

Just what is good for the goose or gander?

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Michigan State University in East Lansing has become one of only a few schools offering training in animal welfare assessment.

Although a tiger in the Berlin Zoo and a dairy cow in Wisconsin don't have much in common, each animal has specific welfare needs that must be addressed. But animal welfare experts say assessing those needs is not a simple task.

Such assessments bring qualitative measurements to an area long left to the subjective, and even the emotional, Associate Professor of Animal Science Adroaldo Zanella said.

Zanella developed the idea for the online graduate-level course to prepare students to assess scientifically animal welfare in real-life situations.

"In the past, animal welfare was viewed as a very subjective type of discipline," Zanella said. "Too often we make assumptions on what is good for animals by looking at things from a human perspective and this is a mistake."

The course offers students the opportunity to learn from the world's top animal scientists from the United States, Great Britain, Australia and Canada.

The course format was reviewed during the 2004 International Society for Applied Ethology Conference, held in Helsinki, Finland.

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