

Human-Animal Bond Initiative

College of Nursing
Michigan State University

The College of Nursing, in collaboration with animal behaviorists, psychologists, cultural anthropologists, veterinarians, interested members of the community, and students from many disciplines announces the development of the Human-Animal Bond Initiative. Our overall goal is to better understand the interactions between humans and animals, to assess how animals enrich our lives, and improve the quality of life for both humans and the animals.

Anyone who comes home after a hard day and is cheerfully greeted by an animal understands the power of the human-animal bond. Although well understood on a personal level, the human-animal bond has been studied scientifically on only a limited basis. Thus, our views on the power of the human-animal bond are based on anecdotal reports and personal feelings, but few scientific studies. Things we think we know or we take for granted, have never been subject to scientific validation. Without validation, it is difficult to take advantage of the bond, and incorporate the use of animals in therapeutic settings.

This is the 4th annual conference designed to promote a better understanding of the interactions between humans and animals. The first conference was a great success and brought together people from across the US and Canada. Over the last year we have formed a tight collaborative alliance with the Animal Welfare and Behavior Group to better serve the missions of a land grant institution. Our research programs are also growing, and include projects on the role of pets with chronically ill children and their parents and, in collaboration with the Animal Behavior and Welfare Group at MSU and the CHUM Therapeutic Riding Center of Mason MI, therapeutic riding for at-risk children. Our programs are funded by the College of Nursing, Intramural Grants Program, MSU and the American Veterinary Medical Foundation. We have involved undergraduate and graduate students, from MSU and other US and Canadian universities in all aspects of our program.

The multidisciplinary team provides a forum for interaction, discussion, and critique, and is developing programs to study and understand the human-animal bond. It is the goal of the College of Nursing's Human-Animal Bond Initiative to develop educational, service, and research programs consistent with the land grant mission of MSU. These programs will enhance the quality of life of humans and the animals in their lives, as well as add to the empirical data on the power of the human-animal bond.