

# Perceptions of a diverse student population on animal agriculture

K.J. Stutts\*, S.F. Kelley, J.L. Leatherwood, M.M. Beverly, and M.J. Anderson



# Introduction

- Courses titled “Difficult Dialogues”
  - SHSU Honors program
- Upper-level courses for all majors
- Lectures, discussions, videos, and student presentations
- Designed for students to critically evaluate opposing ideas



# Introduction

- Animal Rights and Welfare
  - This course strives to inform and spark conversation in class and reflection outside of class. It is intended to encourage us to examine the ramifications of our choices, even though some of these may be unpleasant. The class asks students to investigate many issues, from pollution to eating meat to keeping pets, and to examine them from a variety of perspectives.



# Introduction

- Course objectives:
  - Understand the use of animals in our society and how these animals are treated;
  - Examine various philosophies related to the use of animals and their history;
  - Become familiar with the impact of domesticated animals on the planet;
  - View the use of animals from the point of view of the agriculture industry;
  - To see how we can make positive changes in the lives of domestic animals



# Materials and Methods

- Team taught
  - Faculty from Agriculture, Biology, and Philosophy
    - Vegans and promoters of animal rights
  - Agriculture topics:
    - Food animal production
    - Animals in research
    - Animals for entertainment
    - Harvest of food animals
    - 25% of lectures



# Materials and Methods

- Students (n=15) composed a reflection essay at the beginning and end of the course
  - “Agriculture as I See It and Feel It”
- Essays analyzed using NVivo
  - Qualitative data analysis software
- Reviewed by professors



# Results

- Beginning of course – Descriptive Statistics
  - 80% had agricultural background
  - 87% had a positive view of animal agriculture
  - 6% vegan or did not eat meat



# Beginning of Course Results

## Pre open query - Results Preview

but I've never actually formed an  **opinion**  on the process . It's something that  
and dairy products . Agriculture in my is the preparation of animals for

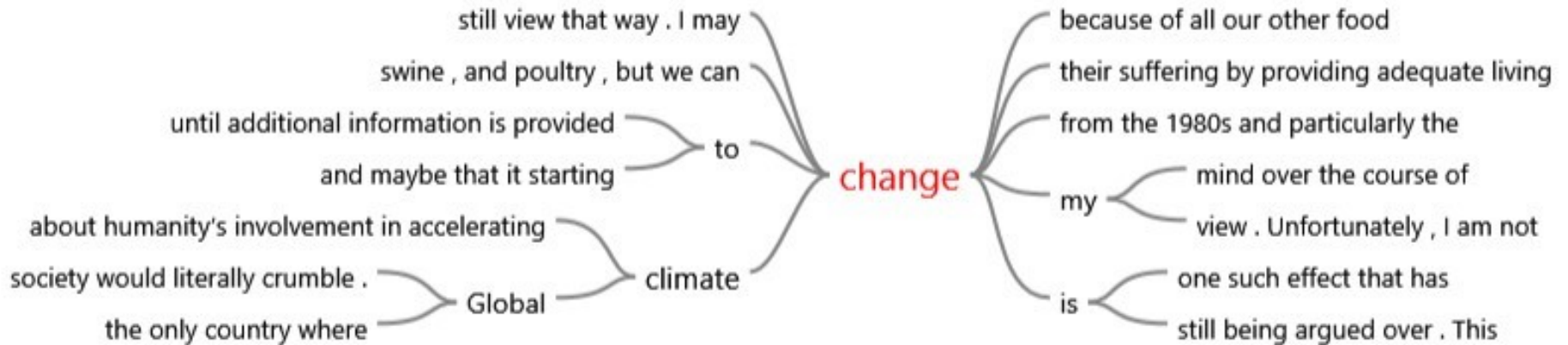
- Opinions based on readily available information – mainstream media
- Admitted they had no sound evidence to support their opinions





# Beginning of Course Results

## Pre open query - Results Preview



- May change opinion after reviewing information presented
- Strong opinion and would need substantial information to change their mind



# Beginning of Course Results

## Pre open query - Results Preview

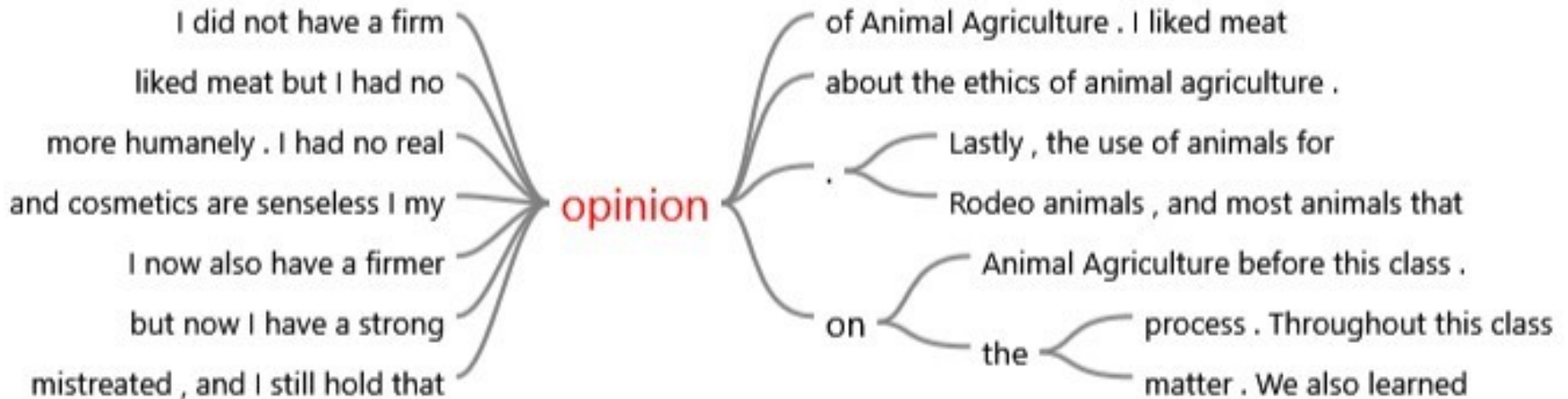


- Vast majority opposed animal rights
- Negative views of animal rights promoters



# End of Course Results

## Post open query - Results Preview



- Strong foundation for their opinions
- Strong support for animal welfare
- Little support for animal rights



# End of Course Results

## Post open query - Results Preview

opinions on animal agriculture did not  
duty to support America we could

change

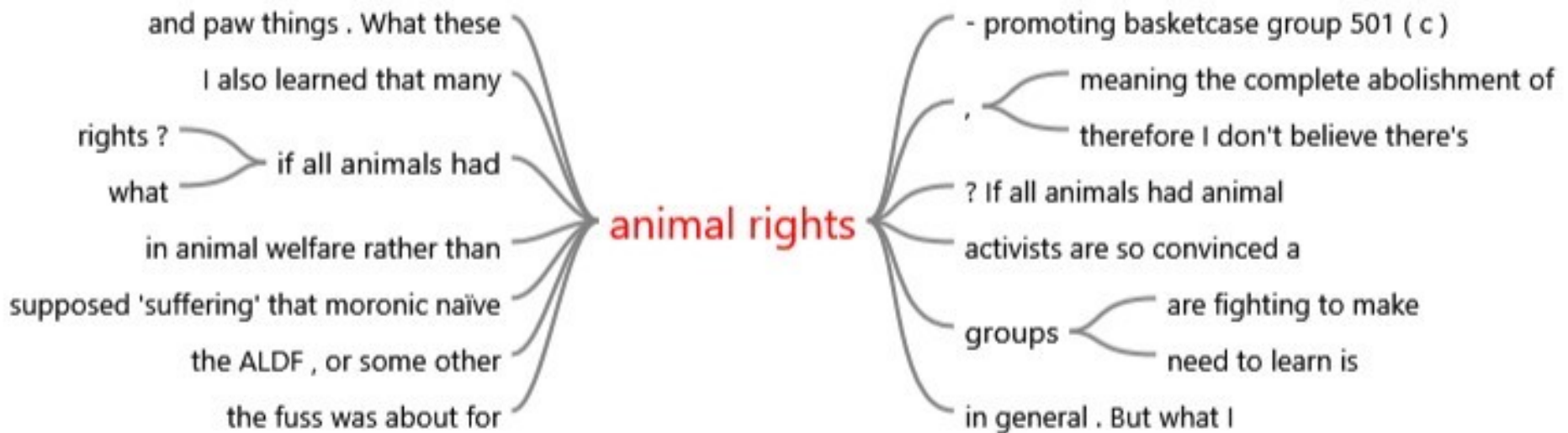
, if anything it was solidified . We  
the world into a better place .

- Maintained support for animal agriculture and beliefs were solidified



# End of Course Results

## Post open query - Results Preview



- Those not in support of animal rights developed a stronger opposition to the concept



# Results

- End of course – Descriptive Statistics
  - 87% had a positive view of animal agriculture
  - 13% had a negative view of animal agriculture and planned to decrease or abstain from meat consumption



# Results

- After completing the course, students:
  - Felt more informed about animal agriculture
  - Supported animal welfare
  - Disagreed with animal rights
  - Disagreed with how the mainstream media portrays animal agriculture



# Implications

- Highlighted the disconnect between the general public and agriculture
- Need for proper education of the public on animal agriculture
  - How?
- Primary opinions of students did not change but were solidified
- Mainstream media has a huge role in public opinion

