

Table SI. Eligibility criteria.

PICOS criteria	Eligibility criteria
Population	• Participants are students of a higher education institution • Participants can be with or without pre-existing health conditions
Intervention	• Using a live animal • Using an animal that is unfamiliar to participants • Animal is the sole intervention tool • Intervention takes place in a higher education setting • Aim of the intervention is to improve any mental, physiological or cognitive outcome of students
Control	• Presence of a parallel control group^a
Outcome	• Any mental health outcomes • Any physiological outcomes that are associated with stress^b • Any cognitive outcomes
Study design	• Study design must be RCT or crossover RCT with a parallel control group • Study design must include true randomization^c • Published in a peer-reviewed journal

^aWe defined a parallel control group as a control group that experienced the control condition at the same time as the intervention group experienced the intervention condition. ^bWe included physiological outcomes that have been shown to correlate with acute feelings of stress, including heart rate, blood pressure and cortisol levels. ^cWe defined randomization as true random allocation to either the intervention and control groups, or in the case of crossover studies, to the order of intervention and control groups.