

Raising puppy on college campus can help dog reach social needs professor says

By Mayah Morrison

Raising a puppy on a college campus does not have adverse effects on the dog, said the lead researcher in dog cognition on Sept. 20 at the University of Texas at Austin.

“We raised them so differently, and it did nada to their cognitive emergence,” said Brain Hare, professor of evolutionary anthropology at Duke University.

The Jackson School of Geosciences hosted Hare, at Hot Science- Cool Talks. During his “Genius of Dogs” lecture, Hare talked about what discoveries have been made at Duke's research facilities, the Canine Cognition Center and the Puppy Kindergarten, in understanding dog cognition and what factors influence puppies' cognitive and emotional development. Approximately 300 attendees were present from all age groups.

Hare's previous research looked into [understanding and predicting behavior](#) in grown dogs and found behavior is not impacted as long as the social [stimulation requirements were met](#).

Building on his previous research, Hare said he was most interested in researching puppy brain development from nine to 20 weeks because the last moment of brain growth in a dog occurs between nine and 16 weeks.

“We need to have puppies during this moment of their life and measure and actually figure out when the abilities that matter first occurred,” Hare said.

Hare said his team monitored puppies from two pools, the normal family unit, and the stimulating college life. Being raised by a college student will not negatively impact the cognition and temperament of a dog.

“There is a threshold. If you meet that socialization threshold, that's enough” Hare said.

Hare said being on campus easily allowed the puppies high amounts of interaction. The puppies were able to interact with humans and other dogs. Hare said dogs were in high demand within the community and interacted with other puppies their age longer than normal.

“It decreased feelings of sadness, tenseness and contentment around campus,” said Hare.

Hare said the puppies are asked regularly to be in attendance at Duke events and became an attraction for over 7,000 visitors.

Candy Estrada, a local Austin, Texas high school student, attended the lecture. She believes that dogs could be a source of encouragement for students.

“Having them around campus could increase happiness and create a happier environment,” said Estrada.

Estrea is not far off.

Sam Gosling, professor of psychology, said dogs can positively impact students' lives.

“Students are in an age where they are learning about and taking on responsibilities of being independent,” Gosling said.

Similar to how dogs have a brain growth period, Gosling said students' frontal lobes develop rapidly during their time at university, and having a dog can help teach students how to balance responsibilities during that period.

Gosling added that dogs have adapted to living in a human-animal relationship and have switched purposes from being working dogs to more commonly serving as companions.

“Dogs have a societal task they are good at,” Gosling said.

Gosling said dogs have been bred to be used for different skills that benefit humans in working conditions however, different certain dog breeds will be better at certain tasks.

Hare said when choosing a dog, you need to consider your lifestyle and living situation.

When the puppies came to Hare and his team at nine weeks they had a few skills already mastered. However, Hare said that problem-solving behaviors were consistent throughout each dog's life.

Hare showed videos of one test that presented each dog with a locked box with a treat inside. Behavior towards the box never changed when the dog was presented with the same task later in life.

“How they perform relative to other dogs as puppies actually predicts what they'll do when they get older,” said Hare.

Hare said dogs' behaviors are not created by an environment. Hare and his team found that dogs' temperaments and behaviors are not trained but rather the puppies were born with their attributes.