility, fidgeting, escape behavior, dilated pupils, excessive panting (dog), increased respiratory rate, trembling, tense closed mouth, ears back, and/or tail tucked or thrashing (cat). May or may not be accepting any types of reinforcers. Not interested in interacting with team members and may be showing active avoidance (moving away).</p>   |
| <b>Caution</b>   | <b>Moderate FAS</b>   |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Moderate interest/disinterest in treats, toys, and/or attention</li><li>• Fidgeting, difficulty settling</li><li>• Pharmaceutical/nutraceutical PVP</li></ul>      | <p><b>Level 3</b> Displays more than 2 moderate signs of FAS occurring more than 4 times in a minute. May refuse reinforcements for brief moments. Might take treats roughly at times. May also be hesitant to interact with team members but not actively avoiding team members.</p> <p><b>Level 2</b> Displays 1 to 2 moderate signs of FAS, such as ears slightly back or to the side, tail down, furrowed brow, moving slowly, overly attention seeking, and/or panting with a tighter mouth (dog), occurring 4 or fewer times a minute. Readily accepts reinforcement (treats, toys, and attention). Still soliciting social interactions with team members.</p> |
| <b>Go</b>  | <b>Low FAS</b>  |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Readily accepts treats, toys, and/or attention</li><li>• Relaxed or mild signs of FAS</li><li>• Nutraceutical PVP</li></ul>  | <p><b>Level 1</b> Displays 1 or 2 mild signs of FAS, such as lip licking, avoiding eye contact, turning head away without moving away, lifting paw, partially dilated pupils, and/or panting but commissures of lips are relaxed, occurring fewer than 4 times a minute. Interested in reinforcers (treats, play, attention) and chooses to interact with the team members.</p> <p><b>Level 0</b> No signs of FAS. Pet displays relaxed body language and solicits social interactions with team members.</p>   |

©2018 Fear Free. Written by Kenneth Martin, DVM, DACVB and Debbie Martin, LVT, VTS (Behavior).

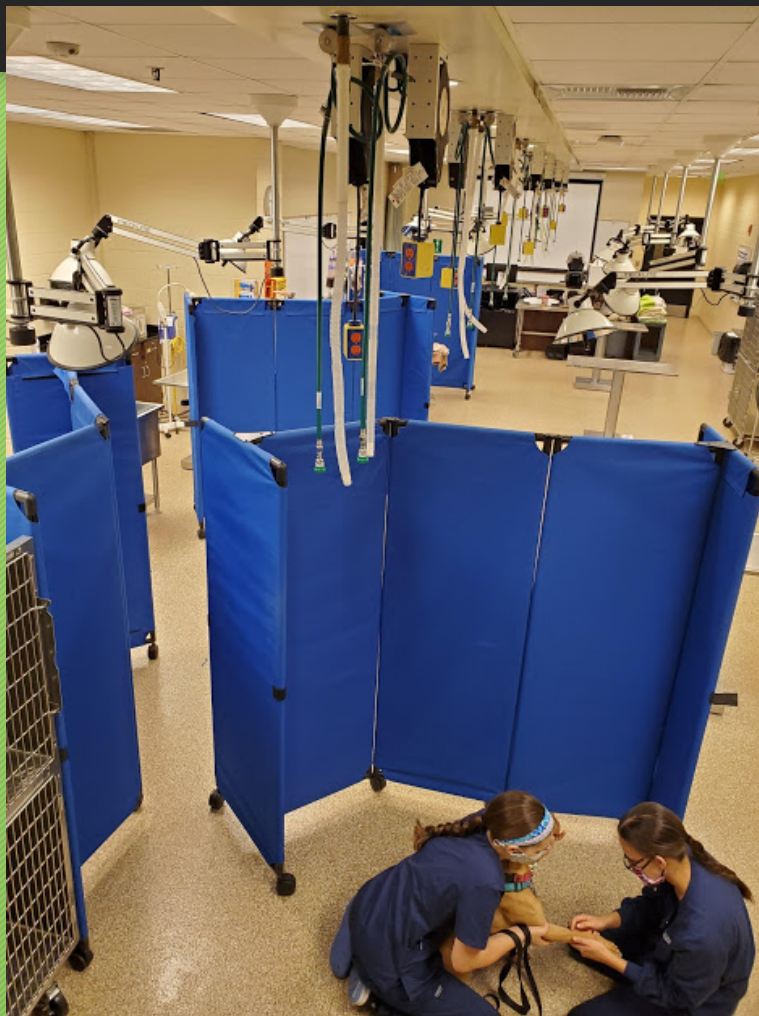


# Cat Clinical...





# Dog Clinical...



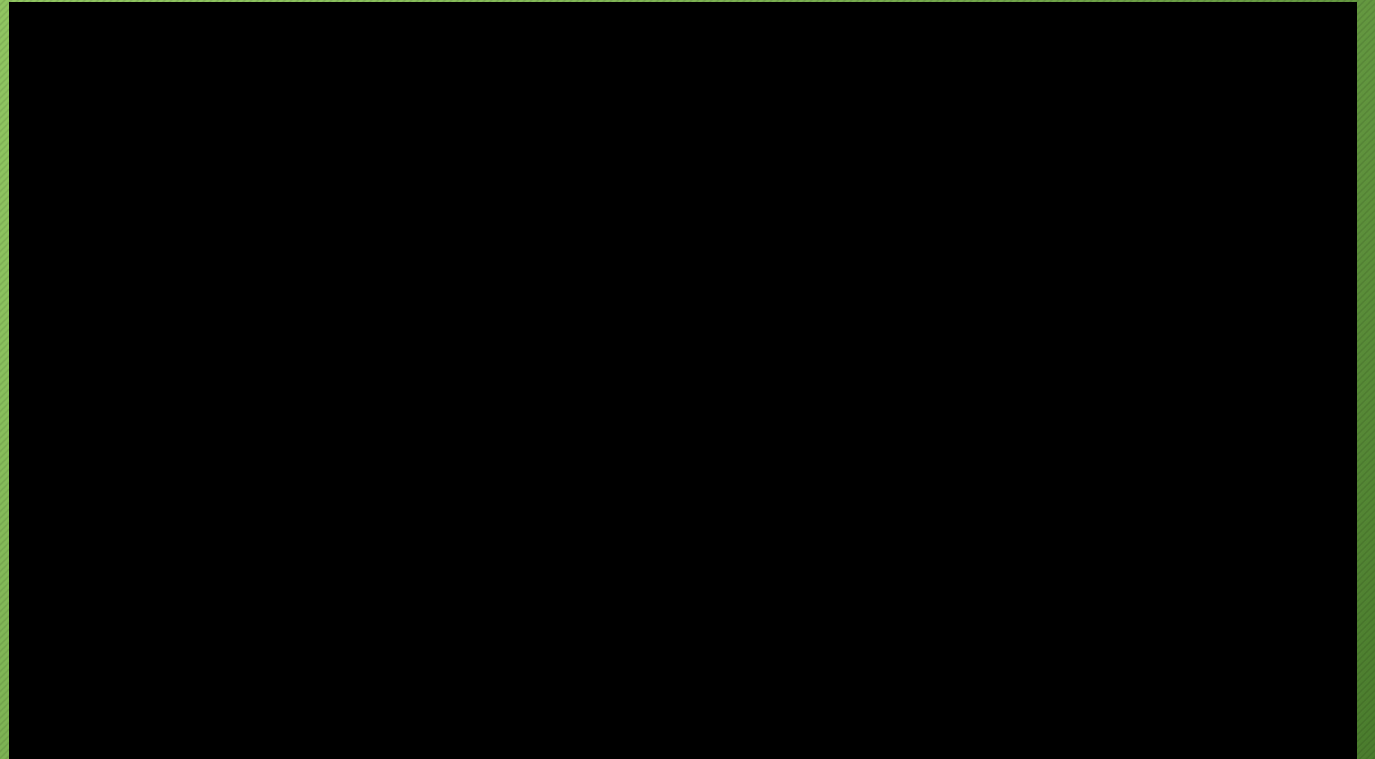


# Step Four: Generalize Implementation

Take it to clinical sites - horses, goats, and cows

Increase enrichment for in college animals

Modify housing where possible





# The Planning

Gabapentin protocol dogs- 10-20 mg/kg PO 2 hours prior to class

Anxiety/activity level & Procedure

Gabapentin protocol cats- 100 mg/cat;

<8lbs 50 mg/cat; PO in canned food PM

& 1-2 hours prior to class in AM

Paradoxical excitement

Pretreat with pheromones in cage

Use visual barriers

Use food





# The Environment

Exposure to the room, people, other animals, & equipment

Smells- use pheromones, lavender/chamomile

Sounds- use white noise, music for animals, fans

Tactile- use touch gradient, associate touch with food/toys

Tastes- use food, vary textures

Sights- use visual barriers, toys, have animals face away from another



# The Interaction

Use courteous approach

- Present your side

- Keep hands close to your body

- Let animal approach you

Use touch gradient

Watch body language

- Adjust interaction based on animal's responses

Use Yin restraint techniques

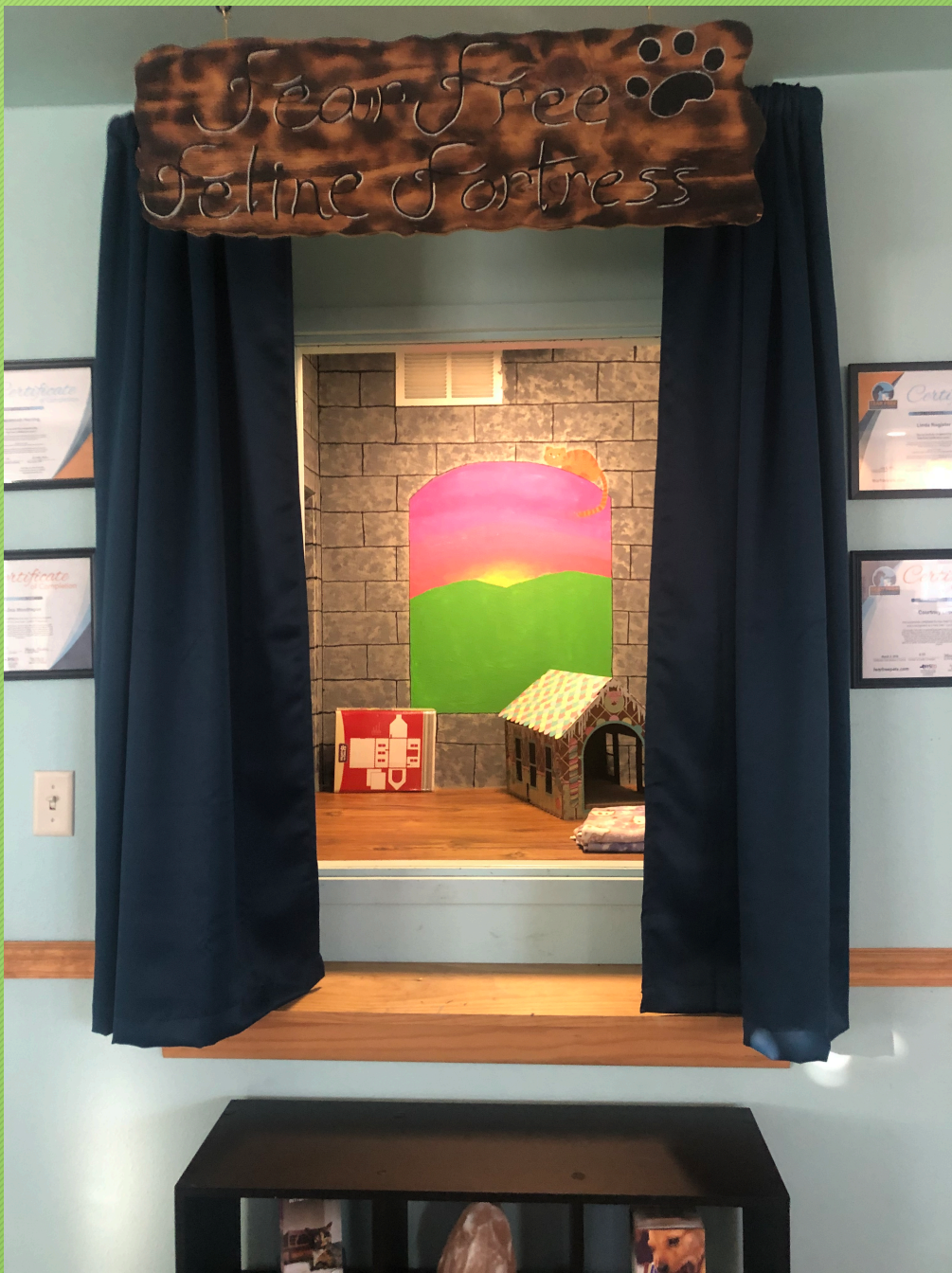




# Student Applications

From Small Animal Breeds and Behavior course







# Behavior Application in Hospital

Students report on application of training/behavior modification with a patient in hospital.

Some modification for Covid-19

Examples:

- Teach dog to accept ear medications

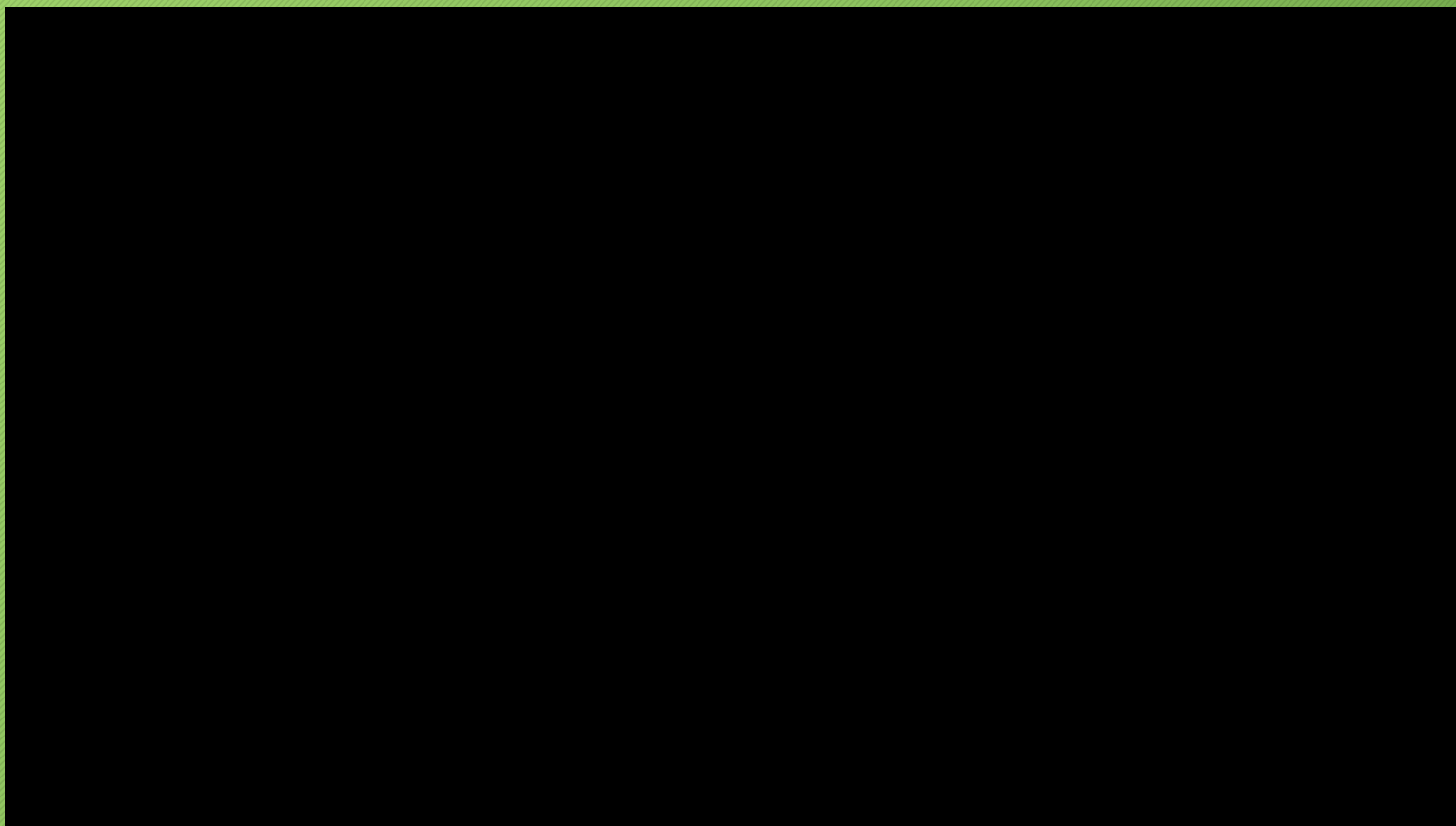
- Teach cat to walk onto & sit on scale

- Teach dog to accept proximity and touch



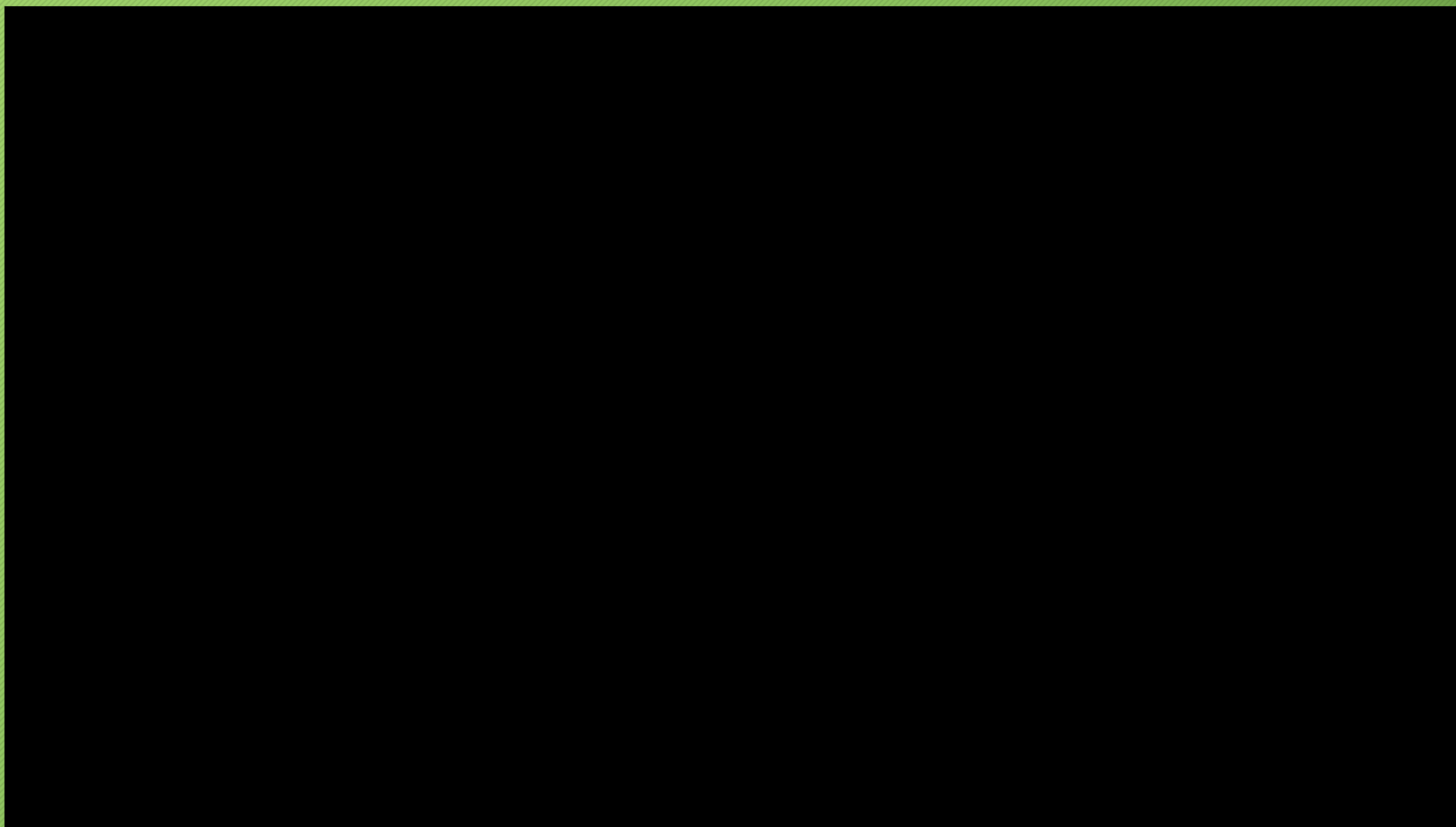


# Teaching a Cat to Sit on a Scale



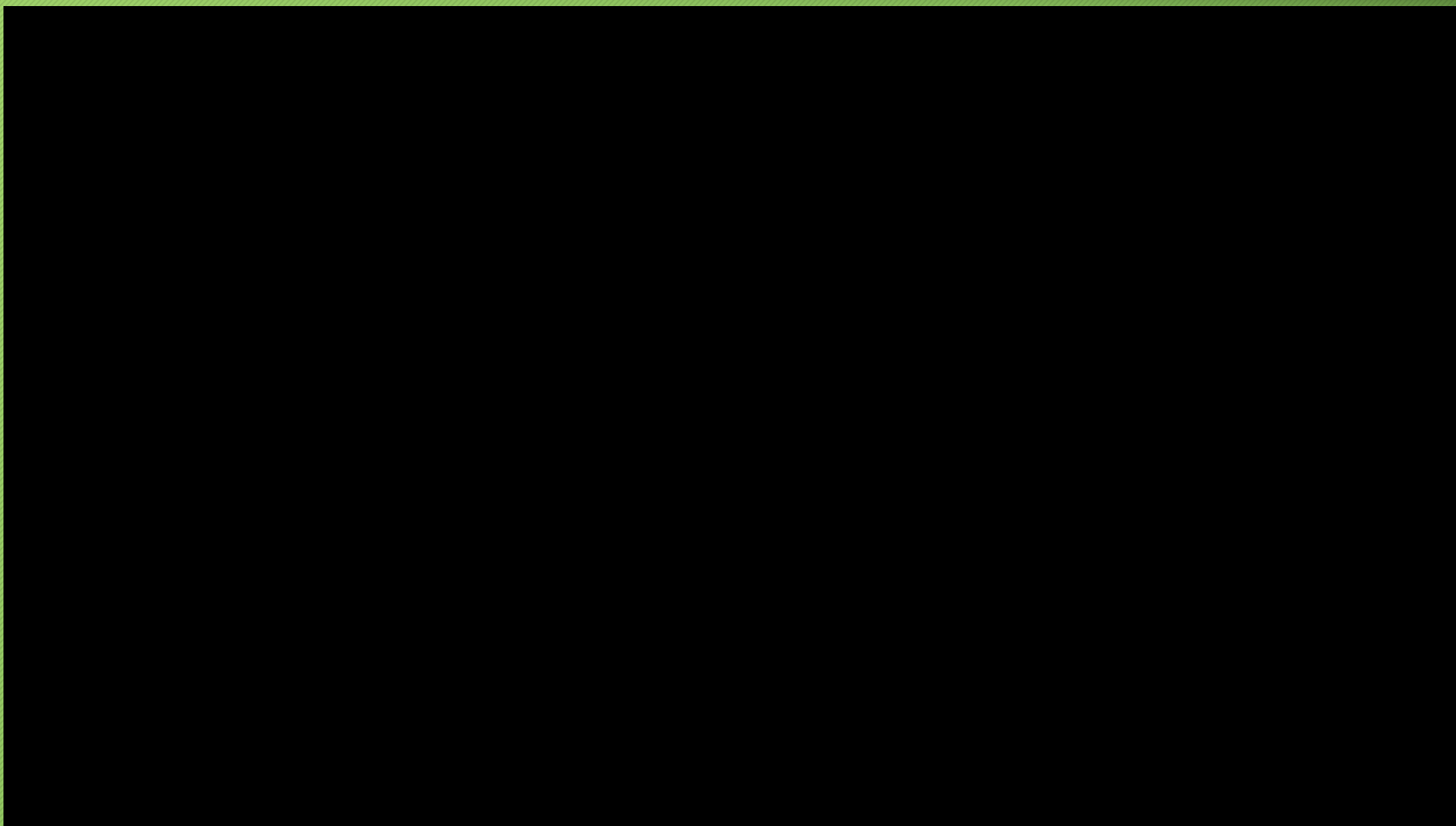


# Cat Gives Consent for Brushing





# Cat Navigating Obstacles





# Conclusion

“The division of the mental and physical aspects of animals is a fallacy. If veterinarians are to optimally care for animals, deliver on their duty to relieve animal suffering, and advance the science of medicine, then the animal—mind and body—must be reunified.”

McMillan & Rollin, 2001



# Questions?

[price.ginny@spcollege.edu](mailto:price.ginny@spcollege.edu)

