Faculty Name: Karen Pryor

Location: Watertown, MA

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Fall 2015

Faculty Research Area

General Area of Research

Innate and learned behavior in animals and humans

Description of Current Research

1. My current research with Hunter College Masters and Ph.D. students is in association with Professors Sheila Chase, Diana Reiss, and Sonia Ragir. I am currently advising Melissa Nelson Slater, Ph.D., candidate, on training innovative behavior in multiple species, and Alexis Torielli, Masters' candidate, on 'Quiet kennels' protocol for reducing barking in animal shelters. I served as thesis and research advisor to completed Masters' program student researchers Audrey Fisher, Corinne Fritzell, and Lindsay Wood, for theses related to experimental testing of effectiveness of the operant procedures used in the modern animal training community but not well represented in the behavioral literature. I am actively looking for students interested in this area of research.
2. My current research also deals with applications of my work with animals to reinforcement-based skills acquisition in medical students (two-year grant-funded study, Albert Einstein College of Medicine, Bronx, N.Y., co-investigator with I. Martin Levy, M.D.); positive reinforcement in the corporate setting, ongoing study, with CEO Ann Kwong, PhD, TREK Therapeutics, PBC, Boston, MA; reinforcement-based training of classical chorus musicians, with Kevin Leong, Ph.D., Concord, MA.

Requirements and Benefits for Student

Essential and Desirable Background Knowledge and Skills

Essential: Curiosity about animal behavior and learning; good observation skills; energy

Desirable: Experience with the use of a secondary reinforcer as an event marker in shaping behavior with positive reinforcement ("clicker training"). Some familiarity with animals and animal care (dogs or other pets will suffice).

Expected Responsibilities

Stay in touch with your sponsors and advisors. Prepare a research proposal with guidance by advisors; carry out the research, collect and write up the data, and be prepared to present the results and your conclusions orally and in writing.

Expected Benefits

Improved understanding of both ethology and applications of classical and operant conditioning in animals; improved understanding of research procedures, data collection and analysis; improved skill in scientific writing. Also potential job opportunities in applications of this research, and quite a lot of fun along the way.

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